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 land-juwelen 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 organizations, from the pioneering work of Georg Kernodle in the 1940s, to a more recent set of essays edited by Elsa Strietman and Peter Happé.¹ The chambers’ relationship to wider movements, such as Protestantism, humanism, and the devotio moderna, has also been closely documented.²


Perhaps most importantly, a number of translations have enabled English readers to access *rederijkers* drama directly.\(^3\)

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: for example, Leonard Forster, Alexandra Johnson, and Claire Sponsler have each insisted that the two be seen as 'part of a shared culture'.\(^4\) The same knowledge is also evident in a new edition of *Everyman*, which directly tackles the persistent view that the play is 'thoroughly English in spirit', emphasizing its provenance in the Flemish chambers.\(^5\) In short, recent scholarship has done much to overturn the older view that 'Holland [...] had nothing significant' in terms of drama.\(^6\)


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 focussed almost exclusively on the spelen, or stage-plays, produced by the chambers. This has the inevitable but unfortunate effect of marginalizing other types of performance associated with the groups. One form that has been especially overshadowed is the refrein, a sort of rhyming declamation that 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’. In fact the refrein was so fundamental to the activities of the chambers that it often impinged on their drama. For instance, the form had a direct influence on 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. A number of later plays also follow this course, incorporating refreins into their dialogue, such as the *Play of Saint Trudo* (c. 1550), and the *Morality Play Concerning Grain* (1565) by Loris Janz. It is the purpose

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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.


10 *Het spel van Sint Trudo*, ed. by Rik Delport (Kortrijk: Vermaut, 1930); *Een spel van binnen beroerende Het Cooren (1565)* van Lauris Janse, ed. by W. M. H. Hummelen and G. W. R. Dibbits (Zutphen: Thieme, 1983).
of the present article to amend this oversight, by offering a brief introduction to the refrein and its conventions. A few examples of the form will also be appended, in a fresh translation.

In terms of its overall development, the most obvious source for the refrein is the French ballade. Many of the refrein's characteristics are clearly derived from this earlier form, either echoing or directly emulating French texts. This borrowing is perhaps most conspicuous in the rhyme schemes of refreins. The refrein shares the ballade's fondness for structural complexity, employing highly repetitive and densely interlaced rhymes. Most surviving examples include only a handful of line-endings and weave them into intricate patterns of repetition. The influence of the ballade is also apparent in the refrein's use of a brief concluding stanza, in the vein of the French envoi. The final part of a refrein is usually shorter than the preceding sections and is invariably addressed to a 'prince'. Again like French form, this Prince-strofe could carry out a broad range of functions. The 'prince' it addressed might be an actual political leader, a particularly notable rederijker, or even a figure of religious significance: in Eduard de Dene's 'Decorated With Five Rose-Red Wounds' (1561), for instance, the final stanza is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, who is hailed as 'a princess deserving reverence'. 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 McTaggart notes, the rederijkers generally used the stock to fix the sense of the stanza, rather than to open up the phrase itself to new meanings. The device was usually employed 'to provide a sense of closure [...] more like codas than real structural repeats'.

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Nevertheless, in spite of its French origins, by the end of the Middle Ages the refrein had developed into a poetic form in its own right. It systematically expanded on most of the features of the ballade. First, in place of the ballade’s three stanzas, the refrein generally employed around four or five strofen. Poets were free to increase 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 rule: the stanzas of ‘It is forbidden by Christ’ (1584), for instance, are twenty-one lines in length. The refrein broke further with its French model in the standard metre it followed. 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.

Although these departures from the ballade may seem slight, for the 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 type of poetry in the first half of the fifteenth century. The earliest surviving examples are those of the Bruges rederijker Anthonis de Roovere...
(c. 1430–82), whose *Rhetorical Works* contains twenty-eight texts specifically designated refreins, dating from the 1450s onwards. The conventions of the form seem to be fully developed by this point: this is further corroborated by the founding charter of the Gent chamber *De Fonteine*, dating from 1448, which refers to the refrein as a specific variety of text. Certainly by the sixteenth century the refrein and the *ballade* were regarded as wholly discrete. This is made clear in the handbook *On the Art of Rhetoric*, compiled by Matthijs de Castelein in c. 1548. 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* or poet.

