

The verses of Mariken van Nieuwmeegen (Anonymous, C. 1515)

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Abstract. *Mariken van Nieuwmeegen is one of the best known plays in Dutch literary history, but has found little fame outside the Netherlands. Although an early modern English translation does exist, this was evidently based on a lost prose version. The original play contains numerous verse-passages. There are four self-contained poems in these sections: two rondelen, a sonnet and a refereyn. This article presents the first translations of these poems into modern English.*

Although little known outside the Netherlands, the story of *Mariken van Nieuwmeegen* is for Dutch readers roughly equivalent to Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*. Not only does *Mariken* share many of Marlowe's key concerns, and belong to the same broad period, it also enjoys a similar ubiquity on school curricula. It is virtually impossible to pass through the Dutch secondary school system without encountering the text in one form or another. *Mariken van Nieuwmeegen* is one of the most central texts in the Dutch literary canon.

Like *Faustus*, *Mariken*'s chief themes are temptation and impetuosity. For the most part, the story takes place in and around Nijmegen, a city in the medieval Duchy of Gelders, the modern-day province of Gelderland. It begins in 1471, during a prolonged power-struggle between Duke Arnold and his son Adolph. The story describes the experiences of Mary, or 'Mariken', a young woman living with her uncle Ghijsbrecht. One day Mary is sent to Nijmegen to buy provisions: she will lodge overnight with Ghijsbrecht's sister, a hard-bitten supporter of 'young

duke' Adolph. Sadly, the old woman is preoccupied by the political upheaval. She fails to recognise Mary and chases her from the house. Stranded in Nijmegen, Mary pleads aloud for help. Her appeal is promptly answered by Satan, 'Moenen'. Satan not only vows to provide for the girl, but promises to teach her arcane knowledge and clothe her in 'costly jewels'. In return Mary must change her baptismal name. Mary agrees, adopting the name 'Emmyken' or Emmy, and travelling with Satan to Antwerp.

Ten days later, Ghijsbrecht confronts his sister on the whereabouts of Mary. The aunt responds with characteristic fury, sending her brother home 'with heavy heart'. Not long after this incident, Duke Arnold escapes from prison in the town of Grave, causing the aunt to cut her throat in despair. In the meantime, Emmy has become the toast of Antwerp. Under Satan's direction, she makes a living reciting elaborate speeches at taverns. She spends seven years living like this, in 'revel and misrule'. However, at length she misses her family, and asks the devil to take her to Uncle Ghijsbrecht. Satan is happy to grant this request. Once at Nijmegen, Mary's fortunes change once again. She finds herself in the audience of a morality play, which depicts the victory of God and the Blessed Virgin over the demon Masscheroen. Having seen this spectacle, Emmy begins to lament her venal life. Her penitence infuriates Satan. He seizes her, carries her into the air and dashes her to the ground, 'intending to break her neck'. Fortunately, Uncle Ghijsbrecht is at hand: his prayers keep his niece from dying. With her uncle's help, the girl eventually obtains absolution, and enters the cloister of Mary Magdalene at Maastricht.

Despite its modern accessibility, the text itself has only survived in an imperfect and second-hand form. The two earliest versions of the story are Jan van Doesborch's *A lyttell story of a mayde that was named Mary of Nemegen that was the dyuels paramoure by the space of. vij. yere* (Antwerp, c. 1518), and Willem Vorsterman's *Die Waerachtige ende Een seer wonderlijcke Historie van Mariken van nieumeghen die meer dan seuen iaren metten duuel woende ende verkeerde* (Antwerp, c. 1515). Neither of these impressions represents the work in its original form. Doesborch's text, for instance, is a translation of a lost Dutch prototype into English prose. In this, Doesborch was following a well-established practice among Dutch printers: at the time, only a few native presses served the English reading public, and England thus presented a lucrative foreign market. It is no more likely that Vorsterman's Dutch *Mariken* corresponds to an original version of the text. Vorsterman was an enterprising but rather disreputable figure, an example of what is now termed a *piraat-editie*: a publisher who capitalises on the success of a popular book by marketing his own version of it. His edition of the *Mariken* is absolutely typical of a *piraat's* working-practices. Its general sloppiness, and its abundance of omissions and mistakes, indicate a rush to copy the text while public demand remained high.

Nevertheless, Vorsterman's *Mariken* remains an interesting document. It preserves a version of Mary's story which differs radically from that printed by Doesborch.

