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Geerten Gossaert belongs to that considerable group of writers who, more consciously than most others, believed that they were living in a junction of time between two fundamentally different periods and who made this difference, which in many cases constitutes a real or imagined conflict, a major or minor object of their writings. To this group also belong, in historical order, Jacob van Maerlant, Vondel, Bilderdijk, Multatuli, Gorter, Van Eeden and Nijhoff, to mention only a few of the more outstanding figures. They have felt called upon to indicate, like prophets, ways and means to bring about certain changes in the views and standards of members of their own generation and in the process criticize the work and actions of their contemporaries and immediate predecessors.

Geerten Gossaert's immediate predecessors can, in literary terms, be said to be the 80-ers. It is against them that he aimed his sharpest criticism; and it is from their work that he derived, in a negative way, the inspiration for some of his best known articles, and perhaps, who knows, some of his famous poems.

It would be incorrect to assume that to criticize the 80-ers took priority in his activities or interests. To him the 80-ers represented a "spirit of the age" which he most strongly rejected and condemned. As individual persons, even as individual poets, he seems to have respected, even admired amongst others, Kloos and Van Deysse.

Gossaert owes his reputation as the most outspoken anti-80-er, in the first place, to a number of unusually sharp attacks on the work of the 80-ers in articles on various writers. In one of those articles, on the poet A. Roland Holst,¹ he discusses certain technical aspects of modern poetry and more particularly the technical skill of Roland Holst. He warns the poet to beware of too much freedom in his metrical pattern:

Nog veroorlooft de schrijver zich te vaak metrische vrijheden, die de effen vloeijing, welke het Nederduitse vers vordert, stremmen.

Zeker zijn er enige accentverplaatsingen, die aan het vers een grotere ritmisch vaart verlenen.

Doch de heer Roland Holst vergeet niet, dat zij slechts van meestershand willen worden aangebracht: te licht wordt als artistieke vrijheid aangewend wat weinig anders is dan de onartistieke

slavernij van knoeiers.

Tot welk een schromelijke ontbinding van het Nederlandse vers deze verwarring, aangesticht en gepropageerd door de verderfelijke Nieuwe Gidskritiek geleid heeft, welke inspanning het gekost heeft de schone traditie der Nederlandse poëzie weer terug te vinden: de heer Roland Holst weet het te goed, om niet volgaarne in dit opzicht, de medestander zijner beste tijdgenoten te zijn. "De ware vrijheid luistert naar de wetten!"

In this statement we have Gossaert's criticism of the 80-ers in a nutshell: they have become bunglers (knoeiërs); they have overrated the value and importance of so-called freedom and have forgotten that real freedom, according to Gossaert, obeys laws.

Various explanations of Gossaert's ever growing, ever fiercer antipathy for the work of the writers of the 1880's can be put forward; their lack of social responsibility and their so-called lawlessness will probably prove to be the most fundamental. All his life he has been acutely conscious of a (real or imagined) discrepancy between the individual's responsibility towards society on the one hand, and the work of the poet on the other. He dedicated a special speech to "De vrijheid van de dichter"³ which he delivered on the "Gesproken Gidsavond", April 16, 1956.

"Der Mensch ist nicht geboren frei zu sein." Ook niet de dichter. Vrijheid wil veroverd worden; die verovering is het doel van de levensstrijd.

En vrijheid is alleen denkbaar als bevrijdzijn van een gebondenheid. Wie over de vrijheid van de dichter spreekt, spreekt daarom tevens van de banden, waaruit hij zich bevrijden moet om zichzelf te worden.⁴

He strove continually to harmonize his personal responsibility towards society and his creative talents—in a way against his better knowledge. For he does not seem to have believed in the possibility of being a poet and a socially responsible person at the same time.

