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RELIGIOUS
LITERATURE

Translated and Introduced
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STHOFF LEYDEN/HEINEMANN LONDON
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Van dichten comt mi cleine bate.
Die liedes raden mi dat ict late
Ende minen sin niet en vertare
Maer om die doghter van hare
Die moeder ende maghet es bleven,
Hebbic een sone miracle op heven,
Die god sonder twivel toghede
Marien turnen, diene soghede.
Ic wille begihnen van ere nonnen
Een ghedichte, god moest mi onnen,
Dat ic die poente moet wel geraken
Ende een goet ende daer af maken,
Volcomelijke na der waertheide,
Als mi broeder Ghiesbrecht seide,
Een begheven willeminijn;
Hi vaant in die bocke sijn.
Hi was een out ghedaghet man.
Die nonne, daer ic af began,
Was hoveshe ende subtiel van zeden;
Men vint ghene noch heden,
Die haer ghelijct, ic wane,
Van zeden ende van ghedane.
Dat ic pricde haer lede,
Sonderlinche haer soonhede,*
Dats een dinc dat niet en dochte.
Ic wille u segghen, van wat ambachte
Si plach te wesen langhen tijt;
Int clooster daer si droech abijt,
Costersse was si daer,
Dat seggic u al over waer:
Sine was lat no traghe,
No bi nachte no bi daghe.
Si was snel te haren werke;
Si plach te ludene in die kerke;

Little profit comes to me from writing poetry, and people advise me to give it up and stop addling my brains. But to the honour of her who remains Mother and Virgin I have undertaken to write of a lovely miracle which God beyond doubt performed to the honour of Mary who suckled Him.

Now I will begin my poem, which is about a nun, and may God grant that I may tell the story properly and make a good end to it, agreeing perfectly with the truth, as Brother Gilbert told it to me, who was a pious Williamite friar. He had found it in his books, and he was a very old man.

This nun, of whom I began to tell you, was well-bred and intelligent: I do not think that one would find anyone today to equal her in breeding and manners. But it would not be seemly for me to extol her, and especially not to speak of her beauty; but I can tell you of the office which for a long time she bore. In the monastery in which she was professed, she was the sacristan, and I can truthfully tell you that she was never slow or lazy, night or day, but she was prompt in her work. She used to ring the church bell.

* The original Dutch text of Beatris which is printed here, parallel with the English translation, is from Beatris. A Middle Dutch Legend, edited from the only existing manuscript in the Royal Library at The Hague by A. J. Barnouw (London, Oxford University Press, 1914). The editor in his Preface to the text remarks: “The use of italics seemed... unavoidable in the case of manuscript or, the e of which, for the reader’s benefit, has been replaced throughout by o where ó, not ë is the sound intended”.
Si ghereide tlicht ende ornament
Ende dede op staen alt covent.

Dese ioffrouwe en was niet sonder
Der minnen, die groot wonder
Pleecht te werken achter lande.
Bi wil en comer af scande,
Quale, toren, wedermoet;
Bi wil en bliscap ende goet.
Den wisen maect si ooe soo ries
Dat hi moet bliven int verlies,
Eest hem lieft ofte leet.
Si dwingt sulken, dat hine weet
Weder spreken ofte swighen,
Dae h loon af waent ghecrighen.
Menege worpt si onder voet,
Die op staet, alst haer dunct goet.
Minne maect sulken mildes,
Die liever sine ghijen wilde,
Dade hlijt niet bider minnen rade.
Noch vintmen liede soo ghestade,
Wat si hebben, groot oft clene,
Dat hen die minne gheeff ghemene:
Welde, bliscap ende rouwe;
Selke minne hetic ghetrouwe.
In constu niet gheseggen als,
Hoe vele gheluxx ende ongevals
Utter minnen beken ronnen.
Hier omme en darfinen niet veronnen
Der nonnen, dat si niet en conste ontgaen
Der minnen diese hilt ghevaen,
Want die duvel altoos begheert
Den mensche te becorne ende niet en cesseert
Dach ende nacht, spade ende vroe;

she looked after the candles and altar furniture, and she wakened the whole convent.

This virgin did not lead a life without love, love which can perform so many miracles far and wide, love which brings sometimes shame, torment, sorrow, despair, sometimes joy and happiness. Love can make a wise man into such a fool that it brings him to ruin, whether he like it or not. Some love so constrains that they can neither keep silence nor speak, though speech could gain them their reward. When it pleases love, it tramples under foot those who stand upright. Some love makes generous who would withhold all their gifts were it not for the counsels of love. Some are made so steadfast by love that they will share with love whatever they have, much or little, riches, joys or sorrows; and that is what I call true love. I could not tell you of all the good fortune and all the ill which flows out of love's streams. And so we must not blame this nun, who was unable to escape from the love which held her captive; because the devil is always longing to tempt man, and he never stops, day and night, late and early,
Hi doeter sine macht toe.
Met quaden listen, als hi wel conde,
Beordisce met vleescheliker sonde,
Die nonne, dat si sterven waende.
Gode bat si ende vermaende,
Dat hise trooste dore sine ghenaden.
Si sprac: ‘ic ben soo verladen
Met starker minnen ende ghewont,
Dat weet hi, dient al es cont,
Die niet en es verholen,
Dat mi die crancheit sal doen dolen;
Ic moet leiden een ander leven;
Dit abijt moetic begheven.’

Nu hoort, hoeter na verghinc:
Si sende om den ionghelinc,
Daer si toe hadde grote lieve,
Ootmoedelijc met enen briefe,
Dat hi saen te hare quame,
Daer laghe ane sine vrame.
Die bodc ghinc daer de ionghelinc was.
Hi nam den brief ende las,
Die hem sende zijn vriendinne.
Doe was hi blide in sinen sinne;
Hi laestenti te kommen daer.
Sint dat si out waren .XII. iacr,
Dwanc die minne des c twee,
Dat si dogheden mench wee.

Hi reet, soo hi ierst mochte,
Ten clooster, daer hise sochte.
Hi ghinc zitten voor tvensterkijn
Ende soude gheerne, mocht zijn,
Sijn lief spreken ende sien.
Niet langhe en merde si na dien;  
Si quam ende woudene vanden  
Vor t'ensterkijn, dat met yerzen banden  
Dwers ende lanx was bevlochten.

Menech werven si versochten,  
Daer hi sat buten ende si binnen,  
Bevaen met alsoe starker minnen.  
Si saten soo een langhe stonde,

Dat ic gheseegghen niet en conde,  
Hoe dicke verwandelde hare blye.

'Ay mi,' seitsi, 'aymie,  
Vercoren liefim, i es soo wee,

Sprect ieghe mi een wort oft twee,  
Dat mi therte conforteerit!

Ic ben, die troost ane u begheerit!

Der minnen strael steet mi int herte,  
Dat ic doghe grote smerte.

In mach nemmermeer verhooghen,  
Lief, ghi en hebbut uut ghetoghen!'  

Hi antworde mit sinne:  
'Ghi wet, wel lieve vriendinne,  
Dat wi langhe hebben ghedragen

Minne al onsen daghen.  
Wi en hadden nye soo vеle rusten,  
Dat wi ons eens ondercusten.

Vrouwe Venus, die godinne,  
Die dit brachte in onsen sinne,  
Moet God onse here verdoemen,

Dat si twee soo scone bloemen  
Doet vervaluen ende bederven.

Constic wel ane u verwerven,  
Ende ghi daibit wout nederleggen

Ende mi enen sekeren tiid seggen,
Hoe ic u ute mochte leiden,
Ic wolde riden ende ghereiden
Goede cler der vang van wullen
Ende die met bonten doen vullen:
Mantel, roc ende sercoot.
In begheve u te ghere noot.
Met u willic mi aventuren
Lief, leet, tsuete metten sueren.
Nemt te pande mijn trouwe.'
'Verconere vrient,' sprac die ionecfrouwe,
'Die willic gherne van u ontfaen
Ende met u soo verre gaen,
Dat niemen en sal weten in dit covent
Werwaert dat wi zijn bewent.
Van tavont over VIIJ. nachte
Comt ende nemt mijn wachte
Daer buiten inden vergier,
Onder enen egllentier.
Wacht daer mijn, ic come uut
Ende willen wes en uwe bruut,
Te varen daer ghi begheert;
En si dat mi sieheit deert
Ocht saken, die mi zijn te swaer,
Ic come sekerlike daer,
Ende ic begheert van u sere,
Dat ghi daer comt, lieve ionchere.'