The refrein reached the peak of its popularity in the sixteenth century. Throughout this period it remained the dominant poetic form of the *rederijkers*: as Reinder Meijer writes, it became the 'favourite form' of the chambers, regarded as the consummate expression of their literary principles. 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 Pleiade 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'. In fact,

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19 See for instance 'Refereyn constich gheestelijck' ('Skillful spiritual refrein') and 'Refereyn van berouwe' ('Refrein of repentance'); *Degedichten van Anthonis de Roovere*, ed. by J. J. Mak (Zwolle: Uitgevermaatschappij Tjeenk Willink, 1955), pp. 218–19, 224–25. 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 redekerkers*, 3 vols (Gent: Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde, 1980–83), iii (1983), 568–75.


24 Waterschoot, 'Marot or Ronsard?', p. 154.
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*, legitimizing its status by supplying it with an ancient pedigree.25 Nonetheless, despite these efforts, the *refrein* fell into 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.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 ‘verbosity’ of the *rederijkers*’ idiom: one of Bredero’s characters remarks that ‘even their smallest utterance took the form of a *refrein*’.27

Like most of the *rederijkers*’ compositions, *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, interpreting it as Christian moral knowledge: accordingly, such pieces are often overtly didactic in character. The bulk of *refreins* were composed under this heading. *Refereynen 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, as late examples by Dirk Philipsz serve to demonstrate.28

The second classification of *refrein* was the *refereyn int amoureuze*, or ‘*refrein* of love’. As might be expected, this form draws on several standard conceits from 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’, and notes that many *fin amour* conventions


make their way into such pieces: for instance, the refreins 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’. 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 with her, I would be appeased’ (c. 1539). This is studded with biblical allusions throughout and ends on an emphatically pious note, as its prince-stanza makes a direct appeal to God glorieus. 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. For instance, the author of ‘I carry love to the chambermaids of Venus’ (c. 1524) permits his narrator to abandon the goddess of love altogether, as he turns to the Christian God at the conclusion of the poem.

A third category of refrein is int zotte, ‘of foolery’. These encompass 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’. Their potential for satire occasionally drew them into the religious controversies of the Reformation era. 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) satirized Luther and the Reformers, branding them ‘the cause of all misery, social and moral’.

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29 ‘Late erfgenamen van de zogenaamde hoofse traditie in de Middeleeuwse Minnelyriek [...].' De geringste blijk van genegenheid te zijnen opzichte — een “vriendelic” of “troostelic” woord, een blik’; A. van Elande, Het refrein in de Nederlanden tot 1600 (Gent: Erasmus, 1953), pp. 121–26.


In general, however, refeins of foolery were more playful than polemic, drawing on the fruitful tradition of fool-literature in the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{36} 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".\textsuperscript{37} Several of these refeins 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".\textsuperscript{38} Furthermore, the texts often deliberately situate themselves in broader traditions of clowning. For instance, the example printed below contains a mock-tribute 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 Dirk Potter's farce \textit{The Ways of Love} (c. 1412).\textsuperscript{39}

It is important to stress that all three kinds of refein 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


\textsuperscript{38} "Dronckaert, dul van hoye": "Refreyn XLIV: By wylen drinck ik to smorhings dat daecht", in E. Soens, "Onuitgegeven Gedichten van Anna Bijns", \textit{Leuvensche Bijdragen}, 6 (1900), 354–55.

Troyen in 1592, refrains 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 prins, but also during the chambers’ regular meetings, which often featured a refrain competition between the members.

The most significant platform for the refrain, however, was the refereinfeest. This was a contest between the chambers of a particular region which focussed exclusively on the form. Like the better-known dramatic landjuwelen and rhetorijkfeesten, the refereinfeest required each competing chamber to submit and perform a stipulated number of refrains. Examples of such festivals include those 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 refrains were composed as responses to a set question or vraag, issued to the chambers before the meeting. For instance, in the Gent refereinfeest of April 1539, the refrains of wisdom were required to answer the query ‘What animal in the world can overcome the greatest strength?’, while the refrains of foolery replied to ‘What people in the world show most stupidity?’.

