

The Shaping of an Innocent Martyr. The Linguistic Strategies of the Remonstrant Widow Willemken van Wanray (ca. 1573-1647)

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Abstract

After the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) forbade Remonstrant gatherings in the Dutch Republic, many Remonstrants secretly continued preaching or attending sermons and were consequently fined or imprisoned. Among them was the Nijmegen widow Willemken van Wanray (ca. 1573-1647), who wrote an autobiographical narrative of the religious persecution she endured. Scholars have shed light on the role of culturally existing scripts on which authors relied to present themselves as role models in their autobiographical narratives; such stories functioned in the family circle as examples of Christian behavior. This article, however, uses a linguistic approach to better understand the construction and functioning of autobiographical narratives as communicative events, by investigating the role of linguistic variation in positioning the self in interaction with an audience. It demonstrates that early modern writers could vary verb types and tenses to create multiple identities. Willemken van Wanray made strategic linguistic choices to present not only a Christian example to her descendants, but, anticipating further religious turbulence, she also created an innocent self for potential Gomarist readers, in order to avoid renewed persecution.

Keywords: Willemken van Wanray, autobiographical narrative, martyrdom, self-positioning, intended audience, language-driven approach

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This article will substantiate the importance of a language-driven approach to better understand the construction and functioning of early modern narratives, particularly in their role as creators and carriers of identity.¹ Memory studies and autobiographical research have primarily shed light on the role of ‘context reflecting’ mechanisms in writing: narrators use fixed scripts or schemata (such as themes, plots, textual structures, metaphors, and figures of speech) to retell the past and ascribe certain positions to themselves in that past.² These scripts are used to give meaning to a story in a socially acceptable format, usable for sharing.³ I will argue that in addition to these ‘context reflecting’ mechanisms of creating a story, ‘context creating’ ways of writing should be taken into account to fully understand the construction of stories and characters: the past is also framed by the linguistic and stylistic choices individual narrators make.

Using methods from sociolinguistic narrative analysis, this article will investigate the linguistic strategies the Remonstrant widow Willemken van Wanray (ca. 1573-1647) used to position herself in her autobiographical narrative of the religious persecution she endured in the 1620s. Firstly, this analysis will demonstrate the role of linguistic features in the process of identity formation as well as the dynamic and multifaceted character of that process. Rather than creating a fixed identity through culturally determined scripts, Van Wanray varied verb types and tenses to position herself in different ways during her story. At times she emphasized her position as a religious martyr, who had followed the law of heaven instead of the law of the Gomarist magistrate, but on other occasions she framed herself as an innocent suspect, wrongfully accused of Remonstrant activities. Furthermore, since the way we present ourselves also depends on the people we are presenting ourselves

1 The relationship between storytelling and identity creation has been widely acknowledged since the strengthening of the narrative turn in the 1990s. See De Fina, ‘Narrative and Identities’.

2 The distinction between ‘context reflecting’ and ‘context creating’ ways of writing or speaking is made by Koven, ‘Narrative and Cultural Identities’, 392.

3 See for example Pollmann, *Memory in Early Modern Europe*, 18-46; and Arlinghaus, *Forms of Individuality*, 16: ‘The stories people tell about their lives are strongly influenced by official and institutionalized models.’

to, I will argue that this analysis of self-positioning also sheds light on the intended audience of the narrative. Van Wanray seems to have written her story not only as a religious example for her descendants, as she claims in her title, and as was customary for early modern autobiographical writing (a ‘context reflecting’ mechanism).⁴ The self-positioning as an innocent suspect also suggests Van Wanray feared the story would end up in the hands of those who had persecuted her, and for whom her story could be a cause for renewed persecution.

Willemken van Wanray lived in Nijmegen and was connected to the powerful Biesman family, the political elite of the town.⁵ By the 1620s, however, political and religious conflicts in the Dutch Republic reached their nadir for Remonstrants. The Synod of Dort (1618-1619), initiated to settle the controversy between the Remonstrants (or Arminians) and Counter-Remonstrants (or Gomarists) in the Dutch Reformed Church, had rejected the Remonstrant views and confirmed the orthodox Calvinist theology. Consequently, Remonstrant ministers had to cease their activities or were banned from the Dutch Republic. With the issuing of a placard on 3 June 1619, Remonstrant gatherings were also interdicted on penalty of fines or imprisonment.⁶ The city of Nijmegen, Van Wanray’s hometown, soon experienced the consequences of this protracted controversy between the Remonstrant and Counter-Remonstrant factions. Up until 1617, the city had been politically and religiously governed by the Remonstrants. In 1618, however, Prince Maurice committed a coup by replacing Remonstrant members of the magistrate with Counter-Remonstrant supporters. Furthermore, Remonstrant ministers and consistories had to give way to Gomarists.⁷ This tense situation brought Van Wanray twice into trouble. She was first caught in 1619 when attending a sermon, and fined 25 guilders. In 1622 Van Wanray opened up her house to a Remonstrant minister and hosted a sermon, but was betrayed to the magistrate. She never openly confessed to hosting the sermon and refused to pay the imposed fine of 225 guilders.⁸ As a result, Van Wanray was imprisoned for several weeks, until she finally caved in under the magistrate’s pressure and borrowed money from friends to pay the fine and be released from prison.

We know about Van Wanray’s story thanks to her memoirs, preserved in the Nijmegen city archives, which also record Van Wanray’s release in the resolutions of the city magistrate.⁹ Around 1622 – the precise date is unknown – she decided to write a story about the

4 Burke, ‘The rhetoric of autobiography’, 154-155.

5 Janssen, *Om den gelove*, 36.

6 The placard is printed in Wiltens, *Kerkelyk plakaat-boek*, 669-675.

7 On the political and religious conflicts in Nijmegen, see Janssen, *Om den gelove*; Jenniskens, *De magistraat van Nijmegen*; Kolman, *De reductie van Nijmegen*; Kuys and Bots, *Nijmegen, Geschiedenis van de oudste stad van Nederland*.