Dit gheloufde en alderen.
Hi nam orlof ende ghine wanderen
Daer zijn rosside ghesadelt stoet.
Hi satter op metter showet
Ende reet wech sinen telt
Ter stat wert, over een velt.
Sijns lieves hi niet en vergat.

when it would be safe to lead you out of here, then I would ride off and obtain fine woollen clothes and have them lined with fur, cloak and gown and jacket. I would not desert you in any need: I will risk with you whatever may be our lot, joy or sorrow, sweet or sour; and receive my promise as a gage.'
'My dearest love,' the virgin said, 'I am glad to accept your promise, and I shall go away with you so far that no one in this convent shall know what has become of us. Tomorrow week, at night, come here and wait for me outside in the orchard under the eglantine. Wait for me there; I shall escape and I will be your bride, to travel with you wherever you like. Unless sickness prevents me, or circumstances too strong for me, I shall certainly come, and I beg you to be there also, my dear lord.'

So either believed the other's promise, and he took his leave and went off to where his steed stood saddled. He mounted it in speed and galloped off across the land towards the town. He did not forget what he had promised his love,
but he went each day into the town, and he bought blue and
scarlet cloth, from which he had a cloak made with a hood,
a gown and a jacket, and he had them well lined. No one ever saw
finer furs among well-dressed women, and everyone who saw
the clothes admired them. He bought for her at great expense a
girdle, with scissors and a purse, caps, gold rings and many
kinds of ornaments, and he provided all the finery which any
bride could need. He took with him five hundred pounds,
and one night secretly left the town, carrying all the finery with him,
well packed on his horse, and he rode out to the convent, and
there where she had said, in the orchard under an eglantine, he
sat down on the grass, waiting for his love to come out. Now
let me leave him, and continue my story about the lovely young
woman. At midnight she rang for matins. Love gave her great
sorrow, and when matins had been sung by both the old nuns
and the young who were then in the convent, and they had all gone
back together to the dormitory.
Bleef si inden coor allene
Ende si sprac haer ghebede,
Alsi te voren dicke dede.
Si knielde voorden outaer
Ende sprac met groten vaer:
'Maria, moeder, soote name,
Nu en mach minen lichame
Niet langher in dabijt gheduren.
Ghi kint wel in allen uren
Smenschen herte ende sijn wesen;
Ic hebbe ghavast ende gheseen
Ende ghemonen discipline,
Hets al om niet dat ic pine;
Minne worpt mi onder voet,
Dat ic der werelt dienen moet.
Alsoo waerlike als ghi, here lieve,
Wort ghehanghen tusschen .ij. dieve
Ende aent cruce wort gherecket,
Ende ghi Lazaruse verwecket,
Daer hi lach inden grave doot,
Soe moetti kinnen minen noot
Ende mine mesdaet mi vergheven;
Ic moet in swaren sonden sneven.'
Na desen ghinc si uten core
Teenen beelde, daer si vore
Knielde ende sprac hare ghebede,
Daer Maria stont ter stede.
Si riep: 'Maria!' onversaghet,
'Ic hebbe u nach ende dach geclaghert
Ontfemelike mijn vernoy
Ende mi en es niet te bat een hoy.
Ic werde mijns sins te male quijt,
Blivic langher in dit abjyt!'
Die covel tooch si ute al daer
she remained alone in the choir, saying her prayers as she had often done before. She knelt in front of the altar, and said with great anguish: 'Mary, mother, sweet name, my body can no longer endure in this habit. You know well at all times what is in man's heart and what his life is. I have fasted and prayed and scourged myself, but I have tormented myself for nothing; love has conquered me, and I must serve the world. As truly as You, my dear Lord, were stretched and hanged upon the cross between two thieves, as truly as You called Lazarus when he lay dead in his grave, so may You know my need and forgive me my trespass, for I must fall into mortal sin.' And with this she went out of the choir to where the image of Mary stood, and she knelt before it and prayed. Without fear she called out: 'Mary, I have lamented day and night to you, asking for pity in my distress, and I am not a scrap better off for it. I shall go altogether out of my mind if I stay any longer in this habit.' Then she took off all her habit
Ende leidse op onser vrouwen outaer.
Doen deede si ute hare scoen.
Nu hoort, wat si sal doen!
Die slotele vander sacristtiën
Hinc si voor dat beelde Mariën;
Ende ic segt u over waar,
Waar omme dat sise hinc al daer:
Ofmense te priemtide sochte,
Dat mense best daer vinden mochte.
Hets wel recht in alder tijt,
Wie vore Mariën beelde lijt,
Dat hi sijn oghen derwaert sla
Ende segge ‘ave’, eer hi ga,
‘Ave Maria’: daer omme si ghedinct,
Waar omme dat si die slotel daer hinc.

Nu ghinc si danen dorden noot
Met enen pels al bloot,
Daer si een dore wiste,
Die si ontsloot met liste,
Ende ghincker heyumelijc uut,
Stillekine sonder gheluut.
Inden vergier quam si met vare.
Di iongelinc wart haers gheware;
Hi seide: ‘lief, en verveert u niet,
Hets u vrient dat ghi hier siet.’
Doen si beide te samen quamen,
Si begonste hare te scamen,
Om dat si in enen pels stoet,
Bloots hooft ende barvoet.
Doen seidi: ‘wel scone lichame,
U soo waren bat bequame
Scone ghewaden ende goede cleder
Hebter mi om niet te leder,

and laid it upon our Lady’s altar, and she took off her shoes. Now listen to what she did next: her sacristan’s key she hung in front of Mary’s image, and I will tell you why she hung it there. It was so that it would most easily be found when they looked for her at prime, for it is an ancient custom that whoever passes in front of Mary’s image should lift up his eyes to it and say an Ave, Maria before he goes, and that was why she thought of hanging the key there.

Then there was nothing else for her but to go, dressed only in her shift, to where she knew there was a door which she had the trick of opening, and so she stole out without making a sound and came timidly into the orchard. The young man saw her, and said: ‘Dear, do not be frightened; it is me, your love, whom you can see.’ As they met, she was filled with shame to be standing there in her shift, bareheaded and barefooted; and then he said, ‘Your lovely body deserves fine dresses and good clothing; and do not be angry with me on this account,
for I shall give you beautiful thing.’ So they went under the
eglantine, and everything which she needed, he gave her in
great plenty. He gave her two gowns, and it was the blue one
which she put on then, well and fittingly made. He looked
lovingly at her and said, ‘Dear, sky-blue suits you better than
grey.’ She put on a pair of stockings, and a pair of fine
shoes, which suited her better than her sandals. Then he gave her
veils of white silk, with which she covered her head. Then the young
man lovingly kissed her lips, and it seemed to him as she stood
there before him that the day was breaking. Quickly he went
to his horse, and set her in front of him in the saddle, and so they
both rode so far that as it began to dawn they saw that no one
was following them. When the east began to grow light, she
said: ‘God, comfort of the whole world, guard us now. I see
the day dawning, and had I not run away with you, I should
have rung the bell for prime as I used to in our convent.
I think that I shall repent this journey, for there is little faith
in the world, to which I have now confided myself: it is like
those dishonest traders who sell rings made of base metal for
gold.’
‘Ah, what are you saying, my lovely one? If ever I were to betray you, so may God destroy me! Wherever we may go, I shall not leave you under any circumstances, unless cruel death part us. How can you doubt me? You have never found me cruel or false to you, and since I first chose you, I would not have set my mind upon an empress, had I been worthy of her, nor would I have left you for her, my dear one. Of this you may be sure. I have taken care to bring with us five hundred pounds in pure silver, and of this you shall be the mistress, dear one. Even though we travel abroad, we shall not need to sell anything for the next seven years.’

So, as they galloped on, they came during the morning to a forest in which the birds were rejoicing. They made such a tumult that one could hear it everywhere, as each one sang according to its kind.
Daer stonden sone bloemkine
Op dat groene velt ontploken,
Die sone waren ende suete roken.
Die locht was claer ende sone.
Daer stonden vele rechte bome,
Die ghelover waren rike.
Die longhelinc sach op die suverlike,
Daer li ghestade minne toe droech.
Hi seide: 'lief, waert u ghevoech,
Wi souden bietten ende bloemen lesen,
Het dunc mi hier sone wesene.
Laet ons spelen der minnen spel.'
‘Wat segi’ sprac si, ‘dorper fel,
Soudic bieken op tfeel,
Ghelyc enen wive die wint ghelt
Dorperlijc met haren lichame,
Seker, soo haddicleine scame!
Dit en waert u niet ghiesiet,
Waerd van dorpers eerde niet!
Ie mach mi bedienken onsochte.
Godsat hebdi dien sochte!
Swighet meer deser talen
Ende hoort die voghele inden dalen,
Hoe si sighen ende hem vervroyen.
Die tijt sal u te min vernoyen,
Alsic bi u ben al naeet
Op een bedde wel ghemaect,
Soo doet al dat u ghanoecht
Ende dat uwer herten voecht.
Ic hebs in myn herte toren,
Dat ghij mi heden leit te voreen.'

Hi seide: ‘lief en belghet u niet.
Het dede Venus, diet mi riet.

