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The medieval construct of demonic evil: an inverted incarnation

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This article explores the concept of inversion as an essential ingredient in the medieval understanding of Good and Evil. It argues that demonic evil is often, but here specifically in the Dutch rederijker drama *Mariken van Nieumeghen*, constructed and represented as an inversion of the incarnation of Christ. Christ is the true *Logos*, or Word, made flesh, offering love and reconciliation, teaching knowledge of the Father, and bringing salvation; the drama's Moenen is the devil disguised in scholarly garb, offering Mariken wealth and pleasure as well as to teach her all languages and the seven liberal arts, but leading her ultimately to damnation. The inversion technique is structural in a further sense, as Mariken's initiation into the world of evil is analysed as involving a series of inversions of the Catholic sacraments, all of which were either instituted by Christ or founded on the Church's interpretation of events during his incarnation. Issues of power (including gendered power) attendant upon the dichotomy of inversion of the forces of Good and Evil in the play are also discussed.

Die middeleeuse konstruk van die demoniese as omgekeerde inkarnasie

Hierdie artikel ondersoek 'n aspek van die konsep van inversie as 'n onontbeerlike element van die middeleeuse begrip van die Goeie en die Bose. Die demoniese word dikwels as inversie en/of deur middel van inversie voorgestel, en hier word daar getoon hoe die demoniese identiteit in die rederykerspel *Mariken van Nieumeghen* spesifiek as 'n omkering van die Christelike inkarnasie gekonstrueer en voorgestel word. Terwyl Christus die ware *Logos* of vleesgeworde Woord is, wat liefde en versoening bied, kennis van die Vader leer en redding bring, is die drama se Moenen eintlik die duiwel (as geleerde vermoen), wat vir Mariken rykdom en genot, asook kennis van alle tale en die sewe vrye kunste belowe, maar wat haar inderwaarheid slegs verdoemenis bied. Die inversietegniek struktureer die spel ook op 'n ander manier: daar word getoon hoe Mariken se inwyding in die wêreld van die bese hier geskied deur middel van 'n reeks omkerings van die sewe Katolieke sakramente (wat almal of deur Christus self ingestel is, of op die Kerk se interpretasie van gebeure tydens sy inkarnasie gefundeer is). Vraagstukke in verband met mag (insluitend dié van gender en mag) wat saamhang met die digotomie wat uit die inversie van die Goeie en die Bose in die drama ontstaan, word ook bespreek.

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This article¹ focuses on the nature of the dramatic and the theological “incarnation” of evil in the rederijker drama *Mariken van Nieumeghen* (c 1515; NK 1089),² a literary work which reveals much of late-medieval religious mentality, as discussed particularly in Pleij (1990) and Eligh (1991). It approaches this “incarnation” as an inversion of the Incarnation³ of Christ — the true *Logos*, or Word, made flesh — who brings salvation. In this context, the inextricable inter-connection of the incarnation with creation and salvation, as well as with the Church’s instruments such as the seven sacraments, is a key concept. The *Catholic Encyclopaedia* explains:

The Incarnation completes in the supernatural order the creative purpose and plan by the Divine Personal Idea, the Word, assuming to himself man’s nature, wherein the natural order of creation is synthesized, and thus carrying back completely the whole creation to its origin and end. The Redemption, the Church, and the sacramental system are obviously the extension of the Incarnation, and so, through the medium of the latter mystery, follow from Creation (*CE* IV: 475).

The introductory section outlines the orthodox theological position on the Incarnation. This is followed by a contrasting survey of the orthodox position on the origin and nature of the demonic. The inverted “incarnation” and *modus operandi* of the demonic antagonist in *Mariken van Nieumeghen* are then discussed in detail, with particular attention to the sacraments. Finally, some of the issues of power attendant upon the dynamic of inversion thus identified between the forces of Good and Evil in the play are considered.

- 1 This paper is a reworking of a conference paper entitled “The Incarnation of Evil in *Mariken van Nieumeghen*”, read at the triennial conference of the Société Internationale du Théâtre Médiéval at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Netherlands (July 2001).
- 2 Quotations from *Mariken van Nieumeghen* [*MvN*] are taken from Jonckheere & Conradie (1992); those from *Mary of Nennegen* [*MoN*] from Raftery (1991a), which contains reproductions of the woodcut illustrations and some text.
- 3 Information on this and other theological issues is derived primarily from Herbermann *et al* (1913), *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, henceforth referred to as *CE*; references are by volume and page number.

1. The incarnation of Christ

The word “incarnation” is used to signify the mystery and dogma of the Word (*Logos*) made flesh (CE VII: 706a). The derivation of the Latin *incarnatio* (*caro* = flesh) is based on the Greek of John 1: 14: “And the word was made flesh”. The terms are used by the Greek and Latin Fathers from the second and the fourth centuries, respectively. The Biblical use of the word “flesh” is a synecdoche for “human nature” (cf Luke 3: 6, Romans 3: 20) which emphasises the weaker part of that nature. Hence, in his incarnation, the divine Christ took on a nature capable of suffering, sickness and death, becoming like humanity in all things except sin (CE VII: 706a).