8 Based on other historical documents, Janssen (*Om den gelove*, 26) has argued that Van Wanray did host the sermon, but refused to confess due to lack of proof.

9 The original text is held in Nijmegen, Regionaal Archief Nijmegen (hereafter RAN), Archief Biesman, inv. 12, *Verhaal van gennege my Wyllemken van Wanrade wedewe van z. Gerradt Byseman inden jaar 1619 etc. is over commen, ca. 1619-1622*. A copy of the manuscript can be found in RAN, Archief Biesman, inv. 13, *Historye vande gevanckenis van onse suster Willemken Biesman, 1622*. More details in Janssen, *Om den gelove*, 13, n. 1, 72-78.

persecution she had lived through.¹⁰ In 2003 A.E.M. Janssen edited her memoirs as *Om den gelove. Wederwaardigheden van Willemken van Wanray*, accompanied by a historical introduction. However, Van Wanray's story has not received any further attention from scholars.

As explained above, this article explores the role of Van Wanray's language use in performing and displaying certain forms of the self, in addition to culturally determined scripts, whose role has been studied by scholars from the field of memory studies. To set the scene for the study of Van Wanray's self-positioning, I will first give an overview of the most recent developments in studies on language, narratives, and identity. Subsequently, I will demonstrate the value of this linguistic approach for the study of early modern life narratives by an in-depth analysis of two positions performed through language: Van Wanray as a martyr and as an innocent suspect.

Linguistic Approaches to Life-Writing

The seminal work of the sociolinguists Labov and Waletzky on the underlying formal and semantic structure of oral stories, published in 1967, marked the beginning of the study of narratives as *linguistic* representations of experiences from the past.¹¹ In the following decades, attention in the field of sociolinguistics shifted from the Labovian view that linguistic variation in storytelling results from social variables (such as gender and class) to seeing such variation as a 'linguistic practice in which speakers place themselves in the social landscape through stylistic practice'.¹² In other words, narrators are active agents, 'tailoring linguistic styles in ongoing and lifelong projects of self-construction and differentiation'.¹³ Since the 1990s, the study of narratives and identity has been further developed in the field of narrative analysis.¹⁴ These scholars approach storytelling as a social and communicative practice in and through which identities are created: 'Identities are seen not as merely represented in discourse, but rather as performed, enacted and embodied through a variety of linguistic and non-linguistic means'.¹⁵ The role of linguistic mechanisms in narrative identity creation is by now widely acknowledged, and has resulted in numerous studies on linguistic and stylistic practices in positioning the past and the self.¹⁶

Traditionally, this type of research has been conducted on the basis of contemporary oral narratives, because of their interactional nature. According to interactionally oriented scholars, identities are 'firmly grounded in specific interactional processes and narrative

10 Janssen, *Om den gelove*, 72-73.

11 See for example Labov and Waletzky, 'Oral versions' and Labov, *The language of life and death*.

12 Eckert, 'Three Waves of Variation Study', 94.

13 Eckert, 'Three Waves of Variation Study', 98.

14 De Fina, 'Narrative and Identities', 351. See for example Schiffrin, 'Narrative as Self-portrait'.

15 De Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg, *Discourse and Identity*, 3.

16 See for example De Fina, 'Narrative and Identities'; De Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg, *Discourse and Identity*; De Fina and Georgakopoulou, *Analyzing Narrative*.

practices and therefore cannot be divorced from the storytelling events in which they are produced'.¹⁷ Hence, the interactional process of storytelling and identity creation has been studied with the analysis of 'the strategies used by narrators, co-narrators, and their audience to achieve, contest, or reaffirm specific identities'.¹⁸ This interactional approach differs from and criticizes the biographical approach. Whereas the interactional approach focuses on the process by which identities are negotiated and constructed, the biographical approach regards the narrative and the individual narrator itself as the objects of analysis.¹⁹ Given their focus on the narrative itself, biographically oriented studies have concluded that identity construction in narratives results in coherent self-presentations that enhance a positive sense of self. Yet recent studies of the interactional approach have suggested that identity construction is also a process in which identities are negotiated, resulting in plural and often contradictory and fragmented forms of identities.²⁰

In this article, I will argue for the use of the interactional approach in studying historical narratives. By analyzing historical narratives as communicative and linguistic practices through which identities are created, we are able to grasp the storytelling event: the interaction between the narrator and the intended audience, and with that also the intended function of the story.²¹ In other words, the linguistic study of identity creation in storytelling does not only shed light on the role of individual language use in performing the self (in addition to the role of scripts), but also invites us to read narratives as conversational instruments, created for and in interaction with specific audiences.

Previous studies have already demonstrated the applicability of linguistic methods on historical texts. The sociolinguist Kormi Anipa has convincingly argued in *The Handbook of Historical Sociolinguistics* (2012) that the study of written texts can also help us understand the role of language in social practices (such as identity creation), because linguistic devices reflect human interaction:

In other words, the various shades of effect that they [linguistic devices] create are an integral part of how people tailor language to different functional and interactional ends, including the art of negotiating ubiquitous tactical and strategic power relations.²²

Research on historical texts as communicative acts has been developed in the field of historical discourse analysis or historical pragmatics, which aims to understand 'the patterns of intentional human interaction'.²³ In general, historical pragmatists study the role of

17 De Fina, 'Narrative and Identities', 365.

18 De Fina, 'Narrative and Identities', 352.

19 See for a discussion on the interactionist and biographical approaches De Fina and Georgakopoulou, *Analyzing Narrative*, 155 and further.

20 De Fina and Johnstone, 'Discourse Analysis and Narrative', 158. See also De Fina, 'Narrative and identities', 352.

21 See for example Schiffrin, 'Narrative as Self-Portrait', 198: 'Who we are is, at least partially, a product of where we are and who we are with, both in interactional and story worlds.'