Indirectly he accused the 80-ers of "letting themselves go" as artists at the expense of their responsibility towards society. He also accused them of neglect of tradition. How much he experiences the conflict between his

creative urge and what he calls "de burgerlijke moraal" or the morals of "de kleinen", appears from another paragraph in the same article:

De dichters behoren niet thuis op de markt des levens, zelfs niet op de 'boekenmarkt.' Mag ik, in dit verband, met een enkele zinsnede noch iets zeggen wat sommigen uwer wellicht mishaaft? Het is een onderwerp, waarover ik zelf eerst langzaam en laat tot vastheid van overtuiging gekomen ben. Ik meen dat de schrijvers en uitgevers, meer dan thans mode is, met wat zij op de boekenmarkt brengen de burgerlijke moraal behoren te ontzien. Zelf heb ik zeer vrije verzen geschreven, die ik gaarne zou publiceren, niet alleen omdat ik ze onder mijn beste werk reken, maar vooral omdat ze het complement vormen van wat van dit werk in "Experimenten" is gedrukt. Doch ik ben daartoe nooit kunnen komen, niet omdat ik me ervoor schaam, maar omdat ik niet gaarne het gebod zou schenden, de kleinen niet te ergeren. Door publikatie zou ik vrezen tegen de Liefde te handelen. En dat weegt mij zwaarder, dan alle literatuur ter wereld.

Will de dichter zich dus in de vrijheid van zijn eigen levenskring handhaven, dan dient hij de evenwaardige vrijheid van de burgerlijke levenskring te eerbiedigen. 's Dichters buitenmaatschappelijke en de maatschappelijke sfeer dienen zo streng mogelijk gescheiden te blijven. Dat is een eis van geestelijke kuisheid.⁵

In an article on Francis Thompson,⁶ Gossaert once again discusses this matter. Here he contrasts the "gemeennuttige" (the common good) and the "poet's dream." Indeed, he says, poets are not of this world. It is more manly, more honest to admit this openly, than to claim simultaneously to be above the law and to have a place of honor in the society that made the law. Recognizing social laws means being unfaithful to one's poetical calling. Unless reborn in the spirit, there is in this worldly civitas no place for the poet. Society recognizing the poet's place in society should be seen as a sign of decadence. Nothing is more just, more natural also, than that the Mister Dreamer in Society should be like a fish on dry land.⁷

It is not surprising that a person, holding such views on poetry, should stop writing after only a few years. Gossaert began publishing in 1904, i.e. at the age of 20 and after 1912 or

1913, i.e. at age 28 or 29, he never published another line. He probably also destroyed more poetry than he ever published. He had bowed to the law and order of the society he believed in.

Even in the matter of spelling Gossaert found reason for a serious conflict with the 80-ers. He relates the difference of opinion on the spelling rules to a "struggle for authority." He compares them to the rules governing society.⁸ Society should be like a plant, he says. Each organ in this plant has a particular function. Nobody expects the roots to develop flowers or the buds to develop roots. It is no different in society. For the growth of society in general, all organs have certain functions. It is of the greatest importance for the plant and for society that on the one hand the various organs respect each other's function, and on the other hand that they perform their functions autonomously.

It follows that some organs at one moment have to follow and others must lead. In his opinion it is the refusal to follow, or, in other words, to submit to authority, that caused the problems, and the low state of the morals in his time, more particularly of the writers of the 1880's: they only wanted to lead, but refused to recognize the same rules that govern the production of poetry, which, in his opinion, is also a growth process, a development in the course of (literary) history, culture and tradition. In 1912 he wrote about his time as being confused about the duties of leading and following and everybody being eager to reform society and nobody being willing or able to leave the responsibility to others.⁸ Everybody is so busy discussing the improvements that are needed that nothing is established. This, he says, spells danger for society in every field. If those in authority do not consider the needs of those who are led, rebellion may result. Failure, on the other hand, to allow those in authority a certain amount of trust and freedom by those who should follow, may lead to a request for cooperation and even a call for subjection.

Gossaert applies the principle of coordination to language and literature. He argues that those who have the most knowledge are entitled to lay down the rules. Language, he says, has a dual character: considered subjectively it is creating, considered objectively, it is a creation. Linguists should not mingle in the creating; once it has become a creation, the artists should leave it alone. The standardization is the work of the linguist - when literary men claim the right to influence the language at this stage, and this is what the 80-ers did according to Gossaert, they are making inroads upon the

field of the linguists.