On these occasions, the vraag was often incorporated into the refrain itself as the

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43 A three-weekly refereinritueel, in which ‘every member was expected to contribute’, is best documented for the Gent chamber De Fonteine; see Dirk Coigneau, ‘Bedongen creativiteit: Over retoricale productieregeling’, in Medioneerlandstiek: Een inleiding tot de Middelnederlandse letterkunde, ed. by Ria Jansen-Sieben, Jozef Janssens, and Frank Willaert (Hilversum: Verloren, 2000), pp. 133–34.

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 ownys'.**

Refreins were also often performed during dramatic festivals. Sometimes a refreinfeest and rhetorijkfeest would be held as parallel but separate events. At Gent in 1539 the two events were hosted in the same city a month apart. In other cases, refreins were simply recited along with the plays, as at Brussels in 1562. The presence of refreins at these festivals again underscores the importance of performance for these texts and their essentially dramatic nature.

How the refreins were performed is, however, something of an enigma. They do not appear to have been sung to musical accompaniment. According to Jan Bonda, the refrein's rise in popularity coincided with a general decline in music among the chambers. Moreover, the rhetorijkfeesten 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

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48 ‘Rond 1500 was het gesproken refrein de belangrijkste lyrische vorm van de redevijzers 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.
50 ‘Het referein kon redeneeren, overtuigen; het lied kon slechts opwekken, ontroeren, aangrijpen’: van Elslander, Het referein, p. 9.
that the refrein was not completely distinct from the song. Various features that
the refrein took from the ballade, such as the strong use of repetition and the presence of the *stockregel*, are at least reminiscent of song; hence Marijke Spies suggests that the refrein is best described as 'a semi-lyrical form'.

51 Owing to this, it seems likely that refreins were delivered in a strongly accented, even rhythmic manner, perhaps as something like a chant.

It also appears that refreins were delivered by a single narrator. Evidence of this is provided by the miracle play *Mary of Nieuwenhagen*. When Mary performs a refrein for the patrons of a tavern, with the *stock* 'artlessness makes art grow forlorn', she clearly recites it alone, since no parts are allocated to any other speaker.

52 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 refrein apart from other productions of the *redenrijker*, such as their plays and *tableaux vivants*. Such types of performance tended to be 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.

53 They were also 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'. 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 *enape* or 'doorman', whose chief

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55 Waite, *Reformers on Stage*, p. 29.
Various features that elicit the presence of readerijkers, as well as rhyming declamation that the audience might understand based on the context of the setting, which might be open and performed on stage. They were also mumbled, as the rhetoric was much more private. Moreover, the plays, which the rhetoricians' Theatre, trans. John Playhouse, ed. by state University Press, was held its meeting, reiterates the importance of the rhetoricians. They were as van Elslander states, 'for a more limited public with more refined literary tastes', not a form suitable for ordinary, untrained observers.

It is true 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 'citizenry'. Yet despite 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.

The Texts and Translation

The refreins presented 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 typical specimens of their form. The texts are taken from a festival held at Rotterdam on 20 June 1561, each being the winning refrein in its particular category. This fest, 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 caerte and a list of prizes awarded, have all survived in a printed edition, published in 1562 by the Antwerp printer Willem Silvius. This in turn has been recently reissued in a modern edition produced by Henk Hollaar.

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56 See Prudens van Duyse, Derederijkkamersin Nederland, hun invoeld op letterkundig, politiek und zedelijk gebied (Gent: A. Siffer, 1900-02), 1 (1900), p. 42.
57 'Voor een beperkter publiek met meer uitgesproken literaire pretenties': van Elslander, Het refrein, p. 187.
60 On Silvius, see Colin Clair, 'Willem Silvius', The Library, 14 (1959), 192-205.
61 De Rotterdamse spelen van 1561, ed. by Henk Hollaar (Delft: Eburon Uitgeverij, 2006).
The Rotterdam rhetorijckfeest drew together chambers from across the countship of Holland.62 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’.63 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 burgomestren of Leiden record sending wine to ‘the rhetoricians of Rotterdam’ for some unspecified service.64 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 Blieswijk 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.65 The chamber performed a similar function when Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I of England, visited Holland in 1642.66

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

62 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.