22 Anipa, 'The Use of Literary Sources', 180.

23 Jucker, 'Historical Pragmatics', 894. Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg, 'Historical Sociolinguistics', 31, describe the differences between historical pragmatics and historical sociolinguistics. Variationist sociolinguistics study linguistic variation in relation to social variables, whereas interactional sociolinguists and discourse studies pay attention to the organization of discourse as a social interaction.

discourse-pragmatic features in certain forms of interaction, such as terms of address, politeness, insults, and compliments.²⁴ Most historical pragmatic research has been conducted on English texts, but some scholars have also analyzed Dutch texts, such as Bax's research on politeness in early modern Dutch letter-writing, and Van Leeuwen's analysis of communication patterns in early modern Dutch sermons.²⁵

Building on this research, I will use methods from narrative analysis to study the interaction between language use and identity creation in early modern storytelling. My focus will be on Van Wanray's ego-document as an example of a communicative and linguistic act of a narrator to real readers and listeners, who in turn influenced the narrator's process of identity creation.²⁶ In my analysis, I will use the concept 'positioning' to refer to this process. 'Positioning' has been introduced as an alternative for studying an overarching identity: positioning approaches 'facets of identity'.²⁷ Positioning also takes into account the practical and social nature of identity construction, because the process of identity construction is located 'in what people observably do', including the ways in which they use language.²⁸ Research on narratives and identity has revealed the dynamic and changeable character of positions; they are constructed moment by moment and can change within a narrative unit.²⁹ Consequently, positions can be contradictory, because narrators position themselves in different categories, as an individual or as a member of a collective category, or because narrators present their agentive self as well as their moral self – the person they should have been.³⁰

In my analysis of Van Wanray's ego-document, I will focus on two forms of self-positioning, performed through different linguistic mechanisms: Van Wanray's collective position as a martyr and her individual position as an innocent suspect. The first two sections will explore the interaction between what I call 'context reflecting' (culturally fixed scripts) and 'context creating' (individual language use) mechanisms in the creation of a salient, collective position, shared with other members of the religious community. I will then demonstrate how, on a more subtle level, the use of individual language functions as a means to create an individual position that is unique to the narrator as the main character of the story.

Positioning as Martyr: Context Reflecting Scripts

In the field of early modern studies, the process of identity creation in storytelling has often been analyzed in terms of 'scripts' or 'schemata': culturally determined structures

24 Brinton, 'Historical Discourse Analysis', 225.

25 Bax, 'Epistolary presentation rituals'; Bax and Steekstra 'Civil rites'; Van Leeuwen, 'Communicatiepatronen in vroegmoderne biechtvaderpreken'.

26 Here I am following Jucker, 'Historical Pragmatics', 896.

27 Depperman, 'Positioning', 369.

28 Deppermann, 'Positioning', 370.

29 Gordon, 'Framing and Positioning', 324, 331; Depperman, 'Positioning'; De Fina, 'Narrative and Identities', 352.

30 De Fina, 'Narrative and Identities', 359. Schiffrin, 'Narrative as Self-Portrait'.

through which the past and the self are framed. Judith Pollmann has argued that ‘memoirs were used to show how someone had “performed” his life in accordance with cultural “scripts” that were used to give meaning to personal experiences and made them useful to share.’³¹ Van Wanray’s ego-document is a classic example of this early modern practice of scripting the self and the past. As an early modern female writer, Van Wanray was part of a tradition in which women preserved and (re)told family memories. Those memoirs could for instance offer an example of human behavior, its consequences, and God’s care in life.³² This exemplary function of family history is well presented in Van Wanray’s story, particularly in the concluding remarks:

Therefore, children, always pay attention to the following: do not follow the people who say that they know the true Word of God, but try, with help of God’s Word, to establish whether they are following the things that God has commanded.³³

In order to emphasize the religious function of her story and to present herself as a religious example to the reader, Van Wanray followed other examples of religious persecution and implemented well-known sixteenth- and seventeenth-century martyr themes in her story.³⁴ Van Wanray for example places herself in line with Christ, the most admirable model, by imitating his behavior. When the magistrate asked her to reveal the name of the minister who had been preaching at her house, Van Wanray answered that she would ‘follow the example of my Savior Christ and all other martyrs and, therefore, I will not answer such questions’.³⁵ She repeated this attitude of not-answering in subsequent interrogations.³⁶ This example, and many other imitations or quotations of and comparisons with other martyrs, illustrates how Christian martyrdom functioned as key part of storytelling scripts used during the Remonstrant controversy: Van Wanray and other Remonstrants performed a role as martyr to reactivate the memory of injustice and to justify their beliefs.³⁷

Apart from quoting and imitating martyrologies, other aspects of intertextuality play a role in scripting Van Wanray’s life story, too, in particular contemporary Remonstrant pamphlets. These pamphlets, printed in Antwerp because of the Northern ban on printing Remonstrant texts, were a means for Remonstrants to criticize the situation in the Dutch

31 Pollmann, *Memory in Early Modern Europe*, 18.

32 Hodgkin, ‘Women, memory and family history’; Pollmann, *Memory in Early Modern Europe*, 18-46.

33 Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 144: ‘Daarom kinder, wyelt daer altiet op lette: niet te vollegen de menschen die seggen dat sy kennen het richte Woerd Gods, maer probbyerren het met het Woerd Gods ofte sy het goedt vollegen dat Godt geboeden heeft’.

34 On the importance of scripts in storytelling, see Pollmann, *Memory in Early Modern Europe*, 18-46; Cubbit, *History and Memory*, 118.