Lovely flowers stood everywhere, blossoming upon the green field, beautiful to see and sweet to smell. The air was clear and bright, and many tall trees, richly leaved, stood there. The young man looked upon the beautiful young woman for whom he felt a constant love, and he said: ‘Beloved, if it would please you to dismount and gather some flowers, this seems to me to be a good place; and here let us play the game of love.’ She said, ‘Why are you talking like a crude village lout? Do you expect me to dismount here, in the fields, like a peasant woman who earns money with her body? Indeed, I should have little modesty to do that. Such a thing would never have occurred to you if you were not yourself a peasant by nature. I may well repent what I have done. God’s curse on you who wished for such a thing. Speak no more of such matters, and listen to how the birds in this valley sing and rejoice, and so the time will pass pleasantly for you. When I lie naked beside you in a well-made bed, then do everything that you please and which your heart longs for. But it is a grief in my heart that you have suggested this to me.’

He said: ‘Beloved, do not be angry. It was Venus who prompted me to this.'
God geve mi scande ende plaghe,
Ochti[e]s u emmermeer ghewaghe.’
Si seide: ‘ic verghefte u dan,
Ghi sijt mijn troost voor alle man
Die leven onder den trone.
Al levede Absolon die scone
Ende ic des wel seker ware
Met hem te levne .M. iare
In weelden ende in rusten,
Ic liets mi niet ghecusten.
Lief, ic hebbe u soo vercoren,
Men mocht mi dat niet leggen voren,
Dat ic u wes soude vergheten.
Waric in hemelrike ghesetenen
Ende ghi hier in ertriken,
Ic quamte tot u sekerlike!
Ay God, latet ongewroken
Dat ic dullijc hebbe ghesproken!
Die minste bliscap in hemelrike
En es hier ghere vrounden ghelike;
Daer es die minste soo volmaect,
Datter zielen niet en smaeect
Dan Gode te minnen sonder inde.
Al erdsche dinc es ellinde,
Si en dooghet niet een haer
Jeghen die minste die es daer.
Diere om pinen die sijn vroot,
Al eest dat ic dolen moet
Ende mi te groten sonder keren
Dore u, lieve scone ioniherence.’

Dus hadden si tale ende wedertale.
Si reden berch ende dałe.
In can u nicht ghesegghen wel

May God send me dreadful punishment if ever I dare to do such a thing again.’ She said: ‘Then I forgive you, for you are my comfort, above every man living under heaven. Even if the beautiful Absolom were alive, and I were sure of living with him for a thousand years, that would not compensate me for you. My dear one, I have loved you so dearly that no one could persuade me that I might ever forget you. Even if I were established in heaven, if you were here upon earth I should come to you without fail. Oh God, do not punish me for the folly I have spoken: there is no joy here to compare with the least of heaven’s joys. The least joy there is so perfect that the soul asks for nothing than to love God everlasting. Every earthly joy is exile, and not worth a straw compared with heaven’s least joy, and those who long for such joys are wise. Yet I am forced to go astray and to choose a life of great sin for love of you, dear and lovely lord.’

So they rode over mountains and through valleys, conversing with one another, and I cannot well tell you
Wat tusschen hen tween ghevel.
Si voren also voort,
Tes si quamen in een poort,
Die scone stont in enen dale.
Daer soo bequaemt hem wale,
Dat siere bleven der iaren seven
Ende waren in verweenden leven
Met gheneechten van lichamen,
Ende wonnen .ij. kinder tsamen.
Daer, na den seven iaren,
Alse die penninghen verteert waren,
Moesten si teren vanden pande,
Die si brachten uten lande.
Cleder, sooneheit ende paerde
Vercocchten si te halver warde
Ende brochtent al over saen.
Doen en wisten si wat bestaen;
Si en conste ghenen roc spinemn,
Daer si met mochte winnen.
Die tijt wart inden lande diere
Van spisen, van wine ende ban viere
Ende van al datmen eten mochte.
Dies hem wart te moede onsochte;
Si waren hem liever vele doet,
Dan si hadden ghebeden broot.
Die aermoede maecte een ghescceet
Tusschen hem beiden, al waest hem leet.
Aenden man ghebrac dierste trouwe;
Hi lietse daer in groten rouwe
Ende voer te sinen lande weder.
Si en sachen met oghen nye zeder.
Daer bleven met hare ghinder
Twee uler maten scone kinder.
Si sprac: 'hets mi comen toe,
Dat ic duchte spade ende vroe;
Ic ben in vele doghens bleven.
Die ghene heeft mi begheven,
Daer ic mi trouwen to vertiet.
Maria, vrouwe, oft ghi ghebriet,
Bidt vore mi ende mine ij. ionghere.
Dat wi niet en sterven van hongere.
Wat salic doen, elendeich wijf!
Ic moet beide, ziele ende lijf,
Bevelken met sondeghen dagen.
Maria, vrouwe, staet mi in staden!
Al constic enen roe spinnen,
In mochter niet met winnen
In twee weken een broot.
Ic moeite gaen dorden noot
Buten der stat op tfelt
Ende winnen met minen lichame ghelt,
Daer ic met mach copen spise.
In mach in ghere wise
Mijn kinder niet begheven.'
Dus ghinc si in een sondech leven.
Want men seit ons overwaer,
Dat si langhe seve iaer
Ghemene wijf ter werelt ghinc
Ende meneghe sonde ontsine,
Dat haer was wel onbequame,
Die si dede metten lichame,
Daer si cleene gheneuchte hadde in;
Al dede sijt om een cranc ghewin,
Daersi haer kinder met onthelt.
Wat holpt al vertelt
Die scamelike sonden ende die zwaer,
Daer si in was .XIII. iaer!

Then she said: 'Now what I feared, late and early, has come upon me. Here I am in great suffering, and he whom I put my trust in has deserted me. Mary, Lady, if it be your will, pray for me and my two children, that we do not die of hunger. What should I do, miserable woman? I have made my immortal soul and my days on earth foul with my sinful deeds. Mary, Lady, be my help! Even if I did know how to spin, I could not earn enough in two weeks to buy one loaf. Necessity forces me to go out of the town to the fields, and sell my body for money so that I can buy food. Under no circumstances can I abandon my children.' So she embarked upon a sinful life, and they tell us that for the next seven years she lived as a common whore, and committed many sins. What she did with her body was a misery to her in which she took no pleasure. She only did it so as to scrape a bare living and to keep her children. What would be the profit of enumerating the great and horrible sins in which she lived for fourteen years?
Maer emmer en lietsi achter niet,
Hadsi rouwe oft verdriet,
Sine las alle daghe met trouwen
Die seven ghetiden van onser vrouwen.
Die las si haer te loven ende teren,
Dat sise moeste bekeren
Uten sondeliken daeden,
Daer si was met beladen
Bi ghetale .XIII. iar;
Dat segghic u over waer.
Si was seven iaeer metten man,
Die .ij. kindere an hare wan,
Diese liet in ellinde,
Daer si doghede groot meswinde.
Dierste .VIJ. iaeer hebdi gehoert;
Verstaet hoe si levede voort.

Als die 'XIII. iaeer waren gedaen,
Sinde haer God int herte saen
Berouwennesse alsoo groot,
Dat si met euen swerde al bloot
Liever liete haer hoot af slaen,
Dan si meer sonden hadde ghecaen
Met haren lichame, alsi plach
Si weende nacht eede dach,
Dat haer oghen seldon droghede.
Si seids: 'Maria, die Gode soghede,
Fonteyne boven alle wiven,
Laet mi inder noet niet bliven!
Vrouwe, ic neme u torconden,
Dat mi rouwen mine sonden
Ende ssjn mi herde leet.
Der es soo vele, dat ic en weet
Waer icse dede ocht met wien.

But always, however great her miseries might be, she never forgot to read each day with devotion the seven hours of our Lady, which she read to Mary's praise and honour, asking her to turn her away from the sinful deeds with which she had been oppressed for a full fourteen years. What I have told you is true: she lived seven years with the man who begot two children by her, and who left her in destitution through which she suffered great distress. You have been told of the first seven years, and you know how she lived after that.

When the fourteen years were over, God suddenly sent into her heart such great contrition that she would rather have suffered her head to be cut off with a naked sword than go on committing carnal sins as she had done. She wept night and day, so that her eyes were seldom dry. She said: 'Mary, who suckled God, you pure spring, beyond all women, let me not remain in need! Lady, I call you to witness my contrition for my sins and the sorrows of my heart. My sins are so many that I do not know where I committed them or with whom.
Ay lacen! wat sal mijns ghescien!
Ic mach wel ieghen dordeel sorgen —
Doghen Gods zijn mi verborgen —,
Daer sonden selen blikken,
Beide van armen ende van riken,
Ende alle mesdaet sal sijn ghewroken,
Daer en si vore biechte af ghesproken
Ende penitencie ghedaen.
Dat wetec wel, sonder waen.
Des benic in groten vare.
Al droghic alle daghe een hare,
Ende crooper met van lande te lande
Over voete ende over hande
Wullen, barvoet, sonder scoen,
Nochtan en constic niet ghedoen,
Dat ic van sonden worde vri,
Maria, vrouwe, ghi en troost mi,
Fonteyne boven alle doghet!
Ghi hebt den meneghen verhoghet,
Also wel Teophiluse seenen;
Hi was der quæsteter snderen een
Ende haddem den duvel op ghegeven,
Beide ziele ende leven,
Ende was worden sijn man;
Vrouwe, ghi verloosseten nochtan.
Al benic een besondech wijf
Ende een onghetroost keytijf,
In wat leven ic noy[s] was,
Vrouwe, ghedinct dat ic las
Tuwer eren een ghebede!
Toent aen mi u ootmoedechede!
Ic ben ene die es bedroevet
Ende uwer hulpen wel behoevet;
Dies maghic mi verbouden.