63 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), 70–77, 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.


65 Herman Brinkman, Dichten Uit Liefde: Literatuur in Leiden aan het Einde van de Middeleeuwen (Hilversum: Verloren, 1997), p. 82.

in front of a tavern’.67 The chambers also competed to see which could stage the ‘best formal presentation’ of their blazoen, the emblem by which the chamber was known.68 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 kilometres. However, since this prize consisted of a monetary sum rather than the usual drinking vessel, it may have been intended as a sort of travel subsidy, rather than an honour in the strictest sense.69 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, and 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 fest’s single dramatic contest focussed 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 this genre among the rederijkers.70

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.71 This is not mere over-sensitivity on the part of De Blauwe Acoleyen, since 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 chambers’ work was routinely submitted for official inspection. This led to an edict of 1545, which strongly condemned ‘all the rhetoricians of Rotterdam’ for their opinions, and even named a few particular individuals.72 It would seem that the Acoleyen was keen to avoid further reprimands

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69 Retoricaal Memoriaal, ed. by van Boheemen and van der Heijden, p. 48.
70 See Vier excellente duchten, ed. by J. J. Mak, Klassieke Galerij, 46 (Antwerp: De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1950); Herman Pleij, De eeuw van de zoolied: over de waar als maatschappelijk bouwast in de vroegmoderne tijd (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2007).
72 ‘Alle rethoresynen tot Rotterdam’: Retoricaal Memoriaal, ed. by van Boheemen and van der Heijden, p. 753.
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 refrains themselves, it is difficult to establish exactly why each took first prize in its particular category. Silvius's 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 refrain int vroe by the Leiden chamber De Witte Ackoleyen (The White Columbine) and the second-place refrain by the Wyngaertrancken of Haarlem. Nonetheless, a few clues are provided by the winning spelen 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 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's 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 treatment of the theme, this inventiveness may have earned it first place: no doubt its Erasmian allusion also found favour, considering Rotterdam's close links with the scholar. Owing to this, it seems at least possible that the winning refrains were singled out for their novel engagement with the vraag. In every other respect they seem unexceptional, following the conventions of the refrain closely and without particular innovation.

The following translation of the three refrains — 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

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73 Pettigree, Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion, p. 94.
75 See W. M. H. Hummelen, Repertorium van het Rederijkersdrama, 1500–ca.1620 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1968), under entries 3D 1–9.
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 rederijkersverse. Likewise, the refreins do sometimes introduce lines which break with their regular metre, to call attention to a particular detail or underscore a key idea. Since our priority has been to re-create 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 the reader to identify these characteristics for themselves.

Refereyn van Leyden

(De Rotterdamse spelen, pp. 293–94)

Godt heeft de aerde in den beginne geschepen en maecte den mensch na sijn welbehaghen, met alle ghideierte dat daer is inne begrepen, die groene cruijden — hoort mijn ghewaghen.

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

van alle vruchten des hoofs te eten behalen van den boom des levens — 't wort u vertelt —:
den boom der kennissen 'goet en quaet' ghetheten. Maar die 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 uuten 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 zij worden van Godt versteken, omdat zij hitrich 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 vergaan — Gods straf heeft haer gheraeckt —

ms Spelen van p. 49–50.

1620 (Assen:}
Deur 's vleijchs lust en onnomelijcke oncuijsheijt.
's Vleijsch lust heeft Israel seer na ghehaeckt in de woestenije, soo die Scriftuer verbreijt,
waerom over haer vergramed 's Heeren majesteijt,
en strafte se seer tot haerder onseghen. Deur haer eijghen lust waren sy verleijt.
Dus verhael ick noch, soo ick hebbe ghezeijt:
's vleijschs lust meest gheacht is en 't loon schadelijcxst vercreghen.

35 Deze lust is noch in de werelt ghebleven soo men daghelijcxs 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 onghelogen.

