



Introduction

Scholarly Personae: Repertoires and Performances of Academic Identity

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The idea that academic work requires certain personal qualities, character traits or dispositions is as old as the university. However, no matter how ubiquitous the phenomenon, it is only in recent years, in the wake of a ‘cultural turn’ in the history of science, that historians have begun exploring ideals and practices of scholarly selfhood. This theme issue seeks to make a modest contribution to this emerging field of scholarship with articles that offer conceptual reflection, as well as case studies drawn from the Low Countries. They do so under the banner of ‘scholarly personae’, not with the intention of excluding competing vocabularies, but by way of entry into a new and not yet clearly defined field of study.

Introductie. Wetenschappelijke personae. Repertoires voor de academische identiteit

Het idee dat academisch onderzoek bepaalde persoonlijke kwaliteiten, karaktertrekken en talenten vereist is zo oud als de universiteit zelf.

Toch zijn historici pas recent, in het kielzog van de ‘cultural turn’ in de wetenschapsgeschiedenis, de idealen en praktijken van de academische identiteit gaan onderzoeken. Dit themanummer wil met conceptuele reflecties en casestudies over de Lage Landen een bescheiden bijdrage leveren aan dit opkomende veld van onderzoek. De artikelen gebruiken daarvoor het concept ‘scholarly personae’, niet met de bedoeling om andere benaderingen uit te sluiten, maar bij wijze van ingang in een nieuw en nog niet helder afgebakend onderzoeksgebied.

What does it take to get a PhD position in molecular pharmacology or a senior lectureship in international tax law? Judging by job descriptions posted on the Dutch website academictransfer.com, relevant degrees and excellent grades are not sufficient. Job requirements typically also include such personal qualities as ‘enthusiasm’, ‘dedication’ and ‘well-developed social

skills'. Even a PhD student likely to spend most of her time in the laboratory can be expected to be 'a motivated, enthusiast, dedicated and flexible team player with excellent communication skills and the ability to motivate and inspire students and colleagues from various backgrounds. You also possess persistence and can work independently.'¹

Although this job advertisement draws on a modern idiom, the idea that academic work requires certain personal qualities, character traits or dispositions is as old as the university. Throughout the centuries scholars have judged each other not merely on the accuracy of their experiments or the explanatory power of their theories, but also on their commitment to the cause of science, their love of truth, their ability to resist pecuniary temptations, their educational talents, their skills in satisfying industrial stakeholders or their 'grantsmanship' (eloquently defined in Wikipedia as 'the art of acquiring peer-reviewed research funding').² Throughout history indeed, the scientific vocation has been perceived as corresponding to a 'scholarly self' or a set of personal qualities indispensable for a successful scientific career – perhaps especially in contexts in which this vocation, however defined, was seen as being under threat.³ Although linguistic conventions for describing the scholarly self have changed over time, with 'virtues' giving way to 'competences' for example⁴, science has been near-universally conceived as a matter not only of methods and techniques, but also of commitment and aptitude (with even the most ardent defenders of positivist science demanding ascetic work on the self).⁵

This is not yet all. In addition to commitment and aptitude, academic identity requires role conformity in terms of conduct and appearance. Gadi Algazi has shown that when the medieval requirement for scholars to live a celibate life was gradually abandoned, new lifestyle markers quickly filled this vacuum: scholars were expected to be absent-minded, to work deep into the night and not to care about food.⁶ In the different context of nineteenth-

1 '3 promovendi moleculaire farmacologie/ biochemie/oncologie' (undated, early 2014): <https://www.academictransfer.com/22308> (28 July 2016).
 2 'Grantsmanship' (13 December 2015): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grantsmanship> (28 July 2016).
 3 Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Life: A Moral History of a Late Modern Vocation* (Chicago 2008).
 4 A history of these changing idioms as used in academia still needs to be written. A stimulating case study in the field of public administration is Michael Macaulay and Alan Lawton, 'From Virtue to Competence: Changing the Principles of Public Service?', *Public Administration Review* 66 (2006) 702-710.