Alas, what is to become of me! I may well dread that Day of Judgment, for God's mercy is hidden from me, and all sins will then be shown, both of the poor and of the rich, and every misdeed will be avenged unless it has before been revealed at confession, and penance performed. I know very well that this is true, and I am in great fear on account of it. Though I were to wear a hair shirt every day, though I were to go crawling from country to country on my hands and knees, clad in coarse clothes and barefooted, still I could not do enough to free myself from my sins. Mary, Lady, be my consolation, you pure spring, beyond all virtue! You have brought gladness to many, as appeared indeed through Theophilus, who was one of the worst of sinners, and had surrendered himself soul and body to the devil and had become his servant; yet, Lady, you did not abandon him. Though I am a sinful woman and an abandoned wretch, whatever kind of life I lived, still remember, Lady, that I used to say a prayer in honour of you. Look on me in clemency. I am an afflicted one, in great need of your help. I may make bold to ask this:
En bleef hem nye onvergouden,
Die u gruete, maget vrië,
Alle daghe met ere ave marië.
Die u ghebet gheerne lesen,
Sie mooghen wel seker wesen,
Dat hem daer af sal comen vrame.
Vrouwe, hets u soo wel bequame,
Uut vercorne Gods bruut.
U sone sinde u een saluut
Te Nazaret, daer hi u sochte,
Die u ene bootschap brochte,
Die nye van bode was ghehoort;
Daer omme sijn u die selve woort
Soo bequame sonder wanc,
Dat ghijs wet elken danc,
Die u gheerne daer mede quet.
Al waer hi in sonden belet,
Ghi souten te ghenaden bringhen
Ende voor uwen soone verdinghen.'
Dese bedinghe ende dese elaghe
Dreie die sondersse alle daghe.
Si nam een kint in elke hant,
Ende ghincker met door tlan,
In armoede, van stede te steden,
Ende levede bider beden.
Soo langhe dolede si achter dlan,
Dat si den clooster weder want,
Daer si hadde gheweest nonne,
Ende quam daer savons na der sonne
In ere weuwen huus spade,
Daer si bat herberghe door ghenade,
Dat si daer snachts mochte bliven.
'Ich mocht u qualijc verdriven,'
Sprac die weuwe, 'met uwen kinderkinen.'

...
Mi dunct dat si moede scinen.
Ruust u ende sit neder.
Ie sal u deilen weder
Dat mi verleent onse here
Door siere liever moeder ere.’
Dus bleef si met haren kinden
Ende soude gheerne ondervinden,
Hoet inden clooster stoeide.
‘Segt mi,’ seitsi, ‘vrouwe goede,
Es dit covint van iofftrouwen?’
‘Jaet,’ seitsi, ‘bi miere trouwen.
Dat verweent es ende rike;
Men weet nieuwer sijns ghelike.
Die nonnen diere abij in draghen,
In hoore nye ghwaghen
Van hen gheen gherochtens
Dies si blame hebben mochten.’

Die daer bi haren kinderen sat,
Si seide: ‘waer bi segdi dat?
Ie hoerde binnen deser weken
Soo vele van ere nonnen spreken;
Alsic verstoet in minen sinne,
Soo was si hier costerinne.
Diet mi seide hine looch niet:
Hets binnen .XIIIJ. iaren ghesciet,
Dat si uten clooster streeck.
Men wiste noyt, waer si weec
Oft in wat lande si inde nam.’
Doen wert die weduwe gram
Ende seide: ‘ghi dunct mi reven!
Derre talen selde beheven
Te segghene vander costerinnen
Oft ghi en blijft hier niet binnen!

‘You seem to me to be tired. Sit down and rest. I will give you a share of what I have, and our Lord will repay me to the honour of His dear mother.’ So she stayed there with her children, and she dearly wanted to find out how things were in the monastery.
‘Tell me,’ she said, ‘good woman, is this a convent of virgins?’
‘Yes,’ she replied, ‘it is indeed, and a rich and splendid one. No one ever saw its like; and no one ever heard anyone dare to speak ill of the nuns who live there, so as to bring them into disrepute.’

The woman sitting there with her children said: ‘How can you say that? Only this week I heard such things said about a nun that I was astounded, and she was sacristan here. The person who told me was not lying. It is now fourteen years ago since she ran away from the monastery, and nobody knew where she fled to or in what country she ended.’ Then the widow became angry, and said: ‘I think you must be mad! Either you stop telling such stories about the sacristan, or you do not remain in this house!’
Si heeft hier costersse ghesijn
.XIII. iac den termijn,
Dat men haers noyt ghemessen conde
In alden tiden éne metten stonde,
Hen si dat si waer onghesont.
Hi ware erger dan een hont,
Diere af seide el dan goet;
Si draghet soo reynen moet,
Die eneghe nonne draghen mochte.
Die alle die cloosters dore sochte,
Die staen tusschen Elve ende der Geronde
Ic wane men niet vinden en conde
Nephene die gheesteliker leeft!'

Die alsoo langhe hadde ghesneef
Dese tale dochte haer wezen wonder,
Ende seide: 'vrouwe, maec mi conder.
Hoe hiet haer moeder ende vader?'
Doe noemesise beide gader.
Doen wiste si wel, dat si haer meende.
Ay God! hoe si naechs weende
Heymelieke voor haer bedde!
Si seide: 'ic en habbe ander wedde
Dan van herten groot berouwe.
Sijt in mijn hulpe, Maria, vrouwe!
Mijn sonden zijn mi soo leer,
Saghic enen hoven heet,
Die in groten gleyen stonde,
Dat die vlamme ginghe uten monde,
Ic croper in met vltc,
Mochtic mier sonden werden quite.
Here, ghi hebt wanhope verwaten,
Daet op willic mi verlaten!
Ic ben, die altoos ghenade hoop.
Al eest dat mi anxt noopt
Ende mi bringt in groten vare.
En was nye soo groten sondare,
Sint dat ghi op etterike quaemt
Ende menschlike vorme naemt
Ende ghi aen den cruce wout sterven,
Sone lieti den sondare niet bederven;
Die met berouwenesse socht gnade,
Hi vante, al quam hi spade,
Alst wel openbaer scheen
Den enen sondare vanden tweeën,
    Die tuwer rechter siden hinc.
Dats ons een troostelijke dinc,
Dat ghine ontfinckt onbescouden.
Goet berou mach als ghewouden;
Dat maghic merken an desen.
Ghi seict: 'vriet, du salt wezen
Met mi heden in mijn rike,
Dat segghic u ghewaerlike.'
Noch, here, waest openbare,
Dat Gisemast, die mordenare,
Ten lesten om ghenade bat.
Hi gaf u weder gout no scat,
Dan hem berouden sine sonden.
U ontfermecheit en es niet te gronden
Niet meer, dan men mach
Die zee uut sceppen op enen dach
Ende droghen al toen gronde.
Dus was nye soo grote sonde,
Vrouwe, u ghenaden en gaan boven.
Hoe soundic dan sijn verscoven
Van uwer ontfermecheit,
Ocht mi mijn sonden sijn soo leit!

