The refrein and the Chambers of Rhetoric in the early modern Low Countries

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Abstract

While the allegorical drama of the Dutch rederijkers has received increasing attention from English-speaking critics, much less attention has been paid to the refreinen that often accompanied the plays on festival occasions. This is despite the fact that the refreins were held in high esteem by the rederijkers themselves, and even regarded as the greatest culmination of their literary principles. To redress this oversight, we offer fresh translations of three of these texts, taken from one of the most noted of the rhetorijckfeesten. This is the first time that these poems have been translated into English.

Over the past twenty years or so, English-language scholarship has gained a new appreciation of the vibrant theatrical culture of the rederijkerskamers. These ‘chambers of rhetoric’ – lay fraternities comprised chiefly of middle-class citizens who styled themselves rederijkers or ‘rhetoricians’ – proliferated across the cities of the Low Countries in the later Middle Ages. The dramas they produced for civic and religious occasions, and for the contests known as landjuwelen in Brabant and rhetorijckfeesten in Holland and Flanders, have become increasingly familiar to critics working in English. A number of studies have outlined the history and structure of these organisations, from the pioneering work of Georg Kernodle in the 1940s, to a more recent essay-collection edited by Elsa Strietman and Peter Happé. The chambers’ relationship to wider movements, such as Protestantism, humanism and the devotio moderna, has also been closely documented. Perhaps most importantly, a number of good translations have enabled English readers to access the rederijkers drama directly.

Such efforts have succeeded in bringing about a new awareness of the rederijkers among English critics. This can be witnessed in the tendency among some commentators to see English urban drama in the context of its Dutch counterpart, conceiving the two as ‘part of a shared culture’. The same awareness is also evident in a recent edition of Everyman, which directly tackles the persistent view that the play is ‘thoroughly English in spirit’, emphasising its provenance in the Flemish chambers. In short, recent scholarship has done much to overturn the older view that ‘Holland...had nothing significant’ in terms of drama. In the place of this attitude, a fuller understanding of the fertile milieu of the rederijkers has emerged among anglophone critics.

However, while this activity is in every respect commendable, it has tended to concentrate fairly narrowly on one aspect of the rederijkers’ output. It has focused almost exclusively on the spelen, or stage-plays, produced by the chambers. This has the inevitable but unfortunate effect of marginalising other types of performance associated with the groups. One form of that has been especially overshadowed in English scholarship is the refrein, a variety of rhyming declamation which attained special prominence during the sixteenth century. Only a handful of refreinen have
been translated into English, and the form has received comparatively little attention from English-speaking critics. This is despite the fact that the refrein occupied a central place in the rederijkers' practices: the chambers often promoted it as a supreme demonstration of rhetorical elegance, and their festivals generally included at least one prize for ‘reciting the best refrein’. Indeed, the refrein was so fundamental to the activities of the chambers that it often impinged on their drama. For instance, an appreciation of the form is necessary for a full understanding one of the landmark plays of the rederijkers, Mary of Nieumeghen (c.1515), in which the title-character recites a full-blown refrein during the course of her adventures. Other plays also incorporate refreins, whether hagiographic, such as the Play of Saint Trudo (c.1550), or allegorical, such as Loris Janz’s Morality Play Concerning Grain (1565). It is the purpose of the present article to offer a brief introduction to the refrein and its conventions, and to provide a few examples in a fresh English translation.

The refrein itself seems to have developed out of the French ballade. Several of its chief characteristics are directly imported from the earlier form. Its most conspicuous debt is its fondness for complex rhyme-schemes. Like the ballades, refreins tended to use highly repetitive and densely interlaced schemes. Most refreins included only a handful of line-endings, and deployed them in intricate patterns of repetition. Another feature clearly drawn from the ballade is the refrein’s use of a formal concluding stanza. As with the envoi of the French form, this was often shorter than the preceding stanzas, and would invariably be addressed to a ‘prince’. For the rederijkers this Prince-strofe proved at least as versatile as it did for French poets. The strofe might be dedicated to an actual political leader, to a particularly notable rederijker, or even to the Virgin Mary: in Eduard de Dene’s ‘Decorated With Five Rose-Red Wounds’ (1561), for instance, the final stanza takes the form of a petition to this ‘princess deserving reverence’. The prince-stanza could also refer to the chief administrator of a particular chamber, or in some cases its patron, who would often take the ceremonial title prins or keiser. Finally, the refrein also inherited the ballade’s inclusion of a burden-line at the end of each stanza. These recurring phrases came to be known as stockregels or ‘stock-lines’. As Timothy McGregor notes, the rederijkers generally used the stock to fix the sense of the stanza, rather than to open out the phrase itself to new meanings: the device was usually employed ‘to provide a sense of closure...more like codas than real structural repeats’.

Nevertheless, in spite of its French roots, by the end of the Middle Ages the refrein had developed into a poetic form in its own right. It systematically expanded and lengthened most features of the ballade. Firstly, in place of the ballade’s three stanzas, the refrein generally employed around four or five strofen. Poets were free to expand on this figure, however: the anonymous ‘A False Tongue’ (c.1524) contains eight strofen, while Jan Van den Dale’s ‘In Praise of the Host’ (c.1520) runs to eleven. The strofen themselves were also extended. Most were at least twice the size of a ballade stanza, containing around fourteen or fifteen lines. Again, there were exceptions to this: the stanzas of ‘It is forbidden by Christ’ (1584), for instance, are twenty-one lines in length. The metre of the refrein signalled a further break with its French model. Rather than using the octosyllabics of Machaut, Deschamps or Villon, refreins favoured a longer line. As is stated in the invitation caerte issued before the Delft feest of 1581, refreins of ‘traditional Holland metre’ should have between ‘ten and...fourteen syllables’. Finally, these additions gave the rederijkers scope to create more elaborate and sustained rhyme-schemes than those of the ballade. In fact, the
creation of complicated patterns of sound became ‘an ever more prevalent and deliberate stage’ in the composition of refreins during their development.\(^{18}\)