Dogmatically, thus, Christ is in his incarnation both human and divine. His divinity is also revealed in the Old Testament by the Psalms (notably 2: 7, 54: 7-8, and 104: 1), as well as by the Sapiential books and the Prophets. The Old Testament *Logos* is, from pre-Mosaic times, both uncreated and creating (CE VII: 707a). It becomes associated with Wisdom in the Sapiential books. Isaiah (cf 7: 14 and 9: 6) gives the Christ the name “Emmanuel”, which Matthew 1: 23 interprets as “God with us”. In the New Testament, all the evangelists as well as Paul bear witness to Christ’s divinity. He is the divine Messiah, the Son of God, and he is God (of the same nature and substance as God the Father). The third source of witness to Christ’s divinity is the tradition of the early Church. In the second century both Pliny and Hadrian describe the early Christians as adoring Christ as God, while Celsus castigates them for the notion of a “God made man” (CE VII: 711b). Christ is adored in both his human and his divine nature in a form of worship called *latría*, as distinct from the lesser forms of reverence for the saints and Our Lady, which are known as *dulia* and *hyperdulia*, respectively.

Christ’s nature is defined as a hypostatic union of the human and the divine, meaning that God is man and man is God in the one person of Jesus Christ. The definition of Christ as one person is important. Nestorius, whose heresy was contested by Athanasius, implicitly denied the hypostatic union in one person by affirming a mere “juxtaposition” of the human and the divine, and hence considering Mary to be the mother only of Christ, not of God. This was condemned as heresy by the Council of Ephesus (431) which proclaimed Mary as *Theotokos*, or “God-bearer” (CE VII: 713). Christ’s dual nature is, like all the mys-

teries of the Church, a complicated and perplexing concept, and was hence more prone to heretical deviation than simpler concepts. Indeed, the very first general council of the Church, the Council of Nicaea (325), had to be called to combat just such a heresy (that of Arius) by defining the divinity of Christ (*CE VII*: 711b). In his *Thalia*, Arius taught that the Word was neither eternal nor generated of the Father, but made out of nothing; and though it existed before the world was, it was nevertheless created. The Nicene Creed explicitly counters this by stating:

We believe [...] in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, generated of the Father, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, True God of True God; begotten not created, consubstantial with the Father, through him all things were made [...].

The dogmatic concept of the fully human nature of Christ proved equally problematic. The Gnostics denied Christ a material body, since they held matter to be inherently evil. Since they believed that Christ came to save humanity from the flesh, the idea of his incarnation appeared to them as a repugnant incarceration (Hill 1995). Valentinus and others denied that Christ was born of Mary, and the Apollinarists denied him a human soul (*CE VII*: 712a).

The Church bases its certainty on this point mainly on the Aramaic title “Son of Man”, which occurs some eighty times in the Gospels and was Christ’s own chosen reference to himself. The heresies mentioned, as well as variations on and developments of them, were all officially condemned. The Council of Chalcedon (451) defined that Jesus Christ remained, after the incarnation,

perfect in Divinity and perfect in humanity [...] consubstantial with the Father according to his divinity, consubstantial with us according to his humanity [...] one and the same Christ, the Son, the Lord, the Only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures not intermingled, not changed, not divisible, not separable (*CE VII*: 714a).

The third Council of Constantinople (680) defined (against the Monothelites) that in Christ there were two natural wills and two natural activities, the divine and the human, and that the human will was not contrary to the divine, but perfectly subject to it (*CE VII*: 714a). The historic Council of Trent (1545-63), belatedly taking up the challenges of Protestant reformers to the Mass and the Eucharist, in particular, also confirmed the earlier councils’ statements on the incarnation.

Before moving to a consideration of the origin and nature of the demonic, it is important to note that while the Church sees Christ (by his own description and that of his Father at his Baptism) as the Son of God by his own nature, the angels, are the children of God only by adoption; they participate in the Father's nature only by the free gifts he has bestowed upon them (*CE VII*: 710b). Unlike the Son, who is the true offspring of the Father, the angels are not adored.

2. The origin and nature of the demonic

Indeed, one of the more generally accepted interpretations among the theologians, including Thomas Aquinas, attributed the fall of Lucifer and his angels to the deadly sin of Pride (*superbia*), which was reinterpreted by Duns Scotus as a species of spiritual lust (*CE IV*: 765b). The *superbia* interpretation persists into later centuries: both Milton's *Paradise lost* and Vondel's *Lucifer* make much use of it. Lucifer desired to be adored and the angels who fell refused to serve humanity (1 Corinthians 6: 3) as they would have had to in view of the privileged position which the incarnation would give to humankind (*CE IV*: 765a): those who accepted salvation through Christ would be destined to share in his divine sonship (1 John 3: 1-2, Romans 8: 14-7, Hebrews 1, Colossians 1: 16, 2: 9, 18-9) (cf Hinwood 1983: 65).