even though I am dogged by fear and brought into great terror. There was never any sinner so great that You would abandon him to perdition, since You came upon earth and took human form and were willing to die upon the Cross. If such a sinner with repentance sought grace, he found it, however late he might seek for it, as it plainly was shown by that one of the two malefactors who hung at Your right hand. It is for us great consolation that You received him and forgave him. Perfect contrition is of great power, as I can see from this. You said: 'Friend, truly I say to you that you will be with Me today in My kingdom.' And it was plain, Lord, that Dismas, this murderer, asked for Your grace in the end. He offered You neither gold nor silver, only his repentance for his sins. We can no more measure Your mercy than we can in a single day shift and dry up the deep sea. Nor was there ever, Lady, sin so great that it exceeded your pity. How then should I be thrust out from your clemency, if my sins are so hateful to me?'
Daer si lach in dit ghebede,
Quam een vaec in al haer lede
Ende si wart in lape sochte.
In enen vysioen haer dochte,
Hoe een stemme aan haer riep,
Daer si lach ende slep:
'Mensche, du heves soo langhe gecarct,
Dat Maria dijns ontfermt,
Want si heeft u verbeden.
Gaet inden clooster met haestecheden:
Ghi vint die doren open wide,
Daer ghi uut ginges ten selven tide
Met uwen lieve, den ionghelinc,
Die u inder noot af ghinc.
Al dijn abijt vinstu weder
Ligghen open outer neder;
Wile, covele ende scoen
Mooghedi coenlije ane doen;
Des danct hooghelike Mariën:
Die slotele vander sacristiën,
Die ghi voor tbeelde hinct
Snachs, doen ghi uut ghinct,
Die heeft si soo doen bewaren,
Datmen binnen .XIIIJ. iaren
Uwes nye en ghemiste,
Soo dat yemen daer af wiste.
Maria es soo wel u vrient:
Si heeft altoos voor u gheditary
Min no meer na dijn ghelike.
Dat heeft de vrouw van hemelrike,
Sonderse, door u gheidaen!
Si heet u inden clooster gaaen.
Ghi en vint nyecman op u bedde.
Hets van Gode, dat ic u quedde!'
Soon after this she started up out of her sleep, and said: ‘God, almighty ruler, do not permit the devil to bring me into greater misery than I am in now. If I were to go back to the monastery now and they were to apprehend me as a thief, I should be in a worse state than when first I fled from the convent. I entreat you, my good God, by the Precious Blood which flowed from Your side, if the voice which called to me has come to me to help me, that You do not suffer it to be silent, but let it speak a second and a third time, clearly, so that I may go back to my monastery without fear; and in return I shall always bless and praise Mary.’

On the next night, you may hear, a voice sounded to her, calling for her and saying: ‘Woman, you are delaying too long! Go back to your monastery, and God will comfort you. Do as Mary commands you. I am her messenger; you need not doubt.’ So she understood once again the voice which spoke to her and commanded her to go into the monastery;
but still she did not dare to do it. She waited for the third night, and said: 'If it is the deceit of some evil spirit which manifests itself to me, then let me soon overcome the devil's power and cunning, and if he should appear again tonight, Lord, vanquish him so that he flee from the house, so that he cannot harm me. Mary, come to my help now: you who sent a voice to me, bidding me go to the monastery, I entreat you, Lady, by your Child that you send the voice to me a third time.'

Then on the third night she kept watch, and through the power of God a voice came, with a dazzling light, and said: 'For shame that you have not done as I commanded you, as Mary bade you through me. You may delay too long. Go back to the monastery without fear, and you will find the doors opened wide, so that you can go wherever you choose. You will find your habit still laid out on the altar.' When the voice had said this, the sinful woman, lying there, could clearly see the light; and she said: 'I no longer dare doubt that this voice comes from God and is the messenger of the Virgin Mary.
Dat wetic nu sonder hone.
Si comt met lichte soo sone:
Nu en willics niet laten,
Ic wille mi in den clooster maken,
Ic saet ooc doen in goeder trouwen
Opten troost van onser vrouwen,
Ende wille mijn kinder beide gader
Bevelen Gode onsen Vader.
Hi salve wel bewaren.’
Doen tooch si ute al sonder sparen
Haer cleder, daer sise met decete
Heymeli, dat sise niet en weete.
Si cussese beide aen haren mont.
Si seide: ‘kinder, blijft ghesont.
Op den troost van onser vrouwen
Latic u hier in goeder trouwen,
En hadde mi Maria niet verbeden,
Ic en hadde u niet begheven
Om al tgoet, dat Rome heeft binnen.’
Hoort, wes si sal beghinnen.

Nu gaet si met groten weene
Ten clooster waert, moeder eene.
Doen si quam inden vergiere,
Vant si die dore onsloten sciere.
Si ghincker in sonder wane:
‘Maria, hebbes danc,
Ic ben comen binnen mure;
God gheve mi goede aventure!’
Waer si quam, vant si die dore
Al wide open ieghen hore.
In die kerke si doe trac;
Heymeli, si doe sprac:
‘God here, ic bidde u met vlite,
Now I know that without any fear of deceit, because it comes accompanied by this lovely light. Now I shall no longer delay, but make my way to the monastery; and I shall do this in good faith, trusting to our Lady, and I shall commend my two children to God our Father, and He will take good care of them.’ Then she took off all her clothing, and quietly covered her children with it, so that they did not wake. She kissed them both on the lips, and she said: ‘Children, farewell. I leave you here in good faith, trusting in our Lady. Had Mary not ordered me to do this, I would not have forsaken you for all the wealth in Rome.’ Listen to what happened to her next.

This mother bereft of her children makes her way to the monastery weeping greatly, and when she entered the orchard she found the door wide open. She entered without fear, saying: ‘Mary, thanks be to you that I am inside the wall. God give me good speed!’ As she went on, she found all the doors wide open to greet her, and when she entered the church, she whispered: ‘Lord God, I greatly entreat You
Hulp mi weder im minen abite,
Dat ic over .XIII. iaeer
Liet ligghen op onser vrouwen outaer,
Snachs, doen ic danen sciet!
Dit en es ghelogh en niet,
Ic segt u sonder ghile:
Scone, covele ende wile
Vant si ter selver stede weder,
Daeer sijt hadde ghchele neder.
Si treact an haestelike
Ende seide: 'God van hemelrike
Ende Maria, maghet fijn,
Ghebenedijt moetti sijn!
Ghi sijt alre doghet bloeme!
In uwen reine magedoene
Droeghedi een kint sonder wee,
Dat here sal bliven emmerme; 
Ghi sijt een uut vercoren werde,
U kint maecte hemel ende erde.
Deze ghewelt comt u van Gode
Ende staet altoos tuwen ghebode.
Den here, die ons broeder
Moghedi ghebieden als moeder
Ende hi u heten lieve dochter.
Hier ommie levic vele te sochter.
Wie aen u soect ghenade,
Hi vintse, al comt hi spade.
U hulpe die es alte groot;
Al hebbic vernoy ende noot,
Hets bi u ghewandelt soo,
Dat ic nu mach wesen vroo.
Met rechte magtie u benedieen!
Die slotele vander sacristieen
Sach si hanghen, in ware dine,
Vor Mariën, daer sise hinc.
Die slotele hinc si an hare
Ende ghinc ten core, daersi clare
Lampen sach berren in allen hoeken.
Daer na ghinc si ten boeken
Ende leide elc op sine stde,
Alsi dicke te voren dede,
Ende si bat der maghet Mariën,
Dat sise van evele moeste vriën
Ende haer kinder, die si liet
Ter weduwen huus in zwaer verdriet.
Binnen dien was die nacht ghegaen,
Dat dorloy begonste te slaen,
Daer men middernacht bi kinde.
Si nam cloozel biden inde
Ende luude metten so wel te tiden,
Dat sitj hoorden in allen ziden.
Die boven opten dormter laghen,
Die quam[en] alle sonder traghen
Vanden dormter ghemene.
Sine wisten hier af groot no clene.
Si bleef inden clooster hare tijt,
Sonder lachter ende verwijt:
Maria hadde ghedient voor hare,
Ghelijc oft sitj selve ware.
Dus was die sonderse bekeert,
Maria te love, die men eert,
Der maghet van hemelriek,
Die altoos ghe trouwelike
Haren vrient staet in staden,
Alsi in node sijn verladen.

Dese ioffrouwe, daer ic af las,
Es nonne alsi te voren was.

before Mary’s image where she had hung it, and she went into the choir, where she saw bright lamps burning in every corner. Then she went for the books and laid each one in its place, as she often had done before, and she prayed the Virgin Mary that she might be made free of all evil, and her children also, whom she had left with a heavy heart at the widow’s house. In the meantime, the night had advanced, so that the clock began to strike, to announce to men that it was midnight, and she grasped the end of the bell-ropo and rang for office so well that they heard it everywhere, and those who were asleep upstairs in the dormitory all came down together without delay. No one, great or small, knew anything about this. So she was able to live her days in the monastery without scorn or reproach. Mary had served for her, just as if she were Beatrice herself; and in this way was this sinful woman converted, to the glory of Mary, to whom men pay honour, the Virgin of Heaven, who always faithfully comes to the aid of her friends when they are brought into distress.