Another fundamental problem, or perhaps just another way of formulating the same problem, is, according to Gossaert, the ever present conflict between individualism and absolutism. The protest by literary men against the rules laid down by linguists, is the result of the conception of the individualistic 80-ers that the artist is autonomous, a conception typically formulated by Van Deyssel who believed that the artist may not know most, but certainly knows best. Gossaert also took great exception to the words of Boutens who said that the artist should live according to rules laid down only by himself and that, consequently, he was infallible.

Gossaert agrees with De Vooy's in calling "rebelliousness" (opstandigheid) the most characteristic element of the art of the writers of the 80's as compared with the art of their successors, which is more lofty and more in harmony with its social environment.⁹ Gossaert accuses the 80-ers of revolutionary hyper-individualism which tends to develop soon into dogmatic absolutism. According to him this trend is apparent in many fields. In this respect he points an accusing finger not so much at Kloos and Van Deyssel whom he, ironically, seems to have respected as individual artists, but rather at Gorter and others, who, when they approach society, do this without respect, not like people who wish to learn, but with the arrogant gesture of world reformers.¹⁰

They do the same when they deal with languages. They claim absolute freedom and are even licentious in the way they use language, they reject all inherent poetical schemes in favour of so-called autogenous rhythm, they ridicule all objections to word-derivation and word-formation. Kloos even "managed with a conceitedness equalled only by his ignorance to reprimand one of our biggest and most productive writers, Van de Woestijne, for using certain language forms which are quite normal in Flanders."¹¹

The explanation for the revolutionary conduct of the 80-ers, he claims to have found in the historical development of the Dutch national literature. He draws a parallel between the political and literary histories of The Netherlands. In an often quoted article on Swinburne,¹² he compares the histories of England and The Netherlands over the last three or four centuries and comes to interesting conclusions concerning the "poor state" of Dutch literature in the 20th century. With respect to England he observes that it developed over a period of three ages from a poor, isolated island to an empire the size of which the world had never witnessed before. It is especially the steady-

ness with which it grew that lends it the most outstanding quality of the English nation in general and its literature in particular: its traditionalism. This word traditionalism should, in addition to a few more, be considered a key word in Gossaert's work. It is traditionalism, amongst other things, which he found so sadly lacking in his predecessors and which he increasingly tried to introduce into his own work. Looking at Dutch history over the corresponding period, he sees important points of resemblance at the beginning of that period, the 16th and 17th centuries, and then notices a sharp decline in Dutch historical development, both with respect to the economy and the poetry after the short flourishing of both in the Renaissance. When eventually, after three centuries, a new kind of poetry appeared on the scene, it was too late to pick up the thread and to continue where the Renaissance writers had left off; both technically and spiritually this was impossible. So the late 19th century writers had no tradition to build on, unlike in England; there was no possibility of an evolution, so there had to be a revolution, and a revolution in Gossaert's way of thinking can only have disastrous results. Such "cataclysms" destroy of necessity, the steady, uniform development of a culture and a literature; they also necessitate the spending of too much energy on being creative instead of on active writing. He considered what the 80-ers were doing as working on a language from the outside, trimming it, decorating it, instead of making it grow healthy, strong and beautiful from the inside.

In English literature there is an uninterrupted tradition which runs from Shakespeare to Shelley and which can be compared to a brightly burning torch that is handed from generation to generation. According to Gossaert, tradition is sadly absent in Dutch literature.

Looking at the list of qualities Gossaert admires in Swinburne, we see at once the qualities he found lacking in the work of the 80-ers and which he tried to make the basis of his own creative work. The most important of these qualities is Swinburne's dependence on the classical Greek tradition with its strict rules and prescriptions and the resulting technical perfection. In his article he discusses at great length, with reference to the verse drama "Atalanta in Calydon", the perfect unity of the empirical and dramatic elements, the pure technical harmony of chorus and dialogue, and in general, Swinburne's originality in spite of his dependence on classical themes and forms.