Whereas Doesborch relates Mary's 'living' in the form of a prose tract, Vorsterman's text takes the form of a verse-drama. What makes this all the more interesting is the fact that a number of self-contained poems are embedded in the play. It is these smaller pieces that our translation reproduces. This is the first time that these poems have been translated into English as verse: Doesborch's English 'story' contains nothing even remotely comparable to these pieces.

The pieces below require some explanation regarding their form. Two are *rondelen*: lyrical pieces, derived from the French *rondeaux* and related to the English roundelays, with a strongly repetitive rhyme-scheme. Another verse-form found here is the *refereynken*, a long poem which concludes each stanza with a refrain or *stockregel*. Lastly and perhaps most importantly is the speech Mary's aunt delivers before her suicide. Although not adhering strictly to the Petrarchan model, this takes the unmistakable form of a sonnet. It is in fact the earliest surviving sonnet in Dutch literature, representing the first known example of a form that would come to dominate Dutch poetry during the sixteenth century.

Our translations are based on the text of Dirk Coigneau (Hilversum, 1996). Other editions include those of Ramakers (Amsterdam, 1998), McKinley (Lancaster, 1993), Raftery (Leiden, 1991), Knuvelde (Den Bosch, 1955) and Cordemans (Brussels, 1924). The editions of Coigneau and Ramakers also include valuable introductions and commentary.

Uncle Ghijsbrecht Confronts His Sister: a rondeel

(Coigneau, pp. 80–1.)

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|---------------------------|--|
| <i>Oom Ghijsbrecht:</i> | Ey lazen, suster, ghi beguyt mi,
Dat ghi segt dat gi van Maeyken niet en weet. |
| <i>Marikens moeye:</i> | Ey neen ick, seker, goey lan Duyt ghi. |
| <i>Oom Ghijsbrecht:</i> | Ey lazen, suster, ghi beguyt mi. |
| <i>Marikens moeye:</i> | Ick schat si yevers in een camer ghemuyt si,
Daermen sulken tijtkens om een grootken speet. |
| <i>Oom Ghijsbrecht:</i> | Ey lazen, suster, ghi beguyt mi,
Dat ghi segt dat ghi van haer niet en weet. |
| <i>Uncle Ghijsbrecht:</i> | Oh sister, I'm not the fool that you assume,
When you claim you do not know where Mary has gone. |
| <i>Mary's aunt:</i> | Oh, you Simple Simon, how dare you rage and fume. |
| <i>Uncle Ghijsbrecht:</i> | Oh sister, I'm not the fool that you assume. |
| <i>Mary's aunt:</i> | I'll bet she is safely sitting in our little room,
Where the boy fits the spit into each fat capon. |
| <i>Uncle Ghijsbrecht:</i> | Oh sister, I'm not the fool that you assume,
When you claim you do not know where she has run. |

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Mary's Aunt Hears Some Bad News: a sonnet

(Coigneau, p.86.)

Hulpe, leveren, longeren ende milten,
 Tanden, hoofden, wat ic al leets ghewinne!
 Den spijt sal mi doen bersten of smilten,
 Want ic swelle van quaetheyt als een spinne.
 Verwoet, dul werdt ic ende buyten sinne
 Doer die nieumere die ic daer hebbe verstaen.
 Doude dief die te Grave opt slot lach in die rinne,
 Die is verlost ende laten gaen.
 Och, nu es alle mijnen troost ghedaen,
 Want ons ionghe hertoghe, bi wien ic blive,
 Sal nu, ducht ick, zijn hant opt bloote slaen.
 Ick bender so inne beroert, dat ic mi saen
 Overgheven soude, met siele, met live,
 Ende roepen alle duvels te mijnen verstive.

1. By Christ's liver! By his spleen, lungs and heart!
2. By his skull and teeth! How I'm plagued by pain!
3. Rage will either melt me or rip me apart!
4. Like a spider I bulge with ire I can't restrain!
5. All be damned! This fury drives me insane!
6. The latest news is the source of my care:
7. That old thief, that a Grave jail-cell did contain,
8. Is now released, free to breathe fresh air,
9. And I can find no solace anywhere.
10. The young duke, with whom my loyalties lie
11. Shall, I suspect, be left with nothing to bear.
12. It makes me sick, fills me with raw despair.
13. I will gladly lose my soul, this news to defy:
14. May every demon in Hell answer my cry!