So this young woman of whom I have been telling you became a nun again as she was before;
Nu en willie vergheten niet
Haer twee kindere, die si liet
Ter weduven huys in groeter noot.
Si en hadden gheht noch broot.
In can u niet vergronden,
Doen si haer moeder niet en vonden,
Wat groter rouwe dat si dreven.
Die weduwe ghincker sitten neven:
Si hadder op ontfermenisse.
Si seide: 'ic wille toter abdisse
Gaen met desen ij. kinden.
God sal hare int herte sinnen,
Dat si hen goet sal doen.'
Si deden aene clader ende scoen,
Si ghincker met in covent;
Si seide: 'vrouwe, nu bekent
Den noot van desen tween wesen:
Die moeder heefs met vrenen
Te nacht in mijn huus ghijelaten
Ende es ghegen hare straten,
Ic en weet, west noch oost.
Dus zijn die kinder onghetroost.
Ic hulpe hen gheerne, wistic hoc.'
De abdisse spraker toe:
'Houtse wel, ic saelt u lonen,
Dat ghij su niet en selt becronen,
Na dat si u sijn ghelaten.
Men gheve hen der caritaten
Els daghys, om Gode.
Sint hier daghelijes enen bode,
Die hen drincken hale ende eten.
Gheberst hen yet, laet mi weten.'
Die weduwe was vroo,
Dat haer comen was alsoo.

nor will I forget to tell you what happened to her two children, whom she left behind her in great need in the widow’s house, with neither money nor food. I cannot describe to you their sorrow when they could not find their mother. The widow went to sit beside them, and she was filled with pity for them, and she said: ‘I shall go to the abbess with these two children, and God will move her heart to be kind to them.’ She put on their clothes and shoes and went with them to the convent, and she said: ‘My lady, see now the destitution of these two poor creatures, terrified because their mother left them last night in my house. She has made off, I do not know whether to east or west, leaving the children desolate, and I should be glad to help them if I knew how.’ The abbess said to her: ‘Take good care of them and I shall reward you, so that you have no reason to regret that they have been left with you. Every day we shall give them our alms for the love of God. Send a messenger here daily to fetch food and drink for them, and if they need anything, let me know of it.’ The widow was glad that things had happened so,
Si nam die kinder met hare
Ende hadder toe goede ware.
Die moeder, diese hadde ghesoghet
Ende pine daerom ghedooghet,
Haer was wel te moede,
Doen sise wiste in goeder hoede,
Haer kinder, die si begaf
In groter noot ende ghine af.
Sine hadde vaer no hinder
Voort meer om hare kinder.
Si leide vort een heylech leven;
Menech suchten ende beven
Hadsi nacht ende dach,
Want haer die rouwe int herte lach
Van haren quaden sonden,
Di si niet en dorste vermonten
Ghenen mensche, no ontecken,
Noo in dichten ooc vertrecken.

Hier na quam op enen dach
Een abt, diese te visenterne plach
Eenwerven binnen den iarc,
Om te vernemen oft daer ware
Eenech lachterliche gherochte,
Daersi blame af hebben mochte[n].
Sdaghese als hire comen was,
Lach die sonderse ende las
Inden coor haer gehebet,
In groter twivelingen met.
Die duvel becorere metter scame,
Dat si haer sodelike blame
Vore den abt niet en soudie bringhen.
Als lach inder bedinghen,
Sach si, hoe dat neven haer leet

and she took the children away with her, and took good care of them. The mother who had suckled them and suffered great sorrow on their account was glad when she learned that they were being well looked after, these children of hers whom she had left in great need and abandoned. She had no further fear or anxieties about her children, and she led a holy life, often sobbing and trembling, both night and day, when her heart was visited by contrition for her wicked sins, which she did not dare to tell or reveal to anyone, or to put down in writing.

Then, upon a certain day, there came an abbot, who was accustomed to visit the monastery once a year, to inquire whether there were any reprehensible rumours for which they might be to blame. On the day of his arrival, this sinful woman was kneeling in the choir and saying her prayers in great doubt. The devil was tempting her not to reveal her sinful guilt to the abbot for fear of shame. As she knelt and pondered, she saw
a young man dressed in white advancing towards her, and on his arm he carried a naked child, which seemed to her to be dead. The young man threw an apple up in front of the child and caught it again to amuse it. The nun, kneeling at prayer, saw this clearly, and she said: ‘Friend, if it may be that you have come from God, I admonish you by your obedience to Him that you tell me without concealment why you are playing with that fine red apple in front of the child, when it is lying dead on your arm? There is nothing you can do for it by playing with it.’ ‘Certainly, nun, what you say is true. The child does not know anything about my play: it is dead, and can neither hear nor see. And in just the same way, God does not know about your prayers and fastings, and they do not help you in the least, and all your pains are wasted when you scourge yourself, for you are so overwhelmed by sin that God up in His realm does not hear your prayers. I counsel you to go quickly to the abbot, your spiritual father, and tell him the whole of your sins without any lies. Do not let the devil hoodwink you.
Vanden sonden, die u deren.
Eest, dat ghise niet wilt spreken,
God salse zwaerlike an u werken!
Die ionghelne ghinc ute haer oghen;
Hine wilde haer nemmeer vertogen.
Dat hi seide, heeft si verstaen.
Smorgens ghinc si alsoe saen
Ten abt ende bat, dat hi hoorde
Haer biechtte van worde te worde.
Die abt was vroet van sinne.
Hi seide: 'dochter, lieve minne,
Des en willie laten niet,
Bepeinst u wel ende besiet
Volcomelijc van uwen sonden.'
Ende si ghinc ten selven stonden
Den heyleghen abt sitten neven
Ende ontdecten hem al haer leven,
Ende haer vite van beghinne:
Hoe si met ere dulre minne
Becort was soo ute maten,
Dat si moeste liggheen laten
Haer abij met groten vare
Eens snachts op onser vrouwen outare,
Ende rumede den clooster met enen man,
Die twee kindere aen hare wan.
Al dat haer ye was ghesciet,
Dies ne liet si achter niet;
Wat si wiste in haer herte gront,
Maecte si den abt al cont.
Doen si ghebiecht hadde algader,
Sprac dabt, die heyleghhe vader:
'Dochter, ic sal u absolveren
Vanden sonden, die u deren,
Die ghi ji nu hebt ghelijt.

If you do not wish to speak now, God will take a heavy vengeance on you.’ The young man vanished from her sight, nor did he ever appear to her again, but she understood what he had said, and first thing in the morning she went to the abbot and begged him to hear her out while she made her confession. The abbot was a prudent man; and he said: ‘My dear daughter, let me hear you without delay. Reflect well and consider what have been all your sins.’ And straightway she went to sit near the holy abbot, and she told him her whole life and story from the beginning: how the madness of love tempted her so excessively that one night, in great fear, she had abandoned her habit upon the altar of our Lady, and had fled from the monastery with a man, who had begotten two children upon her. She did not conceal anything which had ever happened to her, and she told the abbot everything which was in the depths of her heart. When she had made a full confession, this holy old man the abbot said: ‘Daughter, I shall absolve you from the sins which have been afflicting you and which you have revealed to me.
Gheloof ende ghebenedijt
Moet die moeder Gods wesen;
Hi leide haer op tooft met desen
Die hant ende gaf haar perdoen.
Hi seide: 'ic sal in een sermoen
U biechte openbare seggen
Ende die soo wisselke beleggen,
Dat ghi ende u kinder mede
Nemmermeer, te ghere stede,
Ghenen lachet en selt ghecrigen.
Het ware onrecht, soudement swigen,
Die scone miracle, die ons here
Dede door siere moeder ere.
Ic salt orconden over al.
Ic hope, datter noch bi sal
Menech sondare bekeren
Ende onser liever vrouwen cren.

Hi deet verstaen den covende,
Eer hi thuus weder wende,
Hoe ere nonnen was ghesciet;
Maer sine wisten niet,
Wie sie was, het bleef verholen.
Die abt voer Gode volen,
Der nonnen kinder nam hi beide
Ende vorese in syn ghelide.
Grau abijt dedi hen an
Ende si worden twee goede man.
Haer moeder hiet Beatrijs.
Loof God ende prijs
Ende Maria, die Gode soghede,
Ende dese scone miracle toghede!
Si halp haer uut alre noot.
Nu bidden wi alle, aleine ende groot,
Praised and blessed be the Mother of God!’ With these words he laid his hand upon her head and gave her absolution; and he said: ‘I shall preach a sermon and reveal what you have told me in confession, but I shall disguise it so skilfully that neither you nor your children will ever suffer scorn. It would not be right to conceal in silence this fair miracle which our Lord has performed to the honour of His mother. I shall make it known everywhere, and I hope that it will serve to convert many sinners and to promote the honour of our blessed Lady.’

He made known to the convent before he returned home what had happened to one of their nuns, but none of them knew who she was, for that remained a secret. The abbot did as God commanded him, and took both the children of the nun into his protection. He clothed them both in the grey habit, and they became two good men. Their mother was called Beatrice. Praise and honour be to God, and to Mary, who suckled God and achieved this lovely miracle! She helped Beatrice in all her need, and now let us all, small and great,
Die dese miracle horen lesen,
Dat Maria moet wezen
Ons vorsprake int soete dal,
Daer God die werelt doemen sal.