Although these departures from the *ballade* may seem slight, for *rederijkers* they were clearly more significant than the similarities. The refrein and *ballade* came to be regarded as entirely separate forms. The refrein seems to have emerged as a distinct species of poetry in the first half of the fifteenth century. The earliest surviving examples are those of the Bruges *rederijk* Anthonis de Roovere (c.1430-82), whose *Rhetorical Works* contains twenty-eight texts specifically designated refreins, dating from the 1450s onwards.\(^{19}\) The conventions of the form seem to be fully developed by this point: as Johan Oosterman notes, sources such as the founding charter of the Ghent chamber *De Fonteine*, dating from 1448, show that the refrein was already a well-defined type of text at this stage.\(^{20}\) Certainly by the sixteenth century the refrein and the *ballade* were regarded as wholly discrete. This is apparent from the rhetorical handbook *On the Art of Rhetoric*, compiled by Matthijs de Castelein in c.1548.\(^{21}\) While De Castelein, a prolific member of the Oudenaarde chamber *De Kersouwe* (‘The Daisy’), acknowledges formal similarities between the *ballade* and refrein, he conceives the two as independent frameworks. His list of poetic forms treats them as separate items, citing ‘rondels, refreins, *ballades*, lyrics and plays’ as the genres available to a *dichter*.\(^{22}\)

The refrein reached the peak of its popularity in the sixteenth century. Throughout this period it remained the dominant poetic form of the *rederijkers*: in Reinder Meijer’s phrase, it became the ‘favourite form’ of the chambers, regarded as the consummate expression of their literary principles.\(^{23}\) One measure of its importance is the chambers’ refusal to modify the form. As Werner Waterschoot notes, even when the chambers came under the influence of the Pléiade in the 1530s and 1540s, they were reluctant to bring the refrein in line with the new aesthetics: ‘rhetoricians, who in their introductory speeches proclaimed the fame of Marot and Ronsard, continued to ask for refrains in traditional Holland metre’.\(^{24}\) In fact, some *rederijkers* actively sought to defend the refrein against neoclassical innovation. For example, De Castelein compares the eighth eclogue of Virgil to ‘the refrein that repeats the *reghels*’ in a clear effort ‘to shore up the status’ of the refrein, legitimising its status by supplying it with an ancient pedigree.\(^{25}\) Nonetheless, the refrein began to decline at the turn of the seventeenth century. As the chambers themselves waned in both membership and influence, the refrein was increasingly seen as old-fashioned and outmoded.\(^{26}\) In G.A. Bredero’s *The Spanish Brabanter* (c.1617), for instance, the form is treated with particular scorn. Here the refrein comes to typify the ‘extravagance’ and ‘loquacity’ of the *rederijkers*’ idiom: ‘even their smallest utterance formed an entire refrein’.\(^{27}\)

Like much of the *rederijkers*’ poetry, refreins fell into three major categories. The first of these was the ‘refrein of wisdom’, variously known as the *refereyn int vroede* or *refereyn int wijs*. Most *rederijkers* understood ‘wisdom’ in fairly narrow terms, conceiving it as Christian moral knowledge: accordingly, such pieces were often overtly didactic in intent. The bulk of refreins were composed under this heading. *Référeynen int vroede* were in fact so pervasive that even when the chambers began their decline in the seventeenth century, the form continued to be a viable method of discussing religious issues.\(^{28}\) The prevalence of this type is not surprising, given the largely devotional character of the chambers themselves. The groups seem to have developed out of lay brotherhoods organised under direct supervision of the clergy:
even when they became more independent, and more fully comprised of laymen, they did not lose this basic religious design. 29 This can be clearly witnessed in the chambers’ iconography, especially their frequent allusions to the Holy Spirit. Several kamers took the name De Heilige Geest, including those at Bruges, Ypres and Oudenburg; others, such as the chamber at Rotterdam, depicted Pentecost in their insignia, accompanied by such mottoes as Met minnem versaemt (‘Gathered with love’). As Nelleke Moser notes, the implication seems to be that the chambers own meetings served to impart divine insight to their members. 30 The refrein of wisdom was therefore part of a strong spiritual element in the chambers’ outlook, reflecting their predominantly religious purpose.

The second classification of refrein was the refereyn int amoureuze, or ‘refrein of love’. As might be expected, this form echoed several of the standard conceits of troubadour and Minnesänger poetry. In his monograph on the refrein, Antonin Van Elsander terms refereynen int amoureuze ‘late heirs of the so-called courtly tradition in the medieval love-lyric’, noting that many features of fin amour make their way into such pieces: for instance, they often present love as a ‘duty’ or a ‘humiliation’, to which the narrator ‘meekly submits’, forcing him to praise his mistress lavishly for ‘the smallest proof of affection, a soft word, a token’.31 However, the rederijkers also modified the notions they inherited, blending them with a strong religious sensibility. Refreins of love were often given clear moral overtones. One such text is Jan van den Berghe’s ‘If I could speak to her, I would be appeased’ (c.1539). This is studded with biblical allusions throughout, and ends on an emphatically pious note, as its præcestanza makes a direct appeal to God glorieus.32 Often these devotional sentiments directly opposed the form’s romantic aspects. Rather than merging spiritual and sensual love in the manner of other European lyric traditions, the refreins tended to place them in conflict.33 For instance, the author of ‘I carry love to the chambermaids of Venus’ (c.1524) permits his narrator to abandon the goddess altogether at the end of the poem, and turn instead to the Christian God.34