35 Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 110: ‘Ich antwoerde dat ick soude volgen ’t exempell van mynne Salichmaker Chrysty ende alle maerteleren, ende op sulcken vragen geen antwoerd geven.’ She refers to Isaiah 53:7, which foreshadows Luke 23:3, when Jesus neither affirms nor denies a question about his position. This attitude of silence is also recommended by the Remonstrant preacher Poppus in *Nieuwe iaer* (1621), 47: ‘Christus heeft oock dickmael/als hy voor den Richter stondt/ende van hem ondervraecht werde/stille ghesweghen [...] Dese exempelen zijn de Remonstranten schuldigh na te volgen.’

36 Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 114 and 116: ‘Daerop Kelfken vrachden off hy ons vervolechden. Ick antwoerde dat hy ’t mocht weten off hey ’t niet en deden. [...] Daerop Kelfken vrae[ch]den off ick ’t op hem sprack. Ick seyde: die het my aendoen.’

37 Pfeifer, ‘Loyalty, bravery and female cleverness’.

Republic, and especially the subordinate position of the Remonstrants in Dutch society.³⁸ Both Van Wanray and the pamphleteers frame remonstrant subordination in terms of material and financial loss. For example, a 1619 pamphlet on ‘the cruel acts of the blood-thirsty Calvinists’ discusses in great detail the plundering of Remonstrants by Calvinist soldiers, ‘taking away their coats and hats, their money, purse, and handkerchief’. Van Wanray likewise highlights material and financial martyrdom. When, for example, in 1622 the magistrate discovered the Remonstrant sermon and ordered to ransack Van Wanray’s home, the widow evaluates this event in terms of material damage: the mayor and his servants had done ‘this fine piece of work to *the house* of an honest widow’.³⁹ Moreover, when she narrates the event itself, she linguistically marks the passages of material damage to her house by shifting from the perfect to the imperfect tense, whereas the house search itself is told in the perfect tense – a linguistic strategy of tense shifting to which we will return.⁴⁰ Finally, the ending of the story, in which Van Wanray needs to borrow money from friends in order to secure her release from prison, underlines this message of Remonstrant material martyrdom. Both Van Wanray and the pamphleteers thus framed Remonstrant martyrdom specifically as material martyrdom, in order to illustrate and criticize the subordinate position of the Remonstrants. Moreover, Van Wanray used the same textual structure and linguistic elements – such as similar verbs and adverbial phrases – as the pamphleteers.⁴¹ This suggests that the practice of scripting lies not only in the use of literary devices like comparisons, metaphors, and quotations, but also in smaller linguistic elements.

By sketching the textual context in which Van Wanray’s story was written, this section has explored the role of different ‘context reflecting’ mechanisms in the construction of Van Wanray’s story and her position therein: the story’s content and language are inspired by pamphlets on material martyrdom, and Van Wanray’s actions are framed through well-known martyr-scripts based on biblical figures. As such, Van Wanray followed a well-known early modern family tradition, criticizing the religious persecutors and offering her own behavior in the face of persecution as an example to her descendants. In addition to this role of intertextuality in storytelling, the following paragraphs will analyze the role of ‘context creating’ mechanisms in retelling the past. The past is not only framed through fixed scripts, but also through the way individual narrators use their language. Within the boundaries of fixed scripts and genre-styles, Van Wanray varied her language to underline her position as a Christian martyr, but also to construct another social position.

Positioning as a Martyr: Linguistic Strategies

As a martyr, Van Wanray appropriated a position which she shared with other members of the religious community. Different texts and traditions offered means for imitation in

³⁸ Van de Poppe, ‘Nieuwsberichten als stilistisch voorbeeld’; Arblaster, *From Ghent to Aix*, 91.

³⁹ Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 110: ‘Hebbende diet schoenne stuck wercks uutgericht *aent huys* van een eerlick weedfrow’ (emphasis added).

⁴⁰ Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 104.

⁴¹ Van de Poppe, ‘Nieuwsberichten als stilistisch voorbeeld’.

order to achieve this self-position, as we have seen in the previous section. Yet self-positioning is not merely an act of quoting and paraphrasing other voices, or of imitating other styles. Instead, studies in narrative analysis have convincingly shown how linguistic strategies contribute to the process of identity construction. In this part of the article, I will investigate the linguistic strategies in Van Wanray's story that created certain forms of the self. Since the importance of transformation of experiences into linguistically represented episodes lies in verbalization, I will particularly focus on the role of variation of verb types and tenses in self-positioning.⁴²

A first rhetorical strategy employed by Van Wanray is what I call 'actor embedding': the embedding of the narrator's acts in the acts of other characters. This strategy demonstrates the collective character of Van Wanray's position as a martyr: her actions are embedded into those of the larger religious community. She uses this strategy repeatedly in her story about 1619. The following example tells us about Remonstrants who, after they had visited a sermon on German territory, were interrogated in the Nijmegen city hall. Van Wanray first tells her reader about the summoned men and then describes the same situation for the women:

Then they summoned six or seven women from our midst. Together we came before the council. The wife of Jan Joerdens was also there. Although she had not been outside, Gerrit Vervoerd asked Joerdens' wife why she, acting against the placards, had been outside. Thereupon she answered, 'my lords resembled the Pharisees, who thought they saw, but were blind'. So says Gerrit Vervoerd to Joerdens' wife, we followed lies. Thereupon I speak: 'We lived according to that what we embraced 34 or 35 years ago. For that purpose, I want to give up earthly possessions and my life.'⁴³

This fragment has a three-part structure of actors: they (the Counter-Remonstrants) – we (the Remonstrants) – I (Van Wanray).⁴⁴ This embedding of actors illustrates the collective nature of Van Wanray's positioning as a martyr. The Counter-Remonstrants, as accusers, initiated the acting of the Remonstrants as a group. Van Wanray subsequently cites a woman from the Remonstrant group who accuses the magistrate by making a sharp biblical comparison: in Matthew 15:14, Jesus compares the Pharisees, an important Jewish religious movement that agitated against Jesus, with blind people. As is the case with other biblical references, this comparison was taken over by religious groups to accuse

⁴² See Schiffrin 1996, 168. Labov, *The Language of Life and Death*, 15, specifically writes about tensed verbs.