5 George Levine, *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England* (Chicago 2002).

6 Gadi Algazi, "'Geistesabwesenheit". Gelehrte zu Hause um 1500', *Historische Anthropologie* 13 (2005) 325-342; 'Food for Thought: Hieronymus Wolf Grapples with the Scholarly Habitus', in: Rudolf Dekker (ed.), *Egodocuments in History: Autobiographical Writing in its Social Context since the Middle Ages* (Hilversum 2002) 21-44; 'Gelehrte Zerstretheit und gelernte Vergeßlichkeit. Bemerkungen zu ihrer Rolle in der Herausbildung des Gelehrtenhabitus', in: Peter von Moos (ed.), *Der Fehltritt. Vergehen und Versehen in der Vormoderne* (Cologne 2001) 235-250.

century academia, professorial autobiographies testify to the power of role-specific expectations when they apologise for not inviting colleagues for dinner or students for tea often enough.⁷ Also, there are academic dress codes, the power of which becomes especially visible when the rules in question are broken, for instance by Kees Bertels, who appeared with long hair and an unshaven beard on the back cover of his PhD thesis (1973), defended this dissertation in jeans, and after becoming full professor at Leiden continued to cause embarrassment by refusing to wear a tie.⁸

However, no matter how ubiquitous the phenomenon, it is only in recent years, in the wake of a ‘cultural turn’ in the history of science, that historians have begun exploring ideals and practices of scholarly selfhood. Unsurprisingly, different scholars approach the theme from different angles and with different conceptual tools, depending, among other things, on their theoretical sources of inspiration. Some speak in Foucauldian vein about ‘practices of subjectivisation’, in which ‘technologies of the self’ serve as instruments for producing particular kinds of subjects.⁹ Others follow Stephen Greenblatt in employing the language of ‘self-fashioning’¹⁰, while still others prefer to think in terms of ‘scientific personae’ that serve as models of academic identity.¹¹ Confusingly, these concepts are not at all consistently defined, so that ‘persona’ for one historian can be identical to what another scholar calls ‘self-fashioning’. This however, should not discourage anyone from engaging with the history of the scholarly self. There is a broad consensus that selves are moulded in social practices, in accordance with repertoires of behaviour that can stretch back far in time, but which never determine individual agency: models allow for variation and require appropriation or adaptation to new circumstances. Accordingly, much of current research examines how ‘repertoires’ are being ‘performed’ in specific historical contexts, and how this relates to issues of scientific credibility, gender exclusion, institutional politics and scientific ethics.

This theme issue seeks to make a modest contribution to this emerging field of scholarship with articles that offer conceptual reflection, as well as

7 Herman Paul, “‘Werken zoo lang het dag is’”. Sjablonen van een negentiende-eeuwse geleerdenleven’, in: L.J. Dorsman and P.J. Knegtman (eds.), *De menselijke maat in de wetenschap. De geleerden(auto)biografie als bron voor de wetenschaps- en universiteitsgeschiedenis* (Hilversum 2013) 53-73.

8 C.M. van den Akker, ‘De knuppel in het hoenderhok der historici. De receptie van Kees Bertels’ *Geschiedenis tussen structuur en evenement*, *Ex Tempore* 14 (1995) 173-183.

9 Andreas Gelhard, Thomas Alkemeyer and Norbert Ricken (eds.), *Techniken der Subjektivierung* (Paderborn 2013).

10 Richard Kirwan (ed.), *Scholarly Self-Fashioning and Community in the Early Modern University* (Farnham 2013).

11 Lorraine Daston and H. Otto Sibum, ‘Introduction: Scientific Personae and Their Histories’, *Science in Context* 16 (2003) 1-8 DOI 10.1017/S026988970300067X.