A third category of refrein was int zotte, ‘of foolery’. These encompassed a broad variety of comic modes. Surviving examples range from the playful scatology of De Roovere’s ‘The place where they sow luck’, to the harsh misogyny of ‘God made women to talk, shout, and nag’.35 Their potential for satire occasionally drew them into the religious controversies of the Reformation era.36 In 1539 the chamber of Sint Barbara at Kortrijk produced a number of refreins which viciously attacked the Catholic church, while the refreins of Anna Bijns (1493-1575) satiris ed Luther and the Reformers, branding them ‘the cause of all misery, social and moral’.37 In general, however, refreins of foolery were more playful than polemic, drawing on the fruitful tradition of fool-literature in the Netherlands.38 It seems likely that refereynen int zotte would in fact be recited by a fool. Most chambers appear to have had a resident clown, since the landjuwelen and rhetorijckfeesten routinely offered prizes to the ‘best fool’.39 Several of these refreins were also composed for an avowedly ‘foolish’ speaker, such as ‘I will drink until morning comes’, which is narrated by a self-professed ‘drunkard, with a straw-stuffed head’.40 Furthermore, the texts often deliberately situate themselves in the tradition of fooling. For instance, the example printed below contains mock-tributes to ‘Carebus’ and ‘Tiribus’: according to Wim Hüskens, these are conventional names for ‘a type of fool who is better off than many serious-minded men’, which can be traced back to Diret Potter’s farce The Magnifying glass (c.1412).41
It is important to stress that all three kinds of refrein were designed to be recited before an audience. Despite the fact that they often circulated in textual form, such as the anthologies printed by Jan Van Doesborch in c.1524 and Jasper Troyen in 1592, refreins were principally intended for performance. As Herman Pleij states, recitation was always the ‘final destination’ of the poems: ‘it was important for texts to be read or recited to show the clever interweaving of end rhymes and internal rhymes...refrains are the preeminent example of the art of declamation’. Accordingly, they became a staple entertainment of the chambers’ gatherings. They were not only read during special occasions, such as the election of a new prince, but also during the chambers’ regular meetings, which often featured a refrein competition between the members.

However, by far the most significant platform for the refrein was the refereinefeest. This was a contest between the chambers of a particular region which focused exclusively on the form. Like the better-known dramatic landjuwelen and rhetorijckfeesten, refereinefeesten required each competing chamber to submit and perform a stipulated number of refreins. Examples include the festivals hosted at Antwerp in 1509, Berchem in 1556, Delft in 1581, Rotterdam in 1598, Leiden in 1604, and Haarlem in 1613. These events closely resembled the landjuwelen. Like the spelen entered into such contests, the refreins were composed as responses to a set question or vraag, issued to the chambers before the meeting. For instance, in the Ghent refereinefeest of April 1539, the refreins of wisdom were required to answer the query ‘Which animal in world can overcome the greatest strength?’, while the refreins of foolishness replied to ‘Which people in the world show most stupidity?’ On these occasions, the vraag was often incorporated into the refrein itself as the stockregel. Prizes were awarded to the best refrein in each category. During the Rotterdam feest of 1561, the best refrein of wisdom was awarded three wine jars, the best refrein of love received six tin jugs, and the best refrein of foolery earned an amphora. These trophies, evidently intended for use during the chambers’ own feasts, had symbolic rather than monetary value. At least this is the impression given by Richard Clough, an English visitor who witnessed the Antwerp landjuweel of 1561. Clough marvelled at the apparent meagreness of the prizes in comparison to the extravagance of the event itself: ‘thys was the strangest matter that ever I sawe...they shall wyn no more with all but a skalle [drinking bowl] of syllver weying 6 ownsys’. Refreins were also often performed during dramatic festivals. Sometimes a refereinefeest and rhetorijckeest would be held as parallel but separate events. At Ghent in 1539 the two events were hosted in the same city a month apart. In other cases, refreins were simply recited amongst the plays, as at Brussels in 1562. The presence of refreins at these festivals again underscores the importance of performance for these texts, their essentially dramatic nature.

How the refreins were performed is, however, something of an enigma. They do not appear to have been sung. According to Jan Bonda, the refrein’s rise in popularity coincided with a general decline in music among the chambers. Moreover, the rhetorijckfeesten clearly distinguished refreins from songs, usually holding separate contests for each. There were also functional differences between the two forms. As Van Elslander points out, refreins were held to inspire ‘reasoned thought’ and good conduct, whereas songs could only ‘arouse, please, or stir’ the emotions. But despite these considerations, it is equally evident that the refrein was not completely distinct
from the song. On this basis Marijke Spies chooses to describe the refrein as ‘a semi-
lyrical form’.\textsuperscript{53} The formal aspects refreins drew from the ballade, such as the strong
use of repetition and the presence of the stockregel, are at least reminiscent of song.
Owing to this, it seems likely that refreins were delivered in a strongly accented, even
rhythmic manner, perhaps as something like a chant.\textsuperscript{54} It also appears that refreins
were delivered by a single narrator. Evidence of this is provided by the miracle play
Mary of Nieuemeghen. When Mary performs a refrein for the patrons of a tavern, with
the stock ‘artlessness makes art grow forlorn’, the recital clearly involves her alone,
since no parts are allocated to other speakers.\textsuperscript{55} It would seem that other refreins were
staged in a similar fashion, as rhyming declamations, performed by a single orator.
However, it is also possible that the audience recited the stockregel along with the
performer. Since this would be based on the prescribed vraag, the stock would be
partly known to the spectators, which might enable their participation.

Another important detail is the fact that refreins were generally performed within the
rethorijckerscamer itself, the hall in which each chamber held its meetings. This sets
the refreins apart from the other productions of the rederijkers, such as their plays and
tableaux vivants. These types of performance were open and public in nature: as is
clear from pictorial sources, they were usually performed on mounted scaffolds in
market squares or other common spaces.\textsuperscript{56} Accordingly, they were written to be
accessible to a wide audience: as Gary Waite comments, ‘the plays were composed as
services to their urban community, within which the rhetoricians lived and worked’.\textsuperscript{57}
In contrast, the refreins belonged to much more exclusive venues. The chamber halls
were emphatically enclosed and private. In fact, each chamber possessed its own
ceremonial cnape or ‘doorman’, whose chief duty was to restrict access to the hall by
non-members.\textsuperscript{58} The fact that halls were the proper forum for refreins suggests that
they were deemed a specialist type of performance, which could only be fully
appreciated by those within the circle of the rhetoricians. They were, as Van Elsland
states, ‘for a more limited public with more refined literary tastes’, not a form suitable
for ordinary, untrained observers.\textsuperscript{59} It should be noted that some refreins did
eventually find a more popular audience: a 1565 municipal decree from Antwerp
mentions ‘heretical’ refreins being ‘carried in pockets, stockings or hats’ by the
general ‘citizenny’.\textsuperscript{60} Yet in spite of this, refreins do seem to have been primarily
written and performed for a select few alone. They were usually reserved for those
fully inducted into ‘the mysteries of rhetoric’, taking place behind the closed doors of
the camer itself.\textsuperscript{61}