This dependence on the classics gradually became more and more prominent in Gossaert's own work, until he became convinced that "a successful literary work should be founded on tradition, and strictly comply, in the technical sense of the word, with the rules, and yet in its dependence, be original and versatile."¹³ Gossaert also admired Swinburne's exceptional mastery of the technique of blank verse and his metrical vividness, which, according to him, none of the 80-ers possessed. About "Atalanta in Calydon" Gossaert remarks that it contains at least as many romantic as classical elements. Looking at Gossaert's own work, it is quite obvious whom he took, among some others, as his model – by which I in no way mean to say or imply that Swinburne and Gossaert were congenial spirits. Gossaert observed in Swinburne's work also a "particular touch of human interest" which was not found in the classical tragedy. It is the introduction of this very quality which served as a sort of justification for the very close imitation by Gossaert of not only classical writers but also more recent literary artists.

Gossaert admires Swinburne's imagery, his personifications, his use of alliteration, his archaic style, his vocabulary, his use of repetition, and, last but not least, his love of the sea with its manifold sources of metaphor. All these qualities added together, result in what is characteristic of Gossaert's own style and may in one word be called rhetorical, be it rhetorical in a special sense: it has to be human in addition to being classic. And again, whether these qualities were also typical of Swinburne's work, is undoubtedly a debatable issue.

Gossaert and the term "bezielde retoriek" (inspired rhetoric), have become identified with him to such an extent that most students think of Gossaert when the term "bezielde retoriek" is used and vice versa. The word "rhetoric", according to Gossaert, has for us modern people a pejorative connotation which it does not deserve. He goes further and claims that a really great poetic style is always a passionate style, i.e. a style in which the organization of words has become naturally rhythmical as a result of the emotion expressed in them. It is impossible for a poet to find a new use for every inspiring emotion one experiences. To create images in a purely technical way is easier than to create them with one's heart. The number of images which give expression to fundamental emotions is limited in the absolute sense of the word, in spite of all the activities by poets through the ages. All so-called new images are, in Gossaert's opinion, simply derivations or variations of a handful of archetypal images. By rhetoric we are not to understand a thoughtless repetition of

classical images – the correct use of classical images is like the correct use of clichés: they have become a natural part of a cultivated language. Well understood and correctly applied, the use of classical images is by far preferable to the "modern" 80-er custom of finding new images all the time at all costs: this is a false form of originality.

Gossaert was not always anti-80. On the contrary – the work of the young Gossaert, age 20 to 24, can hardly be distinguished from the typical work of the 80-ers. The title of a recently published book "Stichtelijke en onstichtelijke experimenten"¹⁴ deftly demonstrates the two sides of Gossaert's work (perhaps of his character?). The title is a reference to a phrase Gossaert himself once used and is moreover indicative of the criterion Gossaert used in the composition of "Experimenten."

De Gier points out that Gossaert at the age of sixteen read and discussed the works of several Nieuwe Gids poets, either at home or at a literary youth club. About the age of 21, i.e. in 1905, he appears to have had personal contact with Van Deyssel whom he visited at his home and it is in Van Deyssel's magazine "De XX-ste eeuw" that he published his poem "Palinodie" in January 1905. During the same period he corresponded with Kloos in connection with the publication of some ten poems in "De Nieuwe Gids."¹⁵

In his first period he was obviously strongly influenced by the 80-ers, both with respect to their ideas and their techniques. Poems like "Euphorion," "Helena in Egypte" and "Melancholia" could only have been written at a relatively early stage in his (poetic) life; "Hymne aan de stilte" is an open choice for an individualistic life-style, a philosophy favoured by the 80-ers, and was probably for that reason not included in "Experimenten."

So in talking about Gossaert as the most pronounced anti 80-er, we should recognize that we are talking about only a part of his work and that we are not doing justice to the complete Gossaert – and let us not forget the reason that by omitting or neglecting his early work, we can definitely not understand his later work fully.

When he eventually began to side openly against the 80-ers, it was in a way as though he was struggling with something within himself, something which he recognized or found in the work of the 80-ers. They embodied something which to him was evil, and he fully realized that he himself was a "sinner." A close analysis of poems like "Liberate nos, Dominé," "De verloren zoon" and "Een ding heb ik begeerd," might disclose interesting information in this connection.

