



*Onder het mom van satire. Laster, spot en ironie in Nederland, 1780-1800*

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# Summary

## **Under the Guise of Satire. Slander, Ridicule and Irony in The Netherlands, 1780-1800**

This thesis investigates the working of satire, and poses the question of how this phenomenon functions as a cultural, medial, political and social mode of performance. This question will be discussed in the first place within the context of late eighteenth-century Dutch society, and by extension also in a more broader sense. The main reason for investigating the matter of how satire functions is that satire is a) a phenomenon that can potentially have a large social impact; and b) a type of utterance that is usually difficult to grasp, not only for the audience, but also for authorities, as well as for scholars and literary critics. The analysis of satire conducted in this thesis attempts to map out in more detail the issue of its potential social impact, and through this to better understand the working of satire in general.

The empirical basis of this research is formed by two cases of Dutch eighteenth-century satire. The first case comprises an Orangist (pro-Stattholderate) periodical from the years 1782-'83, called *Lanterne magique of toverlantaern*, and three Patriotic (anti-Stattholderate) responses to this periodical, published in the same years. All these publications make use of the 'magic-lantern formula'. They imitate the live performance of a magic-lantern show or raree show (peepshow). Those shows were regular features at eighteenth-century fairs and other public festivities. The aforementioned writings use this formula to perform – often slanderous – ridicule. The second case is an almanac-like series of booklets, published between 1792 and 1801 by the eccentric, world-traveling navy physician Pieter van Woensel, under the title *De Lantaarn* ('The Lantern'). Under the guise of the Turkish pseudonym Amurath-Effendi Hekim-Bachi, Van Woensel offers in these booklets his blunt critique on the Enlightened spirit of his age in general, and the political goings-on of the young Batavian Republic in particular. He does so both in word and in image, as *De Lantaarn* is completed with some forty humorous and derisive prints.

This thesis intends to position itself within the broader scholarly framework of satire theory. Over the last fifty years, theoretical discussions on satire have mainly taken place within Anglo-Saxon academia. In the 1950's and '60's several distinguished literary critics worked extensively on this subject. They deserve credit for putting satire on the agenda as a topic to be taken seriously. The grand stature of these critics, however, also had a somewhat paralyzing effect on the academic debates concerning the topic, which even today are still being overshadowed to some extent by the legacy of Northrop Frye, Alvin B. Kernan, and Robert C. Elliott. Meanwhile, from the 1970's onwards the methodological underpinnings of their work were rapidly superseded by novel developments in literary scholarship. Their elitist and work-immanent take on literature, which led to an idea of satire as a morally stable and essentially dignified form of art, thus became untenable, while true theoretical alternatives were not available either. While the books of George Test from 1991 and Dustin Griffin from 1994 may be considered as successful attempts to offer such an alternative, they never really took root in academia.

As part of a larger research project that attempts to study the working of satire in general (*The power of satire*, Netherlands Organization of Scientific Research (NWO), 2009-2013), this thesis intends to revitalize the dead-locked scholarly debate on satire. It does so by picking up several subtopics from this debate, such as the issue of satire's supposed rhetorical stability and the question of how much power or impact can be ascribed to satire, and subject these to renewed scrutiny by the use of additional theoretical insights taken from various fields within the humanities domain. Thus, as opposed to the old debate the focus here is not strictly literary. Also, different source material is used. The existing theoretical consensus was mainly based on a relatively small corpus of canonical works, written mostly by satirists from classical antiquity or the British Augustan Age. In this project the focus lies more on pamphlets and periodicals, written by hack writers, with a greater emphasis on visual satire.

Starting from this theoretical background, the thesis is divided into five chapters, each of which covers one aspect of satire's functioning, which is approached through the analysis of one of the two main cases, or both. Every chapter thus offers a mixture of empirical and theoretical research. Part of the source material will be examined in detail. Based on this

examination a specific subtopic belonging to the theoretical debate on satire will be discussed.

Chapter 1 analyses the magic-lantern and peepshow periodicals from the 1780's through the lens of their rude and biting nature. The Orangist periodical *Lanterne magique* and its Patriotic responses use a slanderous type of satire, based on scapegoating and personal attack. At the same time, these publications can be considered as manifestations of comedy. They can be placed within the farcical context of carnival, with a showman that speaks a droll French-Dutch dialect, and who presents his victims as caricatures, in scenes that are obviously meant to amuse. This is slander and entertainment at the same time. Henceforth, this satire not only has a political side, but also a commercial one: the act of scapegoating can be seen as a strategy used by publishers and hacks to try to make money. These publications demonstrate the art of defaming, which is in fact age-old and exists until this very day. This art is not exactly subtle, but that does not necessarily make it vulgar or empty. At its best, a defamatory satire kills two birds with one stone: its butt is eliminated – this is what makes defaming political – and the defamatory satirist wins the public's favor by offering it good entertainment – this makes defaming also an act of artistry.

In chapter 2 *De Lantaarn* by Amurath-Effendi forms the central topic. His satire is ironic and ambivalent, rather than harsh and straight, as was the case with the magic-lantern periodicals. Based on these characteristics, *De Lantaarn* can be connected well to the idea of satire as an art form that is almost by definition morally and rhetorically unstable, an idea that was mainly developed in Dustin Griffin's 1994 book on satire, and also by Fredric V. Bogel in his 2001 study. Both the texts and prints in this series of booklets can be considered ambiguous, on several levels. In the first instance on the level of their content, which does not argue evidently pro or contra the Enlightenment or the Batavian Revolution, but takes a middle position. Secondly on the level of the underlying spirit that can be derived from them, which is serious and joyous at the same time. Thirdly and lastly on the level of the author's self-image as it speaks from these texts and prints, which can be read as both arrogant and humble. This constant 'doubleness' makes *De Lantaarn* into a form of inquiring or analytical satire, the sort of ridicule that stimulates the reader to further investigate the moral issues that Amurath-Effendi poses, thus developing his own viewpoint, instead of

being taught one. This type of satire dissects the public debate rather than adding a new vision to it.

