

Book Reviews

Decker, Thérèse, and Martin W. Walsh. *Mariken van Nieumeghen. A Bilingual Edition*. Edited, Translated, and with an Introduction. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994. ISBN: 1-879751-20-8.

For English speakers, this is a very important edition of one of the most fascinating plays in sixteenth-century Netherlandic literature. The introduction provides a succinct, lucid summary of issues surrounding the text and scholarly debate on these issues. The need for a new translation (there have been two from 1924 to now) is amply justified both on scholarly and on performance grounds (p.21). Because the original from Vorstermann's 1516/18 edition and the English translation face one another on opposite pages, a comparison of the two becomes a very simple matter. And, finally, the edition provides a highly useful bibliography, divided into editions and translations, secondary literature in English, and secondary literature in Dutch.

One of the intriguing aspects of this translation lies in the fact that it is governed by the principle of "stageability," the effectiveness of the play as a performed dramatic piece. Those who attended one of the two performances of the play in 1992, as I was fortunate to do, will have experienced first hand that the translators succeeded in realizing their goal, for this is, indeed, a play that "works" in performance in considering some of the enduring puzzles presented by the play, and their considerations are an excellent example of the indispensable contribution dramatic practice can make to philological scholarship. So, for example, they conclude their précis of the various arguments that have been made in favour of either a mixed prose and verse or a purely narrative original for the play by remarking that, from the point of view of staging, many of the narrative portions serve the function of elaborate "stage directions," that such narratives may well be records or residues of "dumb show" components typical of the drama of the period (p.5), and hence are an integral part of the dramatic script. Equally convincing is their point that the two kinds of journeying in the dramatic

text, both physical and spiritual, "are beautifully counterbalanced in a full dramatic presentation" (p.14), and that the staged simultaneity of scenes adds to their impact. For example, the dark premonitions of Mary's uncle, just after he has sent her to Nijmegen (p.29) are considerably more dramatic when one sees, at the same, the receding figure of Mary with her basket about to begin a very perilous journey indeed.

Interesting is the discussion of the significance of the "play within a play" which ultimately is the key element in Mary's salvation; the translators argue that this is "an especially effective demonstration of the power of poetry." (p.8) One might not, however, want to go so far as to agree that "this seemingly simple, straight-forward little drama about *Mariken van Nieumeghen* carries within itself a sophisticated theory of the role of language and in particular poetry." (p.8) On the other hand, why not? Sixteenth-century literature is far more sophisticated than it has, in the past, often been given credit for, and indeed "a complete investigation of this question," urged by the authors (p.8), may yield surprising results.

Altogether, the edition is a fine one, and will be the definitive one for English-language teaching and scholarship for the next foreseeable future.

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Kristiaan Aercke, ed.: *Women Writing in Dutch*. New York & London, Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992. "Women Writers of the World, ed. Katharina Wilson, 1". pp. XIII, 713.

Women Writing in Dutch can be considered a welcome addition to *Women Writers from the Netherlands and Flanders* which appeared in the same year. The selected authors include writers from a very distant and distant past, i.e. Hadewijch, Beatrijs of Nazareth, Anna Bijns, Anna Roemer Visscher, Maria Tesselschade Roemer Visscher (unfortunately, the name is consistently misspelled