Amen.

who listen to this miracle, pray that Mary be our intercessor in
that fertile valley where God shall judge the world. Amen
This volume of the *Bibliotheca Neerlandica* makes available to the English-speaking reader some of the classics of mediaeval Low Country religious and devotional literature. In clear and up-to-date translations, such writers as Hadewijch of Antwerp, Beatrice of Nazareth and John Ruysbroek are collected together for the reader’s new, or renewed, acquaintance. Also included are the texts of the charming sixteenth-century morality play, *Mary of Nijmegen*, and of *Beatrice*, the pious legend upon which, in the 1920s, Max Reinhardt based this internationally famous spectacle, *The Miracle*.

Altogether, *Mediaeval Netherlands Religious Literature* provides a compendium of some of the most important and culturally influential texts of the Middle Ages.
MEDIAEVAL
NETHERLANDS
RELIGIOUS
LITERATURE

Translated and Introduced
by
E. COLLEDGE

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INTRODUCTION

It could be said that it is pleonastic to call any medieval European literature 'religious', because there is none which does not in some way reflect the all-pervading teachings of the Christian faith. The great Jesuit historian Thurston made this point with admirable succinctness, writing of a strange pseudo-Christ whose antics are recorded in English chronicles of the early thirteenth century, when he designates them as '...some sort of contortionist's or mountebank's trick which took a religious colour chiefly because the ideas and interests of that age centred round religious themes'. Though it may seem to superficial observers that there is no justification, other than that of mere chronology, for including in the same volume the Letters of Hadewijch and Mary of Nijmegen, the times in which these two authors wrote did impose upon their work a unifying quality, since both were written in the knowledge that they could appeal to a profound and general assent to the truths of the Christian faith.

The origins of medieval Dutch literature are obscure and for the most part lost, but it is manifest from the earliest verse which has been preserved, such as the Enclide of the Limburg poet of courtly romance, Henry van Veldeke, most of which was completed before 1174, that French poetry of chivalry and romance had made an early and deep impression in the Netherlands; and from the earliest surviving prose, notably Beatrix of Nazareth's Seven Manners of Loving, it is clear that such mastery of prose as they display can only be explained by presupposing an intensive education, of women as well as men, in the Latin Scriptures and classics of the spiritual life, and an already flourishing tradition of lucid and flowing composition in the vernacular.

Beatrice and Hadewijch are the outstanding figures in the history of the evolution in the Netherlands of the Frauenbewegung, that great and victorious revolt of pious women, everywhere in Europe, against the reactionary traditions which would have condemned them in the cloisters as well as in the world to a role of subordination and silence, which would have withheld from them the benefits of literacy.
and learning, which would have denied to them any active part in the
great spiritual revivals and innovations which today we associate
chiefly with the names of St Dominic and St Francis, but to which
others, notably St Bernard, contributed as much. This ‘women’s mo-
vement’ has been faithfully and brilliantly chronicled in recent years
for the Rhineland and Germany by Herbert Grundmann; and in his
fundamental work on the origins and the spread of the Beguines in the
Low Countries, Alcantara Mens has depicted how there, as nowhere
else in Europe, the newly-emancipated women religious were able to
evolve a way of life hitherto unknown in the West, free from monastic
enclosure, observing rules which they themselves devised to meet the
needs of individual communities, following lives of intense activity
which might be devoted to prayer, to teaching and study, to charitable
works, or to all three.

Beatrice of Nazareth, in Seven Manners, tells us nothing of her-
self. For such information we have to go to a very few sources, notably
Chrysostom Henriquez’s Quinque Prudentes Virgines; and there
we learn that she must have been born very soon after 1200, and that
at the age of eleven she was sent to a house of Beguines at Zoutleeuw.
The chronicle suggests that her family sent her there in the first place
for education; but she was to live the rest of her life (she died in 1268)
in such religious communities; and it is plain that she was enabled to
cultivate to the full her great literary gifts. Judged solely on its artistic
merits, Seven Manners is a great achievement, and her mellifluous
fluency must surely have served in the next century as one of the
models for the great Ruybroek. She has been strongly influenced, as
he too was to be, by St Bernard, the Victorines of Paris and by William
of St-Thierry; and already she shows preoccupation with those teachings
and ideas which we associate with Ruybroek, with Tauler and with
Eckhart: that searching of the soul for God which will lead it towards
a union with Him so close ‘that the soul no longer can perceive dif-
cerence between itself and God’, a union in which it will experience
annihilation, a union from which it will return to find the earth a de-
sert and human existence a torment.

Though it is probable that Beatrice knew nothing of the Low Ger-
man writings of her near-contemporary Mechthild of Magdeburg, their
thought and their language are sometimes startlingly close. ‘And like
the fish, swimming in the vast sea and resting in its deeps, and like the
bird, boldly mounting high in the sky, so the soul feels its spirit freely
moving through the vastness and the depth and the inutterable riches-
ties of love’. . . so Beatrice writes, inspired no doubt by St Paul; and
in one of her prose poems Mechthild says that just as the fish must seek
its natural home, the sea, and the bird find its freedom in the sky, so
too must her soul find God.

To modern readers, not accustomed or sympathetic to the forms of
medieval spirituality, there will no doubt be much in Beatrice which is
distasteful if not repellant. Nourished as so many of us have been on
the popular conception that religion should express itself in practical
works, we may ask: ‘What good did she do?’ The next Netherlands
writer to appear in this anthology, Hadewijch, is obviously conscious
that such criticism could be levied at such Beguines as Beatrice and
herself; yet the answers which she provides will hardly be more satis-
factory to the modern sceptic. Though she will often betray impatience
with the religiosity of religious, as in Letter IV, and though she is
convinced of the essentially apostolic and evangelical character of the
contemplative vocation, as, of course, her own work witnesses, all of
the Letters being in the form of instructions to a young Beguine, she
is firm that the proper work of the contemplative is prayer and con-
templation and nothing else. She and those like her have a duty to
the world and especially to fallen sinners, but that duty consists only
in intercession. To do more than that is what she calls ‘needless in-
volveinen’, and such work, she is very positive, is not for them:
though what she does not say here but seems to imply is that there are
others, notably priests, whose proper work the pastoral care of the
fallen is, and who can do it better.

The soul’s true work, for Hadewijch, is deification, striving for
union with God; and she too resembles Mechthild of Magdeburg, in
that she tells us more of the sorrows and torments of the soul in this
strife than of its joys and consolations. Doubtless she knew the famous passage in Hugh of St Victor, destined to be quoted and borrowed by countless spiritual writers, about 'the play of love', the ceaseless alternation of delight and pain for those who seek for God.

She uses the same metaphor when she writes, at the end of Letter I: 'In the beginning my sorrows were great enough, and I longed greatly for what I could not reach; but now it is as if someone were making sport of me, offering me something, and then, as I stretch out my hand, knocking it away and saying, 'Wouldn't you like it?' and taking back again.' And in this same first letter she is playing on the concept of the love between God and the soul not as rest and peace and fulfilment, but contention and opposition and warfare as she says: 'God has been more angry with me than ever any devil was.' This may shock us, and doubtless it shocked those of her sisters who, she makes clear, opposed her teaching and her way of life, 'our false brethren pretend that they dwell with us in the one house of the Faith', but we need not be scandalized if we will understand how profoundly her thought has been influenced, and how her language reflects the philosophy and the literary forms of courtly love, of Minne.

Mention has already been made of Henry of Veldeke, and recently Theodor Weevers has reminded us in his admirable account of the beginnings of medieval Dutch poetry that Henry was highly praised by the German poets whom we regard as the masters of the craft of singing the songs of courtly love, Wolfram of Eschenbach and Gottfried of Strasburg among them, who called him their master and themselves his humble scholars. And in such spiritual writers as Hadewijch we have further testimony that before the fourteenth century, when there appeared that strong reaction in the Netherlands, notably expressed by Jacob of Maerlant, against the poetry of courtly love as blasphemous Venus-worship with which no god-fearing man should have to do, the analogies between the Christian's love of God and the humble, patient, unrewarded, penitential service, which Minne demanded of those whom she has enslaved, had been perceived and assimilated so completely that no discord or paradox was seen.

To say this is, of course, to beg many questions. No one has yet fully explored this field, to show us how much the concepts of courtly love, once they had found their way into the Mediterranean lands from the philosophers and poets of medieval Islam, became enriched and fertilized by Christian ideas and Christian devotion. We must be less prepared today than was, for example, Gilson a generation ago to assert that all the borrowing was by devout Christians from the neo-Ovidians who exploited these new jangled pagan notions as an act of rebellion against the Church's thinking and authority. None the less, in such a case as Hadewijch it is sufficiently evident that the analogy is something of this nature: I am bound to the service of the love of God just as any earthly knight knowingly and willingly enslaves himself to the service of that ideal love which is embodied in his lady. She will reward him or prolong his servitude and sufferings, as seems good to her, and he must always be her faithful servant, to death, in sorrow as in joy, as so must I with God. It is only the base peasant who thinks that the longings of love merit a prompt satisfaction; and if I demand from God happiness and consolation as the return here on earth for my service in His love, I too should be base, peasant-like, a villain knowing nothing of fine amour. So Hadewijch says, in Letter VIII, of those lovers of God who are filled with fear: 'They long to suffer for Love, and so they learn all the fine usages of Love, for fear lest their words should be too churlish to reach the ears of Love.'