The texts and translation
The refreins we present here have not been selected because they possess any qualities
which modern readers are likely to find remarkable, whether as works of art or as
historical documents. On the contrary, they are intended to stand as specimens which
typify the forms of the refrein. The texts are taken from a festival held at Rotterdam
on 20 June 1561, each being the winning refrein in its particular category. This feest,
which included plays and other contests as well as refreins, is one of the best
documented of the mid-sixteenth century. The pieces performed, as well as the
invitation caerete and a list of prizes awarded, have all survived in a printed edition,
published in 1562 by the Antwerp printer Willem Silvius.\textsuperscript{62} This in turn has been
recently reissued in a modern edition, edited by Henk Hollaar.\textsuperscript{63}
The Rotterdam **rhetorijckfeest** drew together chambers from across the countship of Holland. Those known to have taken part include companies from Amsterdam and Gouda in the north, and Rijnsburg, Schiedam, Noordwijk, Leiden and Delft in the south. These were joined by the two chambers of Haarlem, *De Pelicaen* and *De Wyngaertrancken* (‘The Plants of the Vineyard’), respectively designated the ‘old and young chambers’. The festival was hosted by the chamber *De Blauwe Acoleyen*, or ‘Blue Columbine’. Throughout its two-hundred year history, *De Blauwe Acoleyen* was one of the most energetic and productive chambers in Holland. The *Acoleyen* had existed since at least 1484, when the *burgomeestren* of Leiden record sending wine to ‘the rhetoricians of Rotterdam’ for some unspecified service. The chamber is also known to have taken part in numerous *feesten* throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including those held at Noordwijk in 1562, Heenvliet in 1580, Delft in 1581, and Kethel in 1615: it is last mentioned at the festival of Bleiswijk in 1684. The chamber also frequently hosted its own *feesten*, holding four such events between 1545 and 1598. Aside from these occasions, the *Acoleyen* was responsible for much of the civic pageantry staged at Rotterdam. In 1497 it took charge of the celebrations used to mark Phillip the Handsome’s *blijde inkomst*, or official entry into the city. The chamber performed a similar function when Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I of England, visited Holland in 1642.

The Rotterdam *feest* exemplifies the range of contests staged during the *rederijkers’* festivals. Alongside the prizes for poetry and plays, other trophies were awarded for ‘the best parade in the city’, ‘the best firework’, and ‘the best bonfire in front of a tavern’. The chambers also competed to see which could stage the ‘best formal presentation’ of their *blazoen*, the emblem by which the chamber was known. A prize was even awarded to the chamber which had travelled furthest: in this case the ‘victor’ was *De Eglentier* (‘The Sweet Briar’) of Amsterdam, which had covered a distance of some 55 km. However since this prize consisted of a monetary sum rather than the usual drinking vessel, it may have been intended as a travel subsidy rather than an accolade in the strictest sense. Nonetheless, despite these other rituals and competitions, the *refreins* seem to have been the main focus of the event. Participating chambers were required to compose three *refreins* each: separate prizes were awarded to the best ‘refrein of wisdom’, ‘refrein of love’ and ‘refrein of foolery’. By contrast, the chambers were asked to perform only one play apiece. The *feest*’s single dramatic contest focused on *spelen van zinne* or ‘morality plays’. No mention is made of other types of play being performed, such as the *esbattement* or ‘farce’, despite the popularity of such genres among the *rederijkers*.

A further point of interest is the *Acoleyen*’s express desire to avoid any religious irregularity or controversy during the event. Their invitation *caerte* stresses that participants must ‘shun all heresy and mockery, in all of their forms’, especially in the *refreins*. This is not mere over-sensitivity on the part of *De Blauwe Acoleyen*: there were good grounds for taking these measures. In its recent past the *Acoleyen* had attracted the suspicion of the authorities, and even received direct censure. Following a 1529 decree by the court of Holland, which forbade treating religious topics in *spelen* and *dichten*, the chamber’s work was routinely submitted for official inspection. In 1545 a further edict was issued, strongly condemning ‘all the rhetoricians of Rotterdam’ for their opinions, and even naming a few particular individuals. It would seem that the *Acoleyen* was keen to avoid further reprimands.
in the 1561 festival: hence it instructed its guests not to use the occasion ‘to provide an outlet for criticism of orthodox religion’.

Regarding the three winning refereyns themselves, it is difficult to establish exactly why each took first prize in its particular category. Silvius’ volume gives no indication of the criteria used in judging the pieces, and does not single out any of their features as especially praiseworthy. Moreover, it is impossible as a modern reader to detect any great difference in quality between, say, the winning refereyn int vroe by the Leiden chamber De Witte Ackoleyen (‘The White Columbine’), and the second-place refereyn by the Wyngaertrancken of Haarlem. Nonetheless, a few clues are provided by the winning spel van zinne. In this case the first prize was presented to the Schiedam chamber De Roo Roosen (‘The Red Rose’). When compared to the plays staged by the other chambers, the Schiedam piece does stand apart in one key respect: it is notable for the ingenuity with which it responds to the prescribed vraag. The plays were composed in answer to the question ‘What brings most comfort to those who seem lost?’ Most contributors used this prompt to produce a meditation on salvation: for example, the Rijnsburgh entry stresses the importance of adhering to traditional doctrine, and features such figures as De Stemme des Vaders (‘The Voice of the Fathers’) and Gods Ordinatie (‘God’s Commands’). The Schiedam play, on the other hand, takes its lead from Erasmus’ Adagium Sileni Alcibiadis (1515). Noting the vraag’s emphasis on ‘seeming’ rather than being, its narrative explores the difference between inner and outer reality. Since the play is unique in its reading of the theme, such inventiveness may have earned it first place: no doubt its Erasmian allusion also found favour, owing to Rotterdam’s close links with the scholar. Owing to this, it seems at least possible that the winning refereyns were singled out for their novel engagement with the vraag. In every other respect they seem unexceptional, following the conventions of the refereyn closely and without obvious innovation.