Gossaert experimented with a life like the lives of the 80-ers, i.e. a life of unrestricted

indulgence of one's own individuality before he rejected it as sterile and destructive, writes Knuvelder.¹⁶ It should be remembered that in terms of poetic productivity, Gossaert was active only eight or nine years, i.e. from 1904 to 1912 or 1913, and it was not until 1909 that he openly and consciously sided against the 80-ers. And even then, as has been said, he had great respect for the poetic talents of Kloos. He uses the adjective "heerlijkst" to describe Kloos's work, and the comparison of Kloos's "Sappho" with Bilderdijk's "De ondergang der eerste wereld" and Vondel's "Adam in ballingschap" indirectly suggests equality in value: "Men legge het volgende naast een passage uit Vondel en terzelfdertijd naast één uit Kloos's 'Sappho' om de eenheid in verscheidenheid, de continuïteit in de ontwikkeling onzer poëzie te bewonderen ... wellicht kan men bij genoemde dichters regels aanwijzen, die deze evenaren, gene die ze in verhevenheid overtreffen."¹⁷

At quite an advanced age, when looking back at "De Nieuwe Gids" which in his opinion produced little of permanent value, Gossaert nevertheless admits: "maar dat weinige, bovenal een handvol verzen van Willem Kloos, is dan ook van een zo grote, zo ongekende schoonheid geweest, dat heel het opkomend geslacht erdoor overweldigd is geworden."¹⁸

De Gier lists the technical characteristics Gossaert had in common with the 80-ers, more particularly in his early work:

1. the use of blank verse
2. the use of antimetries
3. the use of enjambments
4. varied stanza lengths
5. a number of relatively long poems.

Thematically too, he had much in common with the 80-ers, such as his glorification of the Muse in such poems as "Helena in Egypte" and "Palinodie."

A comparison between Kloos's "Rhodopis" and Gossaert's "Euphorion," discloses an obvious influence of the former on the latter: in both poems the main characters rebel against the gods and both deplore the limitations of human life. Compare especially the following lines:

Kloos: En (ik) de armen strek naar u, naar u, verloorne!

Gossaert: En wéérom strekte ik dan de armen uit naar u, naar u

A letter from Gossaert to Van Eyck¹⁹ contains very important information about Gossaert's view on imitation, and more particularly imitation by himself:

"Toch heb ik een paar dingen uit den rommel bewaard, en wel een serie van 7 kleine liederen die inderdaad licht werpen op een essentieel punt in de ontwikkel-

ing; n.l. het eigenlijke beginpunt van een eigen, van de 80-ers afwijkende stijl. Ik heb je, bij de samenstelling van de 8e druk der Experimenten geloof ik wel eens verteld, welk een grooten invloed, behalve Potgieter, ook de Duitse romantici, maar bovenal Goethe, de Goethe van den O. Divan, de verzen te Ilmenau, ook wel van de jeugdgedichten, op den vorm mijner eerste verzen heeft gehad. In dien zin, dat er op een moment een losbreken uit de traditioneele vormen der 80-ers is geweest en een zeer bewust overgaan tot de eenvoudigstdenkbare strofe, maar die dan ook zoo zuiver mogelijk en in zo klassiek mogelijk Nederlands. (...) want het was geen onbewuste invloed, maar de meest bewuste imitatio..."

If this fragment was not intended as a creed, it can at least be said that it contains some elements which are of great importance for the appreciation of Gossaert's future work, which, from this point onward, can be called **an answer to the 80-ers**; he now consciously began to write differently from them.

Of special importance is his explicit admission that he consciously imitated the work of other writers, as this is to become one of the most outstanding characteristic elements of his style – this is not to be taken in a negative sense, as imitation to Gossaert has a special meaning. In the already mentioned article "De vrijheid van de dichter,"²⁰ he states:

"De ware vrijheid luistert naar de wetten, dus moet de dichter eerst de wetten van zijn ambacht, de poetika, leren bij zijn grote voorgangers. En het dichtersambacht begoort tot de allermoeilijkste ambachten die er zijn..."

