IN SEARCH OF FAME: SELF-REPRESENTATION
IN NEO-LATIN HUMANISM

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Introduction

This paper deals with the at first sight curious phenomenon that in Neo-Latin Humanism the self-representation of the intellectual gains an overwhelming importance: humanists, as it seems, were willing to invest a considerable part of their time in modelling their reputation in society and among their fellow intellectuals. In harsh invectives, they defended their position against their intellectual enemies; with every word published they strove for a well-respected position within the networks of the international Respublica litteraria. In doing so they developed a more profound interest in their individual personality than was usually the case in the centuries before and also among most of their contemporaries. The striving for earthly fame (fama, gloria), the display of a strong selfconsciousness, the pride in intellectual achievements etc., slowly emerged in the fourteenth century from the sphere of negative moral evaluation. A remarkable change took place: as its result, from the fifteenth century on, the concepts mentioned above have clearly turned into positive values, and were generally accepted by the humanists and on a large scale by other intellectuals.

Most interestingly, the humanists developed certain literary genres that were especially suitable for their self-representation. To name but a few, they (re)invented the Latin private prose letter, the Latin writer’s autobiography, the commentarii (historiography from an individual point of view), the dedicatory letter, and the Latin autobiographical elegy. Individual fame, in general, became a major concept of humanistic thought. Given that Humanism was much concerned with reputation and fame, the promulgation of fame via biographies was, of course, also of vital importance. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed the publication of monumental collections of biographies: true halls of fame, e.g. of Paolo Giovio, Fulvio Orsini, Théodore de Béze, Nicolaus
Reusner, Johannes Miraeus, Johannes Meursius and many others.\textsuperscript{1} Of almost every humanist we have one or more biographies, and several other (auto)biographical documents as well.\textsuperscript{2} With a certain justification one may call the age of Humanism the age of biographism.

Our subject, humanistic self-representation in autobiographical texts in fact comprises a field much too extended for a single article: already the amount of relevant source-texts is immense. There are several hundred thousands of Latin humanist’s letters, and thousands of volumes of correspondence preserved, either in manuscript or in print.\textsuperscript{3} The correspondence of many authors comprises more than a hundred letters; of some authors several thousands, as is the case with Erasmus and Lipsius.\textsuperscript{4} Of most of these letters we do not have modern editions nor are they listed in a census; not even of complete correspondences printed in the early modern period do we possess a census.\textsuperscript{5} Very much the same is true for the Latin dedicatory letters. It is clear that the letter of dedication was a standard part of each single humanistic publication; there must therefore exist a number almost as large as the number of published texts (in manuscript and in printed form as well), probably even larger, since quite often the same work was dedicated more than once. Even of the so-

\textsuperscript{1} Giovio, Elogia virorum litteris illustrium; Giovio, Elogia virorum bellica virtute illustrium; Giovio, Opera [...] omnia; Giovio, Opera; Orsini, Imagines et elogia virorum illustrium et eruditorum; Reusner, Icones; Bézé, Icones; Meursius, Illustris Academia Lugd.-Batava, Athenae Batavorae, Miraeus, Elogia illustrium Belgii. For Giovio cf. Rave, ‘Paolo Giovio und die Bildnisvitenbücher’; for Meursius and Miraeus, see Enenkel, ‘Het Nederlandse ‘nationale bewustzijn’ in biografische reeksen’.

\textsuperscript{2} Of Lipsius, for instance, we have an autobiography, a very detailed biography by Aubertus Miraeus, several short biographies among others by Meursius, and several thousands of private Latin letters (ILE). These different documents have a sometimes intriguing intertextuality; for his autobiography, cf. Enenkel, ‘Selbstbildformung in Lipsius’ Autobiographie’; for Miraeus’s biography Enenkel, ‘Lipsius als Modellgelehrter’.


\textsuperscript{4} Cf. Erasmus, \textit{Opus Epistolarum}; Lipsius, ILE.

\textsuperscript{5} The selective bibliography in Ijsenwijn’s-Sacré’s \textit{Companion}, 222–28 which comprises the recently published editions of several famous humanists gives a first impression of the enormous number of correspondences, most of them lacking a modern critical edition. Ijsenwijn’s and Sacré’s short list comprises some 109 correspondences.