Yet none of this is for her mere empty fashionable talk. In the first place her whole system of a Christianized Minne is based on an accurate knowledge of human psychology, so that she can nonchalantly observe, for example: 'It is a sign of love that the beloved's name is sweet.' And she displays the practicality of her erudition when she at once links this with St Bernard's teaching on devotion to the Holy Name; and always she exhibits a down-to-earth sense in her approach to the idea that God is loved as Minne is served in courts and palaces: 'We all want to be God along with God; but God knows that there are few of us who want to be man with Him in His humanity, to carry
His Cross with Him, to hang upon it with Him, to pay with Him the debt of human kind.'

It is needless here to multiply examples of Hadewijch's justness of touch, of that shrewdness and good feeling which holds her back from the excesses of Brauttheologie, from those analogies between divine and human love which less balanced readers and followers of St Bernard were so to exploit. Each one of the twenty (about half of the total) of her Letters here translated will reveal some different facet of her personality; and perhaps the most difficult and yet the finest of them all will be thought to be her Letter XVII, the careful, patient exposition of her mysterious and intricate poem, 'Seek after every virtue with a gracious zeal.' When, at the end of this letter, she tells us that in a moment of illumination she 'understood God's being... Still I can find no language for what I have said,' is she telling us that this revelation came to her, not as a vision seen with spiritual eyes, but as a poem heard with spiritual ears, which she has kept in her memory and come little by little to know the true meaning of? To many readers, no doubt, resemblances will suggest themselves between this strange document and, on the one hand, Julian of Norwich's Revelations, on the other hand Rilke's Duino Elegies.

With Ruysbroek's Book of the Sparkling Stone we come to the second generation, as it were, of the Dutch mystical writers. The fervours of the thirteenth century, and the great numbers of female ecstatics, had produced much piety and devotion, but we cannot doubt that it also helped to encourage the many heretics who lived and taught in the Netherlands, of whom we remember chiefly the Brethren of the Free Spirit and their mysterious leader, the Brussels prophetess 'Bloemardine'. (There was at one time a theory, first put out in the fifteenth century by Pomerius, that 'Bloemardine' was a pseudonym of Hadewijch, but this was rank injustice to one of the very greatest of medieval European spiritual writers, who could only permit herself her extravagances of language and thought because she was fortified in her unimpeachable orthodoxy; and no one today would seriously advance this theory.) We know little of Bloemardine and her writings, except by implication: Ruysbroek, already a middle-aged man who had served Ste Guhde in Brussels for many years of holy obscurity, first entered public life when he undertook a great and, it would seem, successful preaching campaign against her; and when, soon after, he retired to the 'desert' of Groendael where in 1351 he took religious vows and founded a house of Augustinian canons and began to write, his earliest works, notably The Spiritual Espousals, are deeply concerned with contrasting false mysticism with true. It was an English contemporay of his who called heretics 'the devil's contemplatives', and this is a dominant theme in many of Ruysbroek's treatises. The Sparkling Stone is, however, a later work, in which he is less concerned to combat Manichæan Dualism, less anxious to rebut quietism and pantheism, than to teach, positively, how men who are called to that extraordinary way can attain to that union with God which he calls, in the Espousals, 'living and fruitful.' This is not the place to write of the refinements of his doctrine or of his debt to his many great predecessors, from St Paul, St Augustine and 'pseudo-Dionysius' down to Hadewijch, whom he greatly reverenced; the best that one can do here is to commend the Sparkling Stone as one of the very finest pieces of affective writing to appear in the literature of Christian mysticism.

It is not without interest that The Book of the Sparkling Stone was known in late medieval England, in an English translation of the Latin version made by William Jordaens, under its alternative title, The Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God; and the last works in this anthology have also contributed before now to English knowledge of Netherlands literature. Mary of Nijmegen, translated not in its original dramatic form but as a prose narrative, was printed in Antwerp in the early sixteenth century, for export to England, by John Doesborgh, who had presses both there and in London, and the translator may have been one Laurence Andrews, who did such work for him. And in the 1920s Max Reinhardt used Maurice Maeterlinck's version of Beatrice as the scenario for his theatrical spectacle, The Miracle, which created such a sensation in New York and London.
Beatrice is preserved for us in a manuscript, now in the Royal Library at The Hague, which can be dated c. 1375. The poem itself is probably of the fourteenth century, but it is derived partly from a pious legend narrated by Casarius of Heisterbach in the early thirteenth century, and there are many other parallels and analogues.

We may today find the beginnings of Beatrice perfunctory and crude, with singularly little attempt to explore what would, for the twentieth century, be the most interesting aspect of the story, the conflict in the nun’s mind before she decided to break her vows. Partly this is because the poet can make his effect by a very perfunctory appeal to the conventions understood and accepted by his audience: Beatrice was enslaved by Minne, and once she had been pierced by the dart of Love, there was no help for her; and, he naively adds, ‘We must not blame this nun, who was unable to escape from the love which held her captive, because the devil is always longing to tempt man...’ But this somewhat scrambled opening is best accounted for as we read on and discover where the poet’s real interests lie. As he warms to his central theme, that the vilest sinner must not despair of God’s mercy, the whole temper of the poem changes, the artificiality and the conventions fall away, and the story moves easily and compellingly to its climax. Easily and compellingly, at least, for those who still share the conviction of the poet, and of his age, that man’s greatest treasure is his immortal soul, which he imperils by mortal sin.

The same conviction informs Mary of Nijmegen and the modern reader is as little helped as he is in Beatrice to understand the predicament in which the heroine finds herself. Why should a well-brought-up, decent, pious girl be so affected by her aunt’s abuse that she calls upon the Devil? The aunt’s rages and her miserable end we can believe in: she may be a stock figure, a ‘humour’ rather than a character, but she is drawn with such vigour and zest that she compels us to think that she is real; but Mary simply does not come alive until the moment when the play within the play strikes conviction into her heart. There is true drama and true pathos in the closing scenes, and when in answer to the Pope’s horrified questions she says, ‘Father, it was the good times, all the money and the presents which he gave me...’ she is a forerunner of Gretchen, and speaks for all the poor foolish fallen girls in the world.

More perhaps than any of the other works here, Mary of Nijmegen suffers and loses by translation. Whether or not it is the work of the Antwerp poetess Anna Bijnis, it plainly was produced by one of her literary coterie, and the scenes at The Golden Tree, especially Emma-Mary’s ballade in praise of rhetoric, have local and contemporary allusions which are lost on us today. The language of the original, too, with its exotic use of dialect and its constant crudity and obscenities, gives it an earthy strength which cannot be reproduced in English. It is only as the play reaches its climax that its appeal widens and becomes universal, so that we feel that we have in it one of the masterpieces of a great age.
can take example, and say eternal praises to Almighty God in 
honour of this unparalleled goodness. In your own poor and 
feeble way, pay fitting honour to Him in His temple.

The Epilogue

So, God's chosen friends, this happened once long ago, and it is 
true, though many think it a lie; and if you went to Maestricht, 
to the house of converted sinners, you would see Emma's grave, 
and over the grave the three rings hanging, and under the rings, 
written in letters still legible, the story of her life and of the 
penance which she suffered, and how and when it happened. 
These are the signs which convince me that it is true. She lived 
some two years more, after her rings fell off, it was told to me, 
always performing penances and exercises to gain the favour of 
the King of kings. Accept this thankfully and without complaint, 
this poor story, for it was written for love, that we may receive 
heavenly glory. Amen.

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translations from Ruysbroek and several of his contemporaries.

For some twenty-five years a teacher of English language and philology at the University of Liverpool, Edmund Colledge resigned his readership there in 1963 and is now a student for the priesthood with the Augustinian Friars.

Already published in Bibliotheca Neerlandica:

Illustration on the bookjacket: 'Magdalen reading' (detail) by Rogier van der Weyden (+ 1400-1464), National Gallery, London.
To enable people in other countries to read their works, men like Erasmus and Grotius had to write in Latin. The literature of the Netherlands, of the Dutch and the Flemings, has since those years remained comparatively unknown to the outside world because few spoke the language or knew enough about it to realize its translation. To break through the insularity created by this language barrier some writers learned and wrote in other languages. But the greatest books in the history of the Netherlands remained confined to its own people.

The Golden Age of painting in the Netherlands was quickly understood and appreciated throughout the world but its counterpart in literature, equally important, remained unknown abroad; or almost so, for it was for some time considered that Reynard the Fox had a direct influence on Goethe, and that one of Milton’s sources was Vondel’s Lucifer.

The intention of the Bibliotheca Neerlandica is to give in translation to the English-speaking world the classics of Netherlands literature published throughout the ages. In addition to the sixteen volumes there will be a short history of Dutch and Flemish literature as a separate volume.

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