40 Haet ende nijdt en blijft oock niet absent.
Hoverdije, ghiericheijt, wilt hierna poghien,
en quade begheerre, 'tweelck afgoderije is verblent.
Toornicheijt, vijantschap is nu wel bekent,
dronckeschap en overtallighe brasserijen,
tweedracht, elijghenwijsheijt, seckten, broeders jent:
'tweelck al uut 's vleijschs lust comt sonder vermijen.
En seer weijnich niet me 'treghen strijen
die 't vleijsch wederstaet en met beroe 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 Looon is schadelijcxst en 't eeuwich bederven.
De Schriftuer ghetuijcht — smaeckt wel den keest —:
die na 's vleij's lust leeft, dat die moet sterven
omdat het vleijsch gehelust contrarie den gheest,
en den gheest contrarie 't vleij's 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 —,

55 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 vleij's lusten niet sijn ghedachtich
noch 't loon daervan niet sijnde verwachtich.

60 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.

5 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:

10 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,

15 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,

20 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:

25 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,

30 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 maintain:
Lust of the flesh is most valued, but the reward gained is ruinous.

35 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,
40 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,
45 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.
50 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,
55 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 —
60 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.
65 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. 300–01)
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 woordekens vol eloquentie
schept menich amoreus hert troost, t' zijnte verblijen,
luijsterende neerstich met diligentie
na haer woordekens die alle druck afsnijen.
Een vriendelijk ghesicht tot diversche tijen

10

vervreucht menich amoures herte triumphant.
Nochtans al desen — moet ick belijen —
geeven gheen volmaeckten troost, na mijn verstant.
Maer een amoreus hert schept den meesten troost playsant
(soo 't ghebleken is een menich man ende vrouwe)

15

in 't ghebruijck zijns liefs, hem ghejont op trouwe.

Dit bleek aan Jacob, die een amoreus hert droech
tot Rachel, die men hem seer sacht beminnen.
Schoone woorden, 't ghesicht, bijwesen: 't was niet genoeg,
't ghaf gheen volmaeckten troost zijn amoreuse sinnen.

20

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

25

veerdal hij 't ghebruijck vertrecch van sijn lief excellend,
hem op trouwe ghejont tot allen steden.
Doen quam hem eerst volmaeckten troost ontrent.
Hieruit blijckt dat een amoreus herte verbliant
zijnen meesten troost schept, na dat ick ontfouwe,
in 't ghebruijck zijns liefs, hem ghejont op trouwe.

Alle vreucht die op aerden veur werden ghenomen
van amoreusen, 't zij dansen, spelen oft singhen,
't is al om tot dit ghebruijck te comen,
dit werd ghe-estimeert boven alle dinghen.

35

Zij haecken wel met seer vierich verlinghen
na een vriendelijk ghesicht van 's liefs bruijn oghen,
maer 't en can gheenen perfecten troost bijbringen:
zij sorgen al om te werden bedroghen,
's Liefis presentie heeft oock dicwils deurvloghen
menich amoreus herte, waerin hij alleen
grooten troost schiep, maer wert hem noch ontroghen
van een ander, dies hij bleef in swaer ghweeen.
Dus schept een amoreus herte in 't gleemen
zijn meesten troost (soet als een hemelschen douwe)
in 't ghebruijck zijns liefs, hem ghejont op trouwe.

PRINCE
Al werd hem 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,
as jalosije somtijts aan comt gestreken.
Maer een amoreus herce, alsoo men siet,
dat deur Cupido's strael vierich is ontsteken,
schept sijn meesten troost ('t is dickwils ghebleken)
aen dien, die daerdeur 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 occurs that its 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)

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,

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,

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 proven)
To those who are led out of sorrow by this,

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

Refereyn van Leyden

(De Rotterdamse spelen, pp. 319–20)

Haest u, ghij sotten, wilt u niet verblooden.
Maeckt u al ghereet, ’t is nu van nooden.
Ghij moet nu verschijnen om te verwachten u lot.
Tot Rotterdam daer zijt ontbooden.
Ghij en dorft niet sorghen; men sal der u niet dooden,
maer elck moet daer verthoonen sijn gheesten in ‘t sot.
Verghheet niet u vespercleet, brengt mede u marot,
want sonder dat selve men soud ‘er u niet kennen.
Comt op u stadhchste, obedient dit ghebot
en helpt daer tesamen Carebus’ waghen mennen.
Tirebus’ paerden sullen veur den waghen rennen
om die te helpen schutten. Wilt niet achterblijven.
Comt, sotten, helpt haestelijck sotheijt bedrijven.