From this statement it is clear that Gossaert had not only no objection to imitating, but, in contrast to the basic conception of the 80-ers, found it essential. There is after all, an essential difference between repetition and imitation; and a given text acquires an even more personal character if in imitation it is adapted and moreover given a new, additional "dimension." He explains this with reference to an imitation of the 17th century poet Jodocus van Lodenstein.²¹ From a poem by this poet "Het jonge en onbecommert leven" I quote three stanzas:

De wereld zegt: Ik zal u kleeden
in zijde en kostelijk gewaad,
dat naar de mode uw zoete leden
en jonge jaren voeg'lijk staat.

Ik dek uw wang met losse lokken,
ik maak uw arm ter elboog naakt;
ik koord' en boord' uw zijde rokken
en herstel al wat u mismaakt.

Ik prang uw schouders in balijnen,

in doeken en in dure kant,
 en doe in zoet verschiet verschijnen
 aan hand en borst den diamant.

Three comparable stanzas in Gossaert's "In meretricem nimis immaturam" read

Mijn weemoed zal uw naaktheid kleeden
 In zijde en kostelijk gewaad,
 Dat aan uw zoele en zoete leden,
 En jonge jaren voeglijk staat.

Ik prange uw schoudren in baleinen,
 In doeken en in dieren kant
 En doe in zoet verschiet verschijnen
 Ter borste een boot van diamant.

Ik dekke uw wang met losse lokken,
 Ik make uw arm ten elboog naakt,
 Ik koorde en boorde uw zijden rokken,
 Verhelende al wat u mismaakt.

For this imitation Gossaert was accused of plagiarism, which turned out to be inappropriate because he had, at first publication mentioned its origin: "Een drietal strofen van dit gedicht is, met enige wijziging, ontleend aan een stichtelijk lied van Vader Lodenstein,"²² he wrote, and, according to himself, he had changed the meaning fundamentally. "What was left," he says, "was warranted quotation from an older poem organically integrated in a new one, - it does not concern a quotation and nothing more: certain changes have most consciously been made to the original. "He states further that even if the origin had not been mentioned, it would still not have constituted a case of plagiarism as a result of its "adapted" form. De Gier points out the remarkable inversion of the well-known 17th century custom of christianizing secular poetry: he changes a religious poem into a sensual, secular poem. De Gier calls this "ontkerstenende imitatio" (dechristianizing imitation).

Other examples of borrowing quoted by De Gier are the war poem "Heb ik mijn hart niet stilgezet?" which is obviously based on Psalm 131, verse 2: "Zo ik mijn ziel niet heb gezet an stil gehouden, gelijk een gespeend kind bij zijn moeder! Mijne ziel is als een gespeend kind in mij", which becomes

Heb ik mijn hart niet stilgezet
 En mij verloochend naar uw wet?
 Gelijk het pas-gespeende kind
 Zich stil bij zijne moeder vindt.

and, from the much admired Bilderdiik

Den forsgespierden os in 't ploeggareel
 mag dwingen,
 En Vaderlijken grond met eigen vee door-
 snijdt!

which becomes

Met kloekgespiede vuist den ruwen
 ploegstaart sturen
 En rechte voren snijde' in mijner vaadren
 land...

About the first case of imitation above-mentioned, Gossaert says:

"The truth is that this stanza in which form and content, as is the case with all real poetry, form a chemical unit, had sunk into the sub-consciousness of the child, and determined the tone of the heart of the man. When the lines one evening in a moment between dreaming and sleeping entered my mind, I believed them to be my own."²³

"Influence and originality are not one another's opposites; they do not mutually exclude one another,"²⁴ he explains in the same essay, and admits the influence of French, Dutch and poets writing in yet other languages.

Among the first names he mentions as sources of inspiration, should be the name of Swinburne. The poem "In obitum Algernon Charles Swinburne" is not only an ode to the famous English poet in terms of the content, but also in terms of the style. Imagery, atmosphere, line and stanza length and the form in almost every detail are strongly reminiscent of Swinburne's "By the North Sea."

The first poem in "Experimenten," probably also one of the best known poems by Gossaert, "Zwemmende", will serve as the final proof of the strong influence the poet underwent from Swinburne. The first two lines from "In the water" are

The sea is awake, and the sound of the
 song of the joy of her waking is rolled
 They become in "Zwemmende":

De zee is in rust en de wind uit het zuien,
 bij 't dagen des zomerschen morgens
 verstild".