Chapter 3 questions what role the satirist plays in the general functioning of satire. Although there are many examples of anonymously published satirical works the influence that a satirist and his public image have on the way in which a satirical work is experienced by the audience cannot be underestimated. The satirist is oftentimes directly identified with his work, which he in turn also regularly uses to present himself under the guise of a certain literary or intellectual persona. The case of Pieter van Woensel forms a classic example of this principle and he therefore forms the central character in this chapter. Through his writings as well as through his public behavior as it was recorded by his contemporaries, he shows himself to be an eccentric, a lone wolf who pretends he does not care for other people's opinions and who dares to provoke his fellow countrymen in many ways. At first glance, this eccentric image seems to make this satirist into an outcast. When we take a closer look, however, it can be seen that Van Woensel fits into the culture and society of his age rather well. His eccentricity is mainly a pose, derived from the classical Cynics. This pose can also be connected to a tendency towards eccentricity that is broadly practiced within the European intellectual world in the second half of the eighteenth century. The British minister Laurence Sterne and the French-Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau can be seen as the foremost representatives of this tendency. Within this context, Van Woensel should be seen as an 'outsider on the inside', someone who uses his public image as an eccentric to create a free zone for himself, in which he can deride and provoke without worry, using the disputable alibi of being a messenger of inconvenient truths.

Chapter 4 examines satire's functioning from a medial perspective. Taking the idea that satire lacks an official home medium, but instead travels between multiple media and challenges traditional media oppositions. The magic-lantern periodicals and *De Lantaarn* are thus analyzed as (inter)media. By parodying existing forms and genres, as this chapter argues, these cases show themselves to be parasites. They invade existing genres, media, and art forms and subvert them 'from within', by making them look ridiculous and by using them as a vehicle for performing social critique. In the case of the magic-lantern periodicals this is done mainly by parodying the concept of a live magic-lantern show or peepshow. The imaginative potential of these live shows with their presentation of large light images, which

must have made a rather stunning impression on eighteenth-century people, is also being exploited in these periodicals through the use of a rhetoric of viewing. Time and again, the figure of the showman explicitly invites the reader to *watch* his defamatory scenes. *De Lantaarn* by Amurath-Effendi alludes to several genres, in particular the almanac, the 'cock book' (early-modern textbooks for children) and the spectator. The author pretends that he wants to imitate these genres in a serious manner, however his primary goal is actually to mock the Enlightened educational connotation that all these genres had at the time. *De Lantaarn* turns out to be a wolf in sheep's clothing. In both cases this parasitic behavior can be seen as a form of cultural criticism: with it, they react against prevailing ideological currents. Parody thus becomes a vehicle for performing political satire.

The fifth and last chapter discusses the – real and potential – impact of satire. To map out this impact, the history of their reception is sketched. In the case of the magic lanterns this reception is mainly determined by the existence of counter publications: the Patriot Klaas Hoefnagel with his magic-lantern pamphlets responds to the Orangist periodical *Lanterne magique*, in which he himself is one of the main victims. These publications, however, can also be connected to a broader narrative about the delegitimizing effect that libels and other sorts of slanderous literature can have, due to the continuous repetition of negative stories about well-known public figures that can ultimately destroy the social and political position of these figures. Specifically this is what makes defamatory satire potentially dangerous. In its delegitimizing power lies its possible impact. The history of the reception of *De Lantaarn* should be divided into two parts. In its own time, *De Lantaarn* and its maker are mainly seen as annoying and indecent. Amurath-Effendi is an obnoxious teacher, who mainly teaches his reader to be skeptical about the leading ideals of Enlightenment, equality and democracy of the time. This attitude makes the ardent advocates of these ideals hate him. *De Lantaarn voor 1800* is afflicted by censorship, which shows the provocative potential of this publication. The power to provoke can be seen as a form of impact. In the nineteenth century a new chapter of *De Lantaarn's* reception starts. At that time the revolutionary era of the late eighteenth century has a rather bad reputation and is seen as nothing more than empty squabbling with little political significance. Posthumously, Van Woensel becomes a hero, the only wise man in a world filled with fools. The nineteenth-century reception of *De Lantaarn* also shows that satire, despite its strong

roots in the here and now, is able to survive in later times. That is also a form of impact: the power to be memorized.

The five chapters of this thesis show satire's versatility. Satirists can defamate and ironize, they can argue and entertain, they can bite and they can tickle. Rude and harsh attacks alternate with subtle ambiguities. The attempt to ruin reputations goes hand in hand with the urge to amuse the audience. The intention to make people think is combined with a tendency to downplay the importance of the topics that are discussed. Outsiders turn out to be insiders, apparently innocent imitations turn out to be parasitic, an annoying skeptic can posthumously become a hero.

Yet, there is one recurring motif. When an artwork covers itself with the cloak of ridicule, the guise of satire, it earns a position in the public domain that offers it special opportunities. Those opportunities arise thanks to the consistent mixture of seriousness and ludicrousness that characterizes this guise. The seriousness persuades the audience and the authorities of the fact that the satirist has something relevant to say, that his ridicule and slander are not meaningless. The use of play and jest softens his derisive practices. This dialectic of gravity and play is what distinguishes the satirical form from other cultural utterances and seems to be the foremost principle on which the working of satire is based.

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