⁴³ Van Wanray, *Het verhaal van gennene my*, 98-100: 'Daerna hebbe sy onsser sess off suven vrowe ock ontboyen. Sien same voer den Raet gecomme. Daerby Jan Joerdens vrow ock by waes. Ende had niet buette geweest, soo heeft Gerret Vervoerd geseyt tegen vrow Joerdens geseyt waerom dat sy boven het placat butten gegaen waes. Daerop geantwoordt, myn heerre mochte die varreseren slachte, die meynden dat sy sagen en waerren blyndt. Soo seyde Gerret Vervordt, wy gynggen na lugens. Daerop ick sprack, wy sien gegaen dat wy over 34 off 35 jaer aengenomen hebbe; daer woel ick goet en bloet by opset.'

⁴⁴ Strikingly, variation in the increasing or decreasing amount of characters was more often applied to narratives about Remonstrant persecution. An example is *Sommier verhaal van de wreede handelinghe* (1619), 8, where the increase and decrease of victims underlines the fierceness of the persecution: the most dramatic acts are personalized to ascribe them to a single character: 'Een Vrouwe isser door t'been gheschoten/ende vele verschedene ghequest; ontallijcke veel zijnder seer deerlijck en blauw gheslaghen; eenighe Borghers die voor henen liepen zijn van soldaten/meer als een halve ure weeghs/vervolght: Des anderen daeghs isser noch een goet Man van Schoonhoven/die daer by ghevalle ghecomen was/op t'veldt Doot ghevonden.'

their opponents of heresy – a ‘context reflecting’ mechanism for positioning the other.⁴⁵ The rendering of other characters’ speech acts is related to the authority of the narrator: narrators can ‘signal their authority to represent others in a community, thus conveying that they are not just individuals animating their own stories, but also principals who are collectively committed to particular versions of the past’.⁴⁶ In other words, through the strategy of actor-embedding and citing other characters’ speech, Van Wanray was able to connect her own behavior to the acts of the religious community as a whole.

Yet Van Wanray also uses linguistic devices to underline her martyr position as the main character of the story. After the other woman has criticized the magistrate, Van Wanray for the first time cites her own words. She presents herself as a martyr, willing to sacrifice life and goods for the Remonstrant religion. This quotation is linguistically highlighted: in the original Dutch text, Van Wanray shifts from the perfect tense to the imperfect tense in her representation of her conversation with Gerrit Vervoerd. The English translation shows a marked shift to the historical present in this case (due to tense differences in English). Moreover, whereas the words of Joerdens’ wife and Gerrit Vervoerd are cited in semi-direct speech – in the past tense instead of the present tense, and in the citation of Vervoerd in the third person plural instead of the first person plural (free indirect speech) – Van Wanray quotes her own words in direct speech. This combination of shifting in both verb tenses and pronouns marks, in the Labovian terminology of narrative analysis, the complicating action (the action scene) and the most reportable event.⁴⁷ In other words, Van Wanray linguistically marks her position as martyr in her story. This strategy of marking important events is not unknown in early modern storytelling. The action section in a narrative is often distinguished from the orientation section, which precedes the complicating action and introduces characters, time, and place by a different verb type and direct speech.⁴⁸ This technique was also used by early modern pamphleteers writing about the Remonstrant controversy.⁴⁹ Van Wanray followed this technique in her own way: she applied it to underline her position as an obliging martyr.

Another linguistic strategy that plays a role in self-position is also related to quotation: Van Wanray varies in ‘introducers’, verbs that introduce who is talking.⁵⁰ Because the tenses of those introducers can vary, scholars of narrative analysis have argued that this variation is related to the expression of power relations.⁵¹ Let us consider this hypothesis in relation

45 Brandt, *Historie der Reformatie* (1677), also used this reference in his preface to Cornelis Cloek: ‘Dese Historie sou veele Christenen, die sich als blinden van blinde leydsluiden naer de gracht der partytschap laeten leyden, veellicht ten nutte strekken.’

46 De Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg, *Discourse and Identity*, 11.

47 Labov, *The Language of Life and Death*, 23.

48 Labov, *The Language of Life and Death*, 130; Johnstone, ‘Oral versions of personal experience’, 546: ‘*Complicating action* clauses are narrative clauses (often in the simple past tense)’. See also Brinton, ‘Historical Discourse Analysis’, 227. The narrative structure of Van Wanray’s story is analyzed in Van de Poppe, ‘Nieuwsberichten als stilistisch voorbeeld’.

49 Van de Poppe, ‘Nieuwsberichten als stilistisch voorbeeld’.

50 Johnstone, ‘Verb tense alternation’, 34.

51 Non-authorities are often introduced in the past tense in English narratives, a more formal tense according to Johnstone, whereas authorities are presented in the present tense, making them sound more familiar. In this way

to Van Wanray's narrative. We have already seen the shift from the perfect to the imperfect tense when Van Wanray quoted her own speech – it indicates the most reportable event of the 1619 story. There are, however, more options for introducers. In her narrative of 1622, Van Wanray varies these by using the perfect tense, the imperfect tense, and the present participle. This is illustrated in the following two fragments, which have more or less the same structure:

And when they had descended from upstairs, I *addressed* them and *asked* them what motivated them to carry on in my house and to search for something that they had not lost.⁵²

When he [the mayor] was inside, he *has called in* Jan the supervisor in and closed the door, *asking* why I had not let him in. I *answer* that I kept my door closed for scoundrels at night.⁵³