The following translation of the three refereyns – which is, to our knowledge, the first in English – is based on the 2006 edition of Henk Hollaar. The original Dutch text has been reproduced by kind permission of the editor. Our translation has endeavoured to remain as faithful as possible to the literal meaning of the original poems. Owing to this, some formal aspects of the texts may not be clear from our rendering. For example, a central feature in each of the texts is its elaborate and highly repetitive rhyme-scheme, which is, as mentioned above, a hallmark of rederijker verse in general. Likewise, the refereyns do sometimes introduce lines which break with their regular metre, to call attention to a particular line or underscore a key idea. Since our priority has been to recreate the sense of these pieces as closely and readably as we can, it has not been possible to preserve these features. Hopefully the inclusion of the original Dutch text will enable readers to identify these characteristics for themselves.
Refereyn van Leyden.
(De Rotterdamse spelen, pp.293-4)

Godt heeft de aerde in den beghinne gheschepen en maecckte den mensch na sijn welbehaghen, met alle ghedierte dat daer is inne begrepen, die groene cruijden – hoort mijn ghewaghen.

Lichten veur den nacht ende oock veur de daghen.
Alle ghedierte ghaf Hij den menschen in sijn ghewelt om daerover te heerschappijen. Sonder versaghen heeft Hij den mensch in den paradijs ghestelt en ghaf hem een ghebodt, soo die Schriftuer vermelt:

van alle vruchten des hoofs te eten behalven van den boom des levens – ’t wort u vertelt :-
den boom der kennissen ‘goet en quael’ gheheten.
Maar de mensch heeft ’s Heeren ghebodt haest vergeten, deur ’s vijandts ingheven die de waerheijt is teghen, en heeft deur ’s vleijschs lust in den appel ghebeten, waerdeur hij worde uutten paradijs ghesmeten. ’s Vleijschs lust meest gheacht is en ’t loon schadelijcxst vercreghen.

’s Vleijschs lust, dat is noch voort ghebleken doen die kinderen der werelt begonnen te vermeren,
waerdeur sij worden van Godt versteken,
omdat sij hittich ghinghen boeleren met ’s menschen dochteren, na haer selfs begheren.
Daerom ’t Godt beroude dat Hij se oijt had ghemaeckt, en liet over haer comen drucx verseren:
deur ’t waters turbacie hebben zij de doot ghesmaeckt.
Sodoma is vergaen – Gods straf heeft haer gheraeckt – deur ’s vleijschs lust en onnomelijcke oncuijsheijt.
’s Vleijsch lust heeft Israël seer na ghehaeckt in de woestenije, soo die Schriftuer verbreijt,
waerom over haer vergramde ’s Heeren majesteijt, en strafte se seer tot haerder onseghen. Deur haer eijghen lust waren sij verleijt.
Dus verhael ick noch, soo ick hebbe gheseijt:
’s vleijschs lust meest gheacht is en ’t loon schadelijcxst vercreghen.

Dese lust is noch in de werelt ghebleven soo men daghelijsxs wel mach sien veur oghen.
Meest elck heeft hem tot boosheijt gegheven in alderleij quaet dat men versieren soude moghen: in overspel, in oncuijscheijt, ’t is ongheloghen.
Haet ende nijdt en blijft oock niet absent.
Hoverdije, ghiericheijt, wilt hierna poghen, en quade begheerte, ’twelck afgoderije is verblent.
Toornicheijt, vijantschap is nu wel bekent, dronckeschap en overtallighe brasserijen,
tweedracht, eijghenwijsheijt, seckten, broeders jent:
‘twelck al uut ’s vleijschs lust comt sonder vermijen.
En seer weijnich siet me’ ‘rteghen strijen
die ’t vleijsch wederstaet en met berou is beweghen,
omdat hierna volcht ’t eeuwich vermaledijen.

50 Dit doet mij segghen tot deser tijen:
’s vleijschs lust meest gheacht is en ’t loon schadelijcxst vercreghen.

PRINCE
’t Loon is schadelijcxst en ’t eeuwich bederven.
De Schriftuer ghetuijcht – smaeckt wel den keest -:
die na ’s vleijs lust leeft, dat die moet sterven

55 omdat het vleijsch ghelust contrarie den gheest,
en den gheest contrarie ’t vleijs onbevreest.
Want die vleijschelijck sijn moghen Godt behaghen niet
omdat zij niet ghehoorsaem en sijn ’t minst noch ’t meest
van Gods wetten en cueren – vaet mijn bediet -,

60 en die Gods gheest niet en heeft, comt in ’t verdriet.
Die en hoort Godt niet toe. Dit is warachtich.
Maer wandelt ghij in den gheest, naer Paulus onthiet,
soo en suldij ’s vleijs lusten niet sijn ghedachtich
noch ’t loon daervan niet sijnde verwachtich.

65 Want het vleijsch altijt tot sonde is gheneghen
en de sonde die baert die doot onsachtich.
Dus concludeer ick, broeders eendrachtich:
’ s vleijschs lust meest gheacht is en ’t loon schadelijcxst vercreghen.
Refrein of wisdom
Submitted by the chamber De Witte Ackoleyen (‘The White Columbine’) of Leiden, the refrein was composed in answer to the question, ‘What is most valued, but brings most ruin?’ (Wat meest gheacht, en schadelijcst vercreghen is).

God in the beginning gave shape to the earth,
   And then made man as it best pleased Him,
   With all the creatures there are to be known,
   And the green plants – listen to my speech.

Lights for the night and also for the day.
   All creatures He gave to man in His scheme
   To have lordship over. Without pause
   He then installed man in paradise
   And gave him a command, as Scripture reports:

From all these fruits you are free to eat
   Except the tree of life – that is denied to you –
   The tree of knowledge called ‘good and evil’.
   But man soon forgot all the Lord commanded,
   At the advice of the foe who is opposed to truth,

And for lust of the flesh he bit the apple,
   For which he was cast out of paradise.
   Lust of the flesh is most valued, but the reward gained is ruinous.