case studies drawn from the Low Countries. They do so under the banner of ‘scholarly personae’, not with the intention of excluding competing vocabularies, but by way of entry into a new and not yet clearly defined field of study.¹² The issue originates in a conference held under auspices of the Royal Netherlands Historical Society (KNHG) in The Hague in November 2014, when over a hundred Dutch historians engaged in productive discussion over the relation between professional ethics and scientific personae. Four of the papers collected in this theme issue were originally presented at this KNHG conference. One or two others draw on papers presented just a few weeks later in a workshop at the University of Groningen, where researchers working in a project led by Mineke Bosch and others (‘Scientific Personae in Cultural Encounters’) met scholars employed in a project I am currently running at Leiden University (‘The Scholarly Self: Character, Habit, and Virtue in the Humanities, 1860-1930’).¹³

The authors contributing to this issue have been invited to reflect on what difference, if any, a persona perspective might make to the history of science, in particular to the study of academic identity (what does it take to be an academic in terms of qualities that must be cultivated or suppressed?). Most of the articles offer concrete case studies to show what sort of research can emerge from this question. At the same time though, quite a few pieces engage in conceptual reflection in order to contribute to a still ongoing debate on what scholarly personae entail.

The opening piece of this issue, written by Gadi Algazi (Tel Aviv), is a case in point. It distinguishes between three persona concepts, focused on 1) individual academic self-presentation, 2) discipline-specific ideals of scholarly selfhood and 3) culturally sanctioned models of academic existence, respectively. While Algazi himself prefers the third approach, Mineke Bosch (Groningen) uses her article on Dutch historians from Robert Fruin to Annie Romein to defend the first approach as being most helpful for biographical research. In their article on the astronomer and influential Marxist thinker Anton Pannekoek, Chaokang Tai (Amsterdam) and Jeroen van Dongen (Amsterdam) also stay close to the first approach, even though they employ the persona concept not for raising issues about scholarly credibility, as Bosch does, but for examining how scientific self-images translate into actual scientific research practices.

Drawing on the case of the Belgian historian Henri Pirenne, Sarah Keymeulen (Ghent) subsequently shows that personae never come in the singular. While Pirenne dissociated himself from the ivory tower type of

12 For a more programmatic defense of scholarly personae as an analytical tool, see the forum section ‘The Scholarly Self: Toward a History of Scholarly Personae’ in *History of Humanities* 1:2 (2016).

13 I would like to thank Mineke Bosch, Leonie de Goei, and Susan Legêne for their efforts in making these events a success.

historian that he saw personified in some of his German colleagues, the persona he sought to cultivate himself also came under fire, especially late in his life. Examining how nineteenth-century scholars navigated between such competing scholarly personae, Christiaan Engberts (Leiden) focuses on the metaphor of the judge as employed by the Orientalist Michael Jan de Goeje and his colleagues. Given that the judge, not unlike the poet, the politician and the journalist, was seen as personifying a particular type of scholarly conduct, personae in Algazi's second sense of the word can be said to be not only contemporary analytical tools for use by modern historians, but historical models too. This explains why Pieter Huistra (Utrecht) and Kaat Wils (Leuven), in a piece on the Belgian American Educational Foundation (BAEF), can argue that this early twentieth-century funding agency propagated a scholarly persona, just as the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Fund for Scientific Research (FWO) do so in our time by rewarding scholars for conforming to a well-defined template of 'excellence'. Interestingly, in the BAEF case excellence was defined in physical as well as mental terms: good health was a prerequisite for being a transatlantic scholar.

The issue closes with an article by Herman Paul (Leiden), who draws attention to a number of different agendas behind the recent interest in scholarly personae. In his analysis, much of it reflects an academic culture in which scholarly selfhood has become unstable and carefully crafted self-images have moved centre stage. Yet at the same time, he argues that critical reflection on scholarly personae, past and present, can be a means for constructive engagement with currently fashionable models of academic identity. For contemporary academic historians then, a history of scholarly personae can never be an antiquarian pursuit: there is a sense in which our own academic identity is at stake (*nostra res agitur*).¹⁴

14 This introduction was appropriately written at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin, where Lorraine Daston and Otto Sibum once led the Scientific Personae working group that has stimulated much of current interest in scholarly personae. I would like to thank Lorraine Daston for her hospitality and for truly inspiring

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