Second on De Gier's list of imitated poets is Goethe. I will quote one example, again freely admitted to by Gossaert himself, from Goethe's "Glückliche Fahrt":

Die Nebel zerreißen,
 Der Himmel ist helle,
 Und Aolus löset
 Das ängstliche Band.
 Es säuseln die Winde,
 Es rührt sich der Schiffer,
 Geschwinde! Geschwinde!
 Es teilt sich die Welle,
 Es naht sich die Ferne,
 Schon seh' ich das Land!

From Gossaert's "Adieu":

De zomernacht is over,
 Het oosten morgent schier:

't Gedoogt niet langer marren,
Te paard, en voort van hier!

Het ruizelt door de bomen,
Het suizelt over 't meer:
'een afscheid zonder afscheid
En zonder wederkeer!

Similar parallels to those which have been shown to exist between Gossaert and the first two poets, can be shown to exist between Gossaert and Guildo Gezelle, more particularly between Gezelle's "Tijdkrans" and Gossaert's "Clematis." As far as Gezelle is concerned, Gossaert especially respected the uniqueness of his style, which made him "untranslatable."

Many more names of poems and poets could be cited, all of whom have served as inspiration for Gossaert, but this has been done very scientifically by De Gier.²⁴ More important for our purpose is the observation that Gossaert drew so frequently from the work of others and with what results.

Poets he often mentions in his theoretical work and whose influence has been determined are Boutens, Van de Voestijne, Van Eyck and from an earlier period Vondel, Hooft, Huygens and Bredero. All these poets have in common what Gossaert calls tradition. The first three mentioned, the more modern poets, have more over a certain classical style, classical references and an archaic word-use in common, all characteristics highly appreciated by Gossaert.

The net result of the "processing", the selecting, the adapting and the "humanizing" is, in the words of R.P. Meyer "a tremendous mastery of poetic technique, a great interest in metrical and rhythmical variations, passion and sensuousness, erudition and intellect."²⁵

To Knuvelde, the most outstanding characteristic of "Experimenten" (Gossaert's one and only book of poems), is that the book expresses "an uncommonly fierce passionateness, passionateness concerning the senses as well as the intellect, a faculty which seems to be possessed by a passion to know and to analyze." Elsewhere Knuvelde comes to the conclusion that "Experimenten" must be "the precipitation of emotional conflicts which resulted in disillusionment, repugnance and disgust."²⁶ Knuvelde tries to find a psycho-philosophical explanation for Gossaert's passionateness:

"At the deepest point of desolation this disillusionment calls for complete oblivion, to death and eternal rest. But in this world we all have a consciousness. To what shall we turn if our sense turn away from the enjoyment the senses provide? To the past where youth, the home and the mother remain symbols and memories of

undamaged beauty and purity. In addition, it turns to the source of all desire, which is the Divinity, to whom this desire turns in its deepest and most passionate moments. It is in this theocentric orientation that our natural passions realize their transcendental goal.... Passion remains but is purified and sublimated to religious intensification."²⁷

It is probably famous poems like "Eis daimona" and "Liberata nos Domine" that have earned Gossaert the name of the best religious poet of his generation, even "the greatest Christian religious poet of his generation."²⁸ He is also called the most outspoken "anti-tachtiger." Now since the 80-ers were not intentionally anti-Christian or even anti-religious, one wonders what the relationship between these two sides of Gossaert's poetry may be, since it can hardly be considered plausible that they should be unrelated. That he was against the life-style and esthetics of the 80-ers, he has said plainly and in different terms. That he was a Christian or tried to be so, will be more difficult to ascertain.

There are indeed numerous references in his poetry to the Bible. This is not the place to analyze these references at great length. Close analytical interpretation may however disclose that Gossaert's scriptural references do not necessarily prove that this makes his poetry traditionally Christian poetry.