The lust of the flesh, that can be seen everywhere
   Brought more and more children into the world,

And they the word of God forsook,
   For they were engaged in fervid liaisons
   With daughters of men, spawning more like themselves.
   Then God regretted he had made them,
   And let harsh pains overcome them:

Turbulent waters made them taste death.
   Sodom was destroyed – God’s punishment struck it –
   For lust of the flesh and unbridled lewdness.
   The lust of the flesh had great sway over Israel
   In the wilderness, as the Scripture states,

Hence the Lordly majesty grew enraged,
   And he punished them with onerous curses.
   By their own lust were they seduced.
   Thus what I said before, I still now mantain:
   Lust of the flesh is most valued, but the reward gained is ruinous.

This lust now in the world still remains,
   As you can see with your own two eyes.
   More than any other thing it stirs up fury
   And all the other evils that men can perform:
   In adultery, in immodesty, this is undeniable,

In hate and in jealousy it is always present.
   Hubris, avarice, as you hear it from me,
   And filthy desire, which leads to idolatry.
   Wrath, conflict, as we well know,
Drunkenness and useless dissipation,

Rivalry, stubbornness, schism, betraying a brother:
All come out of the lust of the flesh with no hesitation.
And very rarely do I see people resist
Withstanding the flesh and remaining penitent,
Eternal weeping follows after this lust.

This do I say of the present age:
Lust of the flesh is most valued, but the reward gained is ruinous.

PRINCE
The reward is ruinous as you rot forever.
The Scripture states – be sure to remember:
He that lives in lust of the flesh, he must die,

For the lustful flesh is contrary to the spirit,
And the fearless spirit is contrary to the flesh.
They that are fleshly cannot please the Lord
For they do not obey and do not follow in the least
God’s orders and edicts – hear my testimony –

He that lacks God’s spirit will come to grief.
He does not belong with God. This is true.
When you walk in the spirit, as Paul proved,
Then you will not have the flesh’s lust in mind
And no reward will you deserve in the future.

Since the flesh will always veer towards sin,
And sin gives birth to arduous death.
Thus I conclude, assembled brothers:
Lust of the flesh is most valued, but the reward gained is ruinous.
Refereyn van Amstelredam
(De Rotterdamse spelen, pp.300-1)

Menich amoreus herte schept troost en vreucht
als ’t wesen mach in zijns liefs presentie,
daerdeur sijnde van binnen in den gheest verheucht,
maeckende van gheen swaricheijt mentie.

5 In troostlijke woordakens vol eloquentie
schep menich amoreus hert troost, t’ zijnre verblijen,
luijsterende neerstich met diligentie
na haer woordakens die alle druck afsnijen.
Een vriendelijck ghesicht tot diversche tijen

10 vervreucht menich amoreus herte triumphant.
Nochtans al desen – moet ick belijen –
gheven gheen volmaeckt troost, na mijn verstant.
Maer een amoreus hert schept den meesten troost playsant
(soo ’t ghebleken is een menich man ende vrouwe)
in ’t ghebruijk zijns liefs, hem ghejont op trouwe.

Dit bleeck aen Jacob, die een amoreus hert droech
tot Rachel, die men hem seer sach beminnen.
Schoone woorden, ’t ghesicht, bijwesen: ’t was niet genoeyck,
’t ghaf gheen volmaeckt troost zijn amoreuse sinnen.

Veerthien jaer diende hij om te ghwinnen
desen troost, en heeft groot verdriet gheleden:
’st nachts bitter coude, ’s daechs sware hitte van binnen.
Al werdt hem Lea ghegheven, soet van seden,
noch was sijn herte in hem niet tevreden

25 veurdat hij ’t ghebruijk vercreech van sijn lief excellent,
hem op trouwe ghejont tot allen steden.
Doen quam hem eerst volmaeckt troost ontrent.
Hieruut blijckt dat een amoreus herte verblent
zijnen meesten troost schept, na dat ick ontfouwe,
in ’t ghebruijk zijns liefs, hem ghejont op trouwe.

Alle vreucht die op aerden veur werd ghenomen
van amoreusen, ‘tzij dansen, spelen oft singhen,
’t is al om tot dit ghebruijk te comen,
dit werdt ghe-estimeert boven alle dinghen.

35 Zij haecken wel met seer vierich verlinghen
na een vriendelijck ghesicht van ’s liefs bruijn oghen,
maer ’t en can gheenen perfecten troost bijbringhen:
zij sorghen al om te werden bedroghen.
’st Liefs presentie heeft oock dicwils deurvloghen

40 menich amoreus herte, waerin hij alleen
grooten troost schiep, maer wert hem noch onttoghen
van een ander, dies hij bleef in swaer gheween.
Dus schept een amoreus herte in ’t gheemeen
zijn meesten troost (soet als een hemelschen douwe)
in ’t ghebruijk zijns liefs, hem ghejont op trouwe.
PRINCE

Al werd ghejont menich amoreus herte
‘t ghebruijck zijns liefs, als ‘t niet en gheschiet ter eren,
‘t en sal niet verdrijven sijn inwendighe smerte,
maer noch blijft sijnen gheest altijt in ‘t verseren,

sorghende dat sij sulcxs mee sal consenteren
een ander. Dus schept hij daerin den meesten troost niet.
Maer siele en lichaem sal verjubileren
als ‘t ghebruijck in deuchden en in eeren gheschiet.
‘t Ander baerdt noch al een heijmelijck verdriet,

als jalosije somtijts aen comt ghestreken.
Maer een amoreus herte, alsoo men siet,
dat deur Cupido’s strael vierich is ontsteken,
schept sijn meesten troost (‘t is dickwils ghebleken)
aen dien, die daerdeer ghecomen zijn uut rouwe

in ‘t ghebruijck zijns liefs, hem ghejont op trouwe.
Refrein of love
Submitted by the chamber De Eglentier (‘The Sweet Briar’) of Amsterdam, the refrein was composed in answer to the question, ‘Where does an amorous heart find the most comfort?’ (Waer een amoureus hert den meesten troost in schept).