In the first sentence, the conversation between Van Wanray and the city servants is announced in the present perfect ('heb aangesproken en gevraagd') – the reaction of those men remains forthcoming. In the second example, the mayor is the caller, again introduced in the present perfect ('heeft ingeroepen'). However, the conversation between the two main characters of the story, Van Wanray and mayor Kelffken, starts with a present participle ('vragende'), and the reaction of Van Wanray is marked with the simple past tense ('antwoordde') – in the English translation again marked with the historical present. In doing so, the narrator varies introducers to highlight the interactional distinction in conversation: the present participle and the simple past are reserved for a conversation with the magistrate in the 1622 story.⁵⁴ Interestingly, the previous citation is the only example in which a present participle introducer is used to announce the text of a magistrate member. Van Wanray uses the remaining present participle-introducers in reproduction of her own speech.⁵⁵ In those cases, Van Wanray 'carpets' the magistrate. Whereas the mayor critically asks why Van Wanray had not opened her door, in the rest of the story she marks introducers with the present participle for her critical questions or remarks. It is through those questions that Van Wanray frames her position as a martyr. In the example below, the narrator uses the present participle to position herself as martyr who has to bear violence and disruption. This martyr position is supported by the comparison made between the mayor and the Duke of Alba: a 'context reflecting' mechanism in which the sixteenth-century persecution is used to position Remonstrants as the seventeenth-century martyrs.

Then I spoke to Kelffken, *complaining* about the violence he inflicted upon me. I said that they [the magistrate] acted worse than the Duke of Alba, *asking* whether this contributed to unity in the community.⁵⁶

the narrator can counterbalance the discrepancy between authorities and non-authorities. See Johnstone, 'Verb tense alternation', 45.

52 Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 104: 'Ende als sy nu van boven affquamen, hebbe ick haer aengesproken ende gevraecht waet haer movierde so in myn huys te werck te gaen ende te soecken daer sy niet verloerren en hadd.'

53 Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 104: 'Als hy [burgemeester] binnen was, heeft hy Jan den geweldegger ingeroepen ende die doeur toegedaen, vragende waerom ick hem niet hadde ingelaete. Ick antwoerde dat ick savents myn huys voer geboefte gesloeten hielt.'

54 Van Wanray does not use present participles in her story about 1619.

55 See for example Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 106, 110, 114, and 134.

56 Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 106: 'Doen sprack ick tegen Kelffken, my beclaegende over 't geweld dat hy my dede. Ick seyde dat sy ereger handelde als Duc Dalff, vragende off dat all tot eenycheyt streckte tuschen die gemeente.'

So far, we have seen how variation in verbs tenses contributes to positioning. In addition, verb types play a role in the process of identity creation. More specifically, I will demonstrate that Van Wanray primarily uses variation in verb types to emphasize her subordinate position as martyr. Examples are causative auxiliary verbs: the Dutch verbs ‘doen’ (to do) and ‘laten’ (to let). Generally, the verbs can be used in the same way, but the causative verb ‘doen’ is often combined with authority, whereas ‘laten’ is related to non-interference or acceptance.⁵⁷ The quotation below, taken from Van Wanray’s story about the searching of her house in 1622, demonstrates the usage of ‘doen’ to highlight the authoritarian position of the magistrate, specifically mayor Kelffken.

And he did strongly occupy my house and the street. [...] When the door was not opened, he, Kelffken, did order to bring the city smith [...]. I opened the door and let him in. When he was inside, he called in Jan the supervisor and closed the door.⁵⁸

The authoritative ‘doen’ is contrasted with ‘laten’: Van Wanray let the mayor in, who subsequently called in his servant and shut the door – in Dutch also marked with the verb ‘doen’ (toedoen, to close). Apart from the contrast between the two types of causative verbs, this fragment also shows that power verbs (calling in, shutting) are attributed to the magistrate, whereas Van Wanray scarcely used this verb type to describe her own actions. Instead, she acted at the command of the magistrate: ‘When he had ordered me to leave and then again ordered me to come in [...]’ – in Dutch she again uses the verb ‘doen’ to reinforce the order’s authoritative force.⁵⁹

The other verb type that I will discuss here, the class of *quasi modals*, has a similar function. Those verbs are ‘activity generators’: linguistic devices ‘that attribute activity to speakers in a form that is consistent with the absence of such activity’.⁶⁰ More specifically, by means of verbs such as ‘starting’, ‘going’, or ‘beginning’, the narrator has the opportunity to present events dynamically. Those agency generators are, again, used to present the magistrate’s activities, for example in the text passage about the house search: ‘he *went* and stabbed the cellar open’, or ‘they *went* knocking’.⁶¹ When those verbs are related to the Remonstrants, they emphasize their incapacity to act as Remonstrants. An example is the verb ‘begin’, which underlines the Remonstrant disability to finish started events: ‘The sermon had begun, but was not ended, because of the coming disruption’.⁶²

In sum, thanks to the interplay between ‘context reflecting’ scripts – such as references to sixteenth-century persecution – and individual language use, Van Wanray was able to perform a position as martyr, who was persecuted by the authoritarian magistrate. In

57 Verhagen, ‘Taalverandering en cultuurverandering’.

58 Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 102-104: ‘Ende deede myn huys ende die straete wael sterck besetten [...]. Doe die duer niet opgedaen woerden, heeft hy, Kelffken, den staetsmet doen haelle [...]. Ick oppende de doeur ende liet hem yn. Als hy binnen was, heeft hy Jan den geweldeger ingeroepen ende die doeur toegedaen.’

59 Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 114: ‘[A]ls hy my hierop dede affgaen ende wederom binnecommen.’

60 Labov, *The Language of Live and Death*, 55.

61 Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 10: ‘[E]nde genck en staek den kaleder open’ or ‘gingen sy clopen [kloppen]’ (emphasis added).

62 Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 94-96: ‘So is die predecasy begonne geweest, maer niet voleent doer die verstoerryng die daer quaem.’

conversations, too, Van Wanray applies variation in verb tenses and speech type to highlight her position as a martyr, just as she uses different verb types in other passages to underline her subordinate position.