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Mary's Speech at the Tavern: a refereynken

(Coigneau, pp.96-7.)

O Rethorijcke, auctentijcke, conste lieflijcke

Ic claghe met wanhaghe, die di eerst maecte,
 Datmen di haet
 Ende versmaet.
 Den sinnen die u beminnen, vallet seer grielijcke.
 Hem tfi, die di als dongheraecte
 Gheen gade en slaet.
 Tfi, sulcken daet
 Ick puer versmade.
 Maer al eest scade
 Ende leet hem alleene die dit aenhoren,
 Doer donconstighe gaet die conste verloren.
 Conste maect ionste, steltmen in een parable.
 Voer fabele houdic dat woert ende niet waer.
 Laet daer een constenaer comen notable,
 Donable, van consten niet wetende een haer,
 Sal claer ghehoort zijn, hier ende over al (daer).
 Welnaer sal dye constighe van armoeden versmoren.
 Vercoren es die loeftutere allet iaer.
 Maer emmer, al hebbens die selcke thoren,
 Doer donconstighe gaet die conste verloren.
 Tfy alle botte, plompe, slechte sinnen,
 Die conste sout stellen in u verstant! Want
 Reyn conste sal elck met rechte minnen,
 Conste eerst ghemaect aen elcken cant, want
 Conste hout in weelden menich playsant lant.
 Eere gheschie hem allen die consten orboren.
 Tfy donconstighe die de const vander hant plant.
 Te dier causen stel ic den reghel van voren:
 Doer donconstighe gaet die conste verloren.
 Princelijc wil ick tot consten keeren
 Ende nae mijn macht altoos consten leeren,
 Want niemant en es metter consten gheboren,
 Maer tes alle constenaers een verseeren
 Dat donconstige die consten so luttel eeren.

Oh rhetoric, of all arts truest and best,
 It shames me to say, that while I rank you first,
 Other men traduce you
 And even abuse you:
 Your loyal followers now feel sore pressed.
 To him I say Fiel, who like some brute, cursed,
 Pays you little heed.

Fie! Such a woeful deed
 Drives me to despair.
 But I know that there
 Are many who will weep when they hear me mourn:
 It is the artless who have left art so forlorn.
 Good art should give pleasure, states an old saying,
 Which I hold for a fable, not worth a bean.
 If there is a fine artist, skilled in portraying,
 And a third-rate hack whose knowledge is mean,
 The latter will be everywhere heard and seen,
 While the real artist starves and shivers, in scorn.
 The panderer will always grow fat and preen.
 One day the truth will on every man dawn:
 It is the artless who have left art so forlorn.
 Fie on the boorish, dull, rude and obtuse,
 Who think that they can such things understand!
 The purest art should every man seduce:
 Art should before all other things stand;
 Art should be the pride of each lovely land;
 Every true artist honour should adorn.
 Fie on art's detractors, the brutish and bland!
 Because of you this conclusion I have drawn:
 It is the artless who have left art so forlorn.
 Prince-like, to the true arts I will turn
 And as well as I can the arts I will learn,
 For no man with skill in the arts was born.
 It is for all artists a source of concern,
 That uncultured men the arts always spurn.

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Mary's Homesickness: a rondeel

(Coigneau, pp. 103–4.)

<i>[Moenen]:</i>	Emmeken, u bede ontsegge ick u no, Wildi, segdi, eens tot uwen vrienden varen?
<i>Emmeken:</i>	Ick soudt u bidden, waert u believeen alsoe.
<i>Moenen:</i>	U bede, lief, ontseg ick u no.
<i>Emmeken:</i>	Mijn moeye te Nyeumeghen, mijn oom te Venlo En sach (ic niet) in ses och in seven iaren.
<i>Moen(en):</i>	Daeromme ontsegge ick u die bede no.

Ick belove u, wi sullen tuwen vrienden varen.

Moenen: Emmy, whatever you desire, I'll make it so.
Are there, for instance, any friends you want to see?

Emmy: I would wish for that, if you really want to know.

Moenen: Whatever you desire, dearest, I will make it so.

Emmy: My aunt in Nijmegen and my uncle in Venlo,
It has been seven years since either one saw me.

Moenen: As I pledged, tell me your desire, I will make it so:
I promise you, your old friends we will soon see.

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