Many an amorous heart finds comfort and joy
When it so happens that love is present,
Because of that delight within the mind
No mention can be made of heaviness.

In comforting words full of eloquence,
Many an amorous heart finds comfort, cheering itself,
Listening carefully with diligence
To the words that cut away all dread.
An affectionate glance every time

Will cheer an amorous heart triumphant.
Nonetheless all these things – I must admit –
Do not give complete comfort, to my knowledge.
But an amorous heart finds the most pleasant comfort
(As is upheld by many men and women)

In enjoying its love, when it is sworn to be faithful.

This happened to Jacob, he bore an amorous heart
For Rachel, who loved him a great deal.
Sweet words, glances, her company: that was not enough,
It did not bring complete comfort to his amorous senses.

For fourteen years he strove to win
This comfort, and was led to great sorrow:
By night bitter cold, by day cruel heat from within.
Even when he was given Lea, sweet of habits,
Still his heart within him was not satisfied

Until he could freely enjoy his exquisite love,
Which was sworn to be faithful in every town.
Then for the first time he knew complete comfort.
It is clear that an amorous blinded heart
Finds its greatest comfort, as I have told you,

In enjoying its love, when it is sworn to be faithful.

All the joy that may on earth be known
By the amorous, whether they dance, play or sing,
It is all done to reach this enjoyment,
Which is esteemed above all other things.

They strongly wish for and with fiery pain desire
An affectionate glance from their love’s brown eyes,
But even this will not bring complete comfort:
They dread that they will be deceived.
His love’s presence has also passed though

Many amorous hearts, in it he alone
Took great comfort, but he is robbed
By another, and so left to weep heavily.
Thus in general an amorous heart finds
Its greatest comfort (sweet as heavenly dew)

45 In enjoying its love, when it is sworn to be faithful.

PRINCE
Although many an amorous heart is delighted
By enjoyment of its love, if it is not done with honour,
It shall not drive away his inward pain,
But in his mind there will always be stirring,

50 He thinks about that which he cannot defeat:
Another. He will not find greatest comfort there.
But soul and body will celebrate
When enjoyment is had in virtue and honour.
The other carries always a secret sorrow,

55 As jealousy certainly strikes at the heart.
But an amorous heart, as can be seen,
That Cupid’s fiery dart has pierced,
Finds its greatest comfort (it is frequently proved)
To those who are led out of sorrow by this,

60 In enjoying its love, when it is sworn to be faithful.
Haest u, ghij sotten, wilt u niet verbloeden. Meeckt u al ghereet, ’t is nu van nooden. Ghij moet nu verschijnen om te verwachten u lot. Tot Rotterdam daer zijt ontbooden.


Om tot Rotterdam te komen wilt u rassen, want men sal daer nu op veel sotten passen die daer in sesthien jaren niet en hebben gheweest. Beij met minnen versaeent suldij lecker brassen. Daer suldij die blaeuw Acoley sien wassen die u sullen verheughen minst ende meest.


Dus thoont elck sotheijt om in vreucht te beclijven. Comt, sotten, helpt sottelijck sotheijt bedrijven.

Tot Rotterdam comende wilt sotheijt hanteeren, want zij daer van u sotten sotheijt begheeren bedreven te hebben in ’t openbaer.

Dus wilt u daer sottelijck met sotheijt verweeren ende deur u sotheijt alle vreucht vermeeren, verdrijvende duer dien melancolije swaer. Om u sotheijt te baren ontbieden zij u daer. Dus en wilt niet dan sottelijck sotheijt beghinnen daer ghij alleen sijt of bij malcander tegaer, dat men elcx s u sotheijt mach bekinnen. Daerdeur suldij alle druck doen drijven, daer ghij ontboden sijt tot vreuchts verstijven. Comt, sotten, helpt sottelijck sotheijt bedrijven.

PRINCE

Ghij princelijke sotten, wilt u niet verschoonen, maer wilt u elck sottelijck als sotten verthonen, sulcx s een ijghelijck gheest daertoe is ghestelt. Elck voech hem als die sotste van Malburchs sonen
hier in dese feeste. Men sal elck lonen
met die prijzen die veur u sotten sijn opgesteld.
   Dus om prijs te winnen comt elck sottelijk in ’t velt.
   Reijnst, onbeveijnst, thoonst u sotheijt sulcks dat betaemt.
   Elck in haer feeste, sulxs de caerte vermelt
   u ghesonden bij ons broeders *met minnen versaemt*.

Om sotheijt van u te sien, hoe ghij sijt ghenaemt,
    zij rhetorijckelijck aen u allen schrijven:
Comt, sotten, helpt sottelijk sotheijt bedrijven.
Refrein of foolery
Also entered by the Leiden chamber De Witte Ackoleyen. The caerte did not issue a formal question for the refeyen int zotte, only instructing ‘everyone to make the best possible lines’ (Int sot elck na den besten Reghele stelt).

Make haste, you fools, you must not shirk.
Make yourselves ready, for you are now needed.
You must now come here to accept your lot.
To Rotterdam you have been summoned.

But you need not worry; the men there won’t kill you,
For everyone there must in his thoughts show folly.
Do not forget your costume, bring your marot,
For without those things men will not know you.
Come all you faithful, obey this command

And help the others to man Carebus’ wagon.
Tirebus’ horses shall before that wagon run
To help it on its way. You must not despair.
Come, fools, and hastily help folly thrive.

When to Rotterdam you come you must rush,
Since the men there shall host many fools
Who have not been there for over sixteen years.
At gathered with love you will dine well.
There you will see the Blue Columbine grow
From the least to the most they will make you cheer.

Go there most foolishly and make the feast spread.
To make folly thrive all must do their best.
Drive away the heavy moods of the spirit.
In his own way each fool shows foolishness.
They summoned you for this, to speak plainly.

Thus all must show folly so joy may continue.
Come, fools, and foolishly help folly thrive.

Once you arrive at Rotterdam use your folly,
There they demand foolishness from you fools
That must be carried out in the open air.