Positioning as Innocent Suspect

By her own account, Van Wanray wrote her story of religious persecution for her descendants. Following the rules of the autobiographical genre, Van Wanray names her intended audience and content in the story's opening passage or title: 'The story of what has happened to me, [...] because of religion, to be preserved for my children and our descendants'.⁶³ We have already seen how Van Wanray followed an early modern family tradition by presenting her story and her own life as an example of martyrdom to her descendants. Given this religious exemplary function of the story, the lack of information in Van Wanray's narrative about her own religious activities is striking.⁶⁴ Although her memoir details the way she was treated by the Gomarist magistrate, she has remarkably little to say about the immediate cause of persecution, the Remonstrant sermons. Moreover, Van Wanray never openly confessed to hosting the sermon in her own house in 1622, even though this act could be used as a status symbol for her family, illustrating Van Wanray's bravery and obedience to God. Historical evidence suggests that Van Wanray did open up her house in 1622, probably to the Remonstrant preacher Daniël Wittius.⁶⁵ In this section, I will explore how Van Wanray used her language to emphasize her innocence in the short fragments that do retell the sermons: she varies verb types to position herself as an innocent suspect, unlawfully persecuted for violating the placards that forbade Remonstrant sermons.

Below is the first text passage following the heading of Van Wanray's narrative. In the terminology of the sociolinguist Labov, this passage is called an *orientation*, a fragment which introduces the time, place, characters, and immediate cause of an event.⁶⁶

On 24 October 1619 I went to Holdeurn with my son Jan in the Territory of Cleves, together with other men and women. Because they had forbidden us to hear God's Word, to which we had listened until this time, both inside and outside in our provinces, and had forbidden this with placards, as they had decided at the Synod of Dort, we could not neglect to learn God's Word when we were told to.⁶⁷

63 Burke, 'The rhetoric of autobiography', 154-155. Writing for the sake of the family is an often-heard justification in early modern autobiography. Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennge my*, 94 and 102: 'Het verhael van gennge my [...] is overkommen [...] ter oorsaek van de ryelyesse, om 'tselleve voer myn kinderen ende onse nacommelyngen bewaert te woerden.'

64 Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennge my*, 114: 'Onsse Salichmaecker heeft sien apostelen ende all leeraers bevoelen sien Eevangelyom te predicken alle die werlt doer ende wy sien geoersaect, de gelegentheytt hebbende, sulcks te hoeren, om Godt meer gehoersam te sien als die menschen.'

65 See Janssen, *Om den gelove*, 18-22 for historical evidence about the sermon in Van Wanray's house.

66 Johnstone, 'Oral versions of personal experience'.

67 Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennge my*, 94: 'Den 24 Octoerber 1619, soe ick met myn soon Jan gegaen inger Haeldoern op den Cleefse boyeme, met meer mans en vrouwen gegaen. Doerdien ons benamen was bynnen en buyten in ons provynssyen Godts Woert te hoeren, dat wy tot dessen tyet toe ghehoert hadd, en dat verboeden met placate, gelyck sy op Dortse Synode besloeten hadde, so hebb wy niet cunnen laeten, doen ons voerGEDRAGEN woerden om Godts Wordt te leerren, oms sulcks te vollegen.'

The first aspect that indicates Van Wanray's framing as an innocent person is the initiating event. The initiating event 'triggers the narrative chain about to be told'.⁶⁸ Although Van Wanray starts to narrate what she did – she went to Holdeurn, outside the Dutch Republic on German territory – she also points to the cause, the prohibition of Remonstrant gatherings in the Republic. In other words, the situation is presented as a knock-on reaction, initiated by the other, the Counter-Remonstrant magistrate. The second aspect that enhances this self-framing is found in the last sentence of the cited fragment. In the Dutch text, Van Wanray uses a *passive construction* with the verb 'woerden' (or 'worden') to tell her reader how she was invited to attend the sermon (see note 72). The usage of a passive construction enables a writer to leave out certain actors, in this case the people who had told Van Wanray about the Remonstrant sermon. Apart from leaving out actors, the passive also controls judgement of involvement. The proposal to visit a sermon is made by someone else and Van Wanray seems to have little control over her acceptance of the proposal. Her formulation reminds us of what in narrative analysis are called *metapragmatic verbs*: narrators, when representing their characters, may use verbs like 'negotiated' or 'was talked into' to void them of responsibility.⁶⁹ Van Wanray positions herself as 'talked into' the sermon by using among others the verb 'were told' ('voorgedragen'). Interestingly, Van Wanray uses the neutral wording 'God's Word' instead of 'meeting', 'gathering', or 'sermon', the words that were commonly used in the official placards against the Remonstrants – presumably another attempt to emphasize her innocence.⁷⁰ Although from a Remonstrant martyr perspective Van Wanray had acted correctly – as a Remonstrant martyr she only had to justify her behavior to God, who had ordered her to listen to his word⁷¹ –, she strategically implemented a passive and a metapragmatic verb to conceal her part in attending the sermon.

The story about 1622 starts *in medias res*: Van Wanray begins the passage in the midst of the raid on her house. City servants are assailing her house because 'spies' had informed the magistrate about a Remonstrant gathering there. Van Wanray downplays this information as a rumor.⁷² Between the lines, however, Van Wanray seems to be unpleasantly surprised by the mayor and his servants: she refuses to open her door, whereupon the servants try to break it open, 'using much force, with knocking and hitting on my door, which lasted for two hours'.⁷³ Interestingly, Van Wanray obscures her own role in this episode by using the passive, as she did in the sermon episode in the first story. The passive enables Van Wanray to leave the agents of an event implicit and as such protects herself and other Remonstrants. Instead of explicitly acknowledging her refusal to open the door, Van Wanray writes:

68 Labov, *The Language of Life and Death*, 24.

69 Wortham, 'Interactional positioning'. See also De Fina and Georgakopoulou, *Analyzing Narrative*, 165.

70 The placard of 1619 forbade 'Vergaderingen ofte Conventiculen'. See Wiltens, *Kerkelyk plakaat-boek*, 669.

71 In her discussion with the magistrate, Van Wanray (114) uses this argument: 'Onsse Salichmaecker heeft sien apostelen ende all leeraers bevoelen sien Eevangelyom te predicken alle die werlt doer ende wy sien geoersaeckt, de gelegentheytt hebbende, sulcks te hoeren, "om Godt meer gehoersam te sien als die menschen".'