The best-known "Christian" poems are "Liberata nos, Dominé" which obviously relates to Matthew 6:13 - "...deliver us from the evil one," "Een ding heb ik begeerd" to Psalm 27:4 - "One thing I ask of the Lord...", "Quem me esse dicitis" to Matthew 16:15 - "Who do you say I am?," "Jabbok" has Jacob's struggle with the angel as its background in Genesis 32:24-34 and "De verloren zoon" the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:15-39).

Themes of a Christian religious nature are summed up by De Gier.²⁹ He mentions God's perfectness, the antithesis Christ - Satan, the notion of a new earth, appearing before God after death, God's ambiguity and omnipotence, our dependence on God, the notion of heaven as a home and God's love for the world.

In another context Gossaert attached importance to a personal reshaping and modernization in the case of classical themes, of existing material. His treatment of scriptural elements is not principally different. It can be said that he uses the Bible as just another source for his material. He often deviates from the texts after first creating a biblical premise, and a resulting reader expectation. In the poem "Liberata nos, Dominé," the reader is led

to expect the stranger to be Christ, since the action resembles the story of the men on the road to Damascus. (Luke 24:13-35). To his surprise the reader discovers that the stranger is not Christ, but remains a stranger. In "Quem me esse dicitis?" a similar effect is obtained: a solution or conclusion to an action is predicated by aligning the title with a well-known Bible text. The question: "Who do you say I am?" was put to Peter by Jesus after the latter had told Jesus that some people took him to be John the Baptist and others the prophet Elijah. Peter's answer in the Bible is "You are the Christ." Gossaert's poem does not contain a confession of this nature:

Dat ik met ziel en zin,
 Het leven durf beminnen
 Omdat ik u bemin.

The latter is an excellent example of the modernization and adaptation of classical material and is, in its emphasis on life, hardly traditionally calvinistic.

Similar adaptations take place in "Een ding heb ik begeerd," "De verloren zoon" and many other poems. The best proof of how cautiously we should describe Gossaert's particular Christianity or religiousness, is provided by his own description of the relationship between belief and poetics in "Christelijk dichterschap":

"Hieruit volgt dat er geen dichter is die van nature, van aanleg, een christelijk dichter is, of kan zijn, tenminste als men het woord "christelijk" zijn specifieke betekenis niet ontnemen wil."³⁰

It may well be that further study would disclose that Gossaert, in his universal approach to religious matters was far ahead of his time and perhaps less inhibited than some older and younger poets who discreetly or even indiscreetly lay claim on originality and uninhibitedness, and this is in my opinion Gossaert's answer to the writers of the 1880's.

Notes

1. A. Roland Holst. In: **Verzamelde werken**. Bosch & Keuning N.V. Baarn, 1973. p. 256.
2. **Verzamelde werken**. p. 257
3. "De vrijheid van de dichter." In: **V.W.** p. 563.
4. **Idem.**, p. 563.
5. **Idem.**, p. 565.
6. Francis Thompson. In: **V.W.** p. 213.
7. **Idem.**, p. 217.
8. "Gelegenheidsbezwaren." In: **V.W.** p. 274.
9. **Idem.**, p.277.
10. **Idem.**
11. "de vrijheid van de dichter." **V.W.** p. 563.
12. Swinburne. **V.W.** p. 178.
13. **Idem.**
14. J. de Gier. **Stichtelijke en onstichtelijke experimenten**. Hes publishers Utrecht 1982.
15. De Gier. p. 164.
16. G. Knuvelder. **Hanboek tot de geschiedenis der Nederlandse Letterkunde**. Malmberg's Hertogenbosch, 1961. Deel 4. p.222.
17. **V.W.** p. 167. Quoted by De Gier, cf. note 14. p. 164.
18. **Idem.**
19. Quoted by De Gier. p. 171.
20. **V.W.** p. 563.
21. Quoted by De Gier. p. 203.
22. **V.W.** p. 535.
23. **V.W.** p. 537.
24. **V.W.** p. 539.
25. R.P. Meyer, **Literature of the Low Countries**. Van Gorcum & Comp. N.V. Assen 1971.
26. Knuvelder. p. 230.
27. **Idem.** p. 230.
28. **Idem.**
29. De Gier. p. 91.
30. **V.W.** p. 644.