Thus go there and foolishly bring forth folly
And let your foolery spread joy to all,
Banishing through you heavy melancholy.
To bring forth folly they have summoned you.
Thus you must do nothing but start foolish folly

Whether you are alone or grouped all together,
So that men may your foolishness witness.
Therefore you should work to drive out anguish,
You are summoned there to preserve joyfulness.
Come, fools, and foolishly help folly thrive.

PRINCE

You princely fools, you must not retreat,
But must be shown to be as foolish as fools,
Just as each of you is accustomed to be.
Each must be foolish as a son of Wrongton84
Here in this feast. Each man will be rewarded
With prizes which are set aside for you fools.
To win a prize the foolish must enter the field.
Come forth, unafraid, show your usual folly.
All shall feast here, as the charter states
Sent to you by our brothers, gathered with love.
To show foolishness, and show your name,
In a rhetorical style they wrote to you all:
Come, fools, and foolishly help folly thrive.

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4 Claire Sponsler, Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods and Theatricality in Late Medieval England (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997), p.96. See also Leonard Forster, ‘Literary relations between the Low Countries, England and


7 The modern Dutch spelling ‘refrein’ has been used throughout, despite the tendency of some English commentators to adopt the formation ‘refrain’. ‘Refrein’ is preferred here to avoid the unhelpful connotations of ‘refrain’, since the repetition of a burden is only one feature of the refrein.


14 ‘Een valsche tonghe’, in *Jan van Stijveoorts Refereinenbundel anno 1524*, ed. by Frederikyna and Willem van Eeghem, 2 vols. (Antwerp: De Sikkel, 1930), II,


19 See for instance ‘Refereyn constich gheestelijck’ (‘Skilful spiritual refrein’) and ‘Refereyn van berouwe’ (‘Refrein of repentance’): *De gedichten van Anthonis de Roovere* ed. by J.J. Mak (Zwolle: Uitgeversmaatschappij Tjeenk Willink, 1955), pp.218-9, 224-5. Although the *Rhetorical Werken* was not published until 1562, some eighty years after its author’s death, the titles do seem to be De Roovere’s: see Dirk Coigneau, *Refreinen in het zotte bij de rederijkers*, 3 vols. (Ghent: Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde, 1980-1983), III (1983), pp.568-75.


25 ‘De refereinen dats tsreghels repetitie/ Rijst ons ter monitie van Maro zo ic meene,/ In zijn achste eglogue’: Castelein, *De const van rhetoriken*, p.55; Spies, *Rhetoric, Rhetoricians and Poets*, p.44.


31 ‘Late erfgenamen van de zogenaamde hoofse traditie in de Middeleeuwse Minnelyrie...De geringste blik van genegenheid te zijnen opzichte – een ‘vriendelic’ of ‘troostelic’ woord, een blik’: A. van Elslander, *Het refrein in de Nederlanden tot 1600* (Ghent: Erasmus, 1953), pp.121-6.


42 See *De refreinenbundel van Jan van Doesborch*, ed. by C. Kruyskamp (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1940); C.G.N. De Vooy, ‘De Dordtse bundel met Christelijke en
50 ‘Rond 1500 was het gesproken refrein de belangrijkste lyrische vorm van de rederijkers geworden. Het is wellicht het verdwijnen van de band met de muziek geweest’: Jan Willem Bonda, De Meerstemmige Nederlandse Liederen Van de Vijftiende En Zestiende Eeuw (Hilversum: Verloren, 1996), p.429.
52 ‘Het referein kon redeneeren, overtuigen; het lied kon slechts opwekken, ontroeren, aangrijpen’: Elslander, Het referein, p.9.
57 Waite, Reformers on Stage, p.29.
58 See Prudens van Duyse, De rederijkamers in Nederland, hun invloed op letterkundig, politiek en zedelijk gebied (Ghent: A. Siffer, 1900-02), I (1900), p.42.
59 ‘Voor een beperker publiek met meer uitgesproken literaire pretenties’: Van Elsland, Het referein, p.187.
60 Quoted in Maria A. Schenkeveld, Dutch literature in the age of Rembrandt (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1991), pp.69-70. Similar edicts were made in Holland
63 *De Rotterdamse spelen van 1561*, ed. by Henk Hollaar (Delft: Eburon Uitgeverij, 2006).
64 In the same year, festivals at Antwerp and Brussels were held for the chambers of Brabant and Flanders respectively: see Van Elslander, *Het Refrein*, p.216.
65 On the significance of this name, and its relevance to the Virgin Mary, see Robert A. Koch, ‘Flower Symbolism in the Portinari Altar’, *Art Bulletin* 46 (1964), pp.70-7, especially p.74. The name was a popular one among the rederijkers, adopted by at least four other chambers: see P.J. Meertens, *Letterkundig leven in Zeeland in de zestiende en de eerste helft der zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1943), pp.71-130.
72 See *Vier excellente cluchten*, ed. by J.J. Mak, Klassieke Galerij 46 (Antwerp: De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1950); Herman Pleij, *De eeuw van de zotheid – over de nar als maatschappelijk houvast in de vroegmoderne tijd* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2007).
74 ‘Alle rethoresynen tot Rotterdam’: *Retoricaal Memoriaal*, p.753.
75 Pettigree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, p.94.
79 The ‘bauble’ or carved wooden stick traditionally carried by fools.
80 For Carebus and Tiribus, see n.40.
81 Hollaar suggests that ‘hastily’ (*haestelijck*) should in fact read ‘foolishly’ (*sottelijck*), as in the later *stockregelen*. It is certainly unusual to vary the *stock* in a refrein, although not completely unprecedented: see for instance De Roovere’s ‘Daer
lief daer ooghe/ daer handt daer seer’ (Where the lover there an eye, where a hand there the pain), in *De Gedichten*, p.395.

82 Rotterdam had indeed last hosted a *rederijkerfeest* in 1545: see *Retoricaal Memoriaal*, p.753.

83 The motto of the *Blauwe Acoleyen*, here used to designate the chamber hall itself.

84 *Malburchs zonen* seems to have been a proverbial expression, perhaps suggested by Malbork in modern-day Poland. See Kalff, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Letterkunde*, III (1907), pp.174-5.