72 Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 102: 'Ende dat op hett gerucht dat hem doer eenige verspyders was aengebracht van dat in mynnen huysse vergaederinge waes ende Godts Woerdts gepredict woerde.'

73 Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 102: 'Gebruckende allen gewelt met cloppen ende stoeten op de duere, wel twee uren lanck geduer[d].'

'When the door was not opened, he, Kelffken, summoned the city smith to be brought and commanded him to break open the door.'⁷⁴ When the mayor finally comes inside, and asks about her behavior, Van Wanray seems to withhold the truth by saying that she always keeps her house closed at night because she fears the rabble.⁷⁵

This suppressing of information about Van Wanray's actions before the mayor enters the house, through the passive, lays the foundation for her to perform the role of an innocent suspect and position the Gomarist magistrate as an unlawful persecutor. In some places, Van Wanray's role as an innocent victim is intertwined with her martyrdom, for example when she refuses to answer a question about the pastor who had held a sermon, or about the people who had attended the sermon, by imitating the not-answering Christ. Her refusal to pay the imposed fine also shows how religious and legal aspects are linked. She defends her refusal by denying her guilt, but her wording allows for multiple interpretations: 'I answered that I did not owe them anything.'⁷⁶ Since she had just argued for obedience to God instead of to people, and had pointed to the command to hear the Bible, this answer can also be read as a martyr statement: Van Wanray only owes God an explanation for her deeds.⁷⁷

However, it could also be argued that in a way her self-positioning as innocent suspect is not consistent with her martyr-position. Since she, as she argues in her story, only had to justify her behavior as a martyr to God, covering up her Christian duty to attend Remonstrant sermons is striking.⁷⁸ In my view, this form of self-positioning as an innocent victim suggests (fear of) an audience outside the remonstrant circle: as an innocence suspect, Van Wanray criticizes the legal acts of the Gomarist magistrate, but, more importantly, also protects herself from renewed persecution by Contra-Remonstrant readers of her story. Her prudence in giving information about the sermon and the protection of her own role suggest that Van Wanray wrote her story in unsettled times, probably just after her release in 1622. It would take years before the religious troubles subsided: only in 1635 was the Remonstrant Church officially allowed in Nijmegen.⁷⁹ This meant that she had to be careful, keeping in mind both her own and the Remonstrant community's safety. It is probable that this strategy worked, because there is no indication of further charges against Van Wanray.⁸⁰

Conclusion

The conclusion of this article is twofold. On a methodological level, this article has sought to demonstrate the importance of a language-driven approach for the study of early

⁷⁴ Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 102: 'Doe die duer niet opgedaen woerden, heeft hy, Kelffken, den staetsmet doen haelle en heeft hem gehieten die duer op te steken.'

⁷⁵ Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 104-106.

⁷⁶ Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 116: 'Ick antwoerde dat ick *haer* niet schuldich waes ende daer niet begeerden te geven' (emphasis added).

⁷⁷ Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 114.

⁷⁸ Van Wanray, *Het verhael van gennege my*, 114.

⁷⁹ Janssen, *Om den gelove*, 68-71.

⁸⁰ Janssen, *Om den gelove*, 71.

modern narratives. Previous research has shown how individual writers connect with the discourses of others through available scripts: the construction of stories through ‘context reflecting’ language. Yet writers also have the agency to create their own, individual story by strategically and creatively using their language: storytelling through ‘context creating’ language. Since narratives are a means to express, perform, and negotiate identity, the study of identity construction in narratives is a particularly promising way to understand the early modern storytelling event: how did narrators present themselves, to whom, and which linguistic mechanisms did they use, in addition to cultural scripts?

By applying this method to Van Wanray’s story, this article has also argued for the existence of multiple self-positions in narratives. Van Wanray assumed a collective position as a martyr, which she shared with other members of the religious community. This collective position was partly achieved through ‘context reflecting’ mechanisms, in particular biblical and historical scripts, and was enhanced by Van Wanray’s variation in her use of verb types and tenses, through which she indicated her subordinate position to her reader as a martyr who opposed the authoritarian magistrate. Beside this well-known and shared position of martyrdom, Van Wanray implicitly created a position as innocent suspect. Unlike the collective martyr position, this individual suspect position is not produced through fixed scripts of storytelling. Instead, Van Wanray frames her juridical innocence through the passive and the use of metapragmatic verbs. And although sometimes both positions reinforced each other – for example, Van Wanray uses religious arguments to cover up her legal transgression – they also seem to pinch at times: as a martyr she did not need to hide her ‘disobedience’ to a worldly magistrate that persecuted true believers. This latter position as an innocent suspect suggests that, besides the addressed audience, the text was written with an audience in mind beyond the domestic circle. By varying her use of language, Van Wanray conceals her role in the Remonstrant community, but also emphasizes martyrdom, so that her story could be spread and read as an example of Remonstrant subordination and criticism of the Gomarist magistrate, without causing renewed persecution.

With her memoir, Van Wanray became part of a larger literature that illustrated and criticized the subordinate position of the Remonstrants in Dutch society, such as pamphlets. The reception of Van Wanray’s memoir shows that she was read beyond the domestic circle, because her story was retold in *The persecution of the Remonstrants (Der Remonstranten Vervolgingh, 1627)*. Thanks to copies of the original document made by Van Wanray’s brother-in-law, Christoffel Biesman, her tribulations also became known among other Remonstrants, and by 1704 it was partly printed Gerard Brandt’s *History of the Reformation*.⁸¹

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81 See Janssen, *Om den gelove*, 77.

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