Om tot Rotterdam te comen wilt u rassen,
want men sal daer nu op veel sotten passen
die daer in seschien jaren niet en hebben gheweest.
Beij met minnen versacemt suldij lecker brassen.
Daer suldij die blauwe Acoleye sien wassen
die u sullen verheughen minst ende meest.
Comt daer op u soste en vermeert haer feest.
Om sotheijt te bedrijven treck elck sijn lijne.
Verdrijft daerdeur den swaermoedighen gheest.
Daer thoone elck sost sottelijck ‘t sijne.
Ghij sijt daerom ontboden, ghesijt ten fijne.

Dus thooent 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 vermeer,
verdrijvende duer dien melancolije swaer.
Om u sotheijt te baren ontheden zij u daer.
Dus en wilt niet dan sottelijck sotheijt beghinnen
daer ghij alleen sijt of bij malander tegaer,
dat men elcx s u sotheijt mach bekinnen.
Daerdeur suldij alle druck doen drijven,
daer ghij onboden sijt tot vreuchts versijven.
Comt, sotten, helpt sottelijck sotheijt bedrijven.

Ghij princelijke sotten, wilt u niet verschoonen,
maer wilt u elck sottelijck als sotten verthoonen,
volcs een ighelijck gheest daerto echte is gheweest.
Elck voech hem als die sotste van Malburchs sonen
hier in dese feeste. Men sal elck lonen
met die prijzen die veur u sotsten sijn opgestekt.
Dus om prij te winnen comt elck sottelijck in ‘t velt.
Reijnst, onbeveijnst, thooent u sotheijt sulcsx dat betaemt.
Elck in haer feeste, sulcx de caerte vermelt.

PRINCE

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THE REFREIN AND THE CHAMBERS OF RHETORIC

u ghesonden bij ons broeders met minnen versaemt.

50 Om sotheijt van u te sien, hoe ghij sijt ghenaemt,
zij rhetorijckelijck aen u allen schrijven:
Comt, sotten, helpt sottelijck sotheijt bedrijven.

Refrein of Foolery

Also entered by De Witte Ackoleyen. The caerte did not issue a formal question for the refereyn 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.

5 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,77
For without those things men will not know you.
Come all you faithful, obey this command

10 And help the others to man Carebus's wagon,
Tirebus's horses shall before that wagon run78
To help it on its way. You must not despair.
Come, fools, and hastily help folly thrive.79

When to Rotterdam you come you must rush,

15 Since the men there shall host many fools
Who have not been there for over sixteen years.80
At gathered with love you will dine well.81

77 The 'bauble' or carved wooden stick traditionally carried by fools.
78 For Carebus and Tiribus, see note 39 above.
79 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 without precedent: 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.
80 Rotterdam had indeed last hosted a rederijkerfeest in 1545: see Retoricaal Memoriaal, ed. by van Boheemen and van der Heijden, p. 753.
81 The motto of the Blauwe Acoleyen, here used to designate the chamber hall itself. On the significance of this and similar mottoes, see Nelleke Moser, Destrijd voor rhetorica: poëtica en positie van rederijkers in Vlaanderen, Brabant, Zeeland en Holland tussen 1450 en 1620 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2001), pp. 78-85.
There you will see the Blue Columbine grow
From the least to the most they will make you cheer.

20 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.

25 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.

30 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

35 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.

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 Wrongton\textsuperscript{2}
Here in this feast. Each man will be rewarded

45 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, \textit{gathered with love}.

50 To show foolishness, and show your name,
In a rhetorical style they wrote to you all:
Come, fools, and foolishly help folly thrive.

\textsuperscript{2} Malburchszonen seems to have been a proverbial expression, perhaps suggested by Malbork in modern-day Poland. See Kalff, \textit{Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Letterkunde}, iii (1907), 174–75.