The main sources relating to the devil are the Bible, the apocryphal books, certain other Jewish texts written between the two Testaments under the influence of Canaanite and Persian religions (Hinwood 1983: 64), and the works of the Church Fathers. The Old Testament makes little mention of the devil, its older books in particular regarding all events as the work of God. Thus, for example, the second book of Samuel (24: 1), probably dating from the tenth century BC, attributes David's counting of Israel and Judah to "the anger of the Lord" while the first book of Chronicles (21: 1), dating from the fourth century BC, makes the same event the work of the devil. The story of the trials of Job involves a similar palimpsest. So, too, Genesis 3: 1-4 names the serpent in the temptation scene, but the identification of the serpent with the devil is found in later books, particularly Revelations. The fall of the angels is referred to by Christ in Luke 10: 18: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven", and described (with prophetic as well as retrospective significance) in Revelations 12: 3-10 (Cf also 2 Peter 2: 4,

Jude 1: 6, Job 4: 18). The two classic texts lamenting the kings of Babylon and Tyre were also interpreted as referring to the fall of the angels (Hinwood 1983: 65). Isaiah 14: 12-5 reinterprets the Canaanite myth of the presumption and pride of Helal ben Sharar (the “morning star”) who rebels against the “almighty” Baal:

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, who didst rise in the morning? How art thou fallen to the earth, that didst wound the nations? And thou saidst in thy heart: I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will sit in the mountain of the covenant, in the sides of the north. I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like the most High. But yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, into the depth of the pit.

Ezekiel 28: 12-5 also makes use of a Canaanite or Babylonian myth, and was read as referring to the fall of the angels:

Thou wast the seal of resemblance, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou wast in the pleasures of the paradise of God; every precious stone was thy covering [...] Thou a cherub stretched out, and protecting, and I set thee in the holy mountain of God, thou has walked in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day of creation, until iniquity was found in thee.

The Church’s belief on the nature and origin of devils and demons is encapsulated in the creed of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). The situation of this explanation within the context of the Creation does not only describe the demonic as a perversion of original good but also, in using the terminology of “essence”, “substance” and “nature”, rhetorically inscribes it as an inversion of the incarnation:

We firmly believe and confess without reservation that there is only one true God [...] the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; three persons but one essence, substance, or nature [...] the one principle of the universe, the Creator of all things, visible and invisible [...] The devil and other demons were indeed created by God naturally good, but they became evil by their own doing (*CE IV*: 764a, Hinwood 1980: 29-30).

The fall of the angels did not impair their natural powers, gifts, or superior intelligence (*CE IV*: 766d). The chief devil, variously identified as Lucifer (“light-bearer”, or morning star) or Satan (“accuser” or “adversary”), is thus the doughty, though doomed, opponent of God as well as a potent and dangerous tempter, accuser, and tormenter of humanity. He is described by Christ as the overlord of this world (John 14: 30, Ephesians 2: 1-2), though this is only by outward government,

unlike Christ's own headship of the Church by his inward life-giving influence (*CE* IV: 767, *Summa* Q.viii.a.7). The devil's mundane sovereignty is proclaimed to be overthrown by Christ's incarnation and passion (John 12: 31, 16: 11). In *De trinitate* (XIII: 11-6) Augustine (354-430) adds a juridical note to the concept of the purpose and significance of the incarnation by stating that, after the temptation and expulsion from Eden, the devil had a right to the souls of humanity, which he had won with their free will, but that he had no right to punish Christ with death, since Christ, though fully human, was never subject to sin. In this case, therefore, the devil acted beyond his powers, in a type of *hamartia*, and hence lost his power over that portion of humanity comprising followers of Christ. This juridical view was countered by Anselm, but not obliterated from thought or literature, as is demonstrated by its frequent occurrence in medieval literature (cf Marx 1995: 8ff; 18ff).

The devil is able to attack the human body and mind from without (obsession) or from within (possession) (cf Matthew 12: 22, 9: 32, Mark 5: 2-4, 9: 18, 22, Luke 8: 29, 11: 14, cf also Rhodewyk 1975). The *Roman ritual* of 1614 laid down norms for assessing possession and for exorcism from the demonic influence (Hinwood 1980: 31), some of which are anticipated by *Mariken van Nieuweghen*. Yet despite the great power of the devil and his demons, they are permitted to operate only within limits set by God (as the drama confirms), and even the strongest of them cannot help but acknowledge Christ (cf Matthew 8: 19, Mark 1: 24, 34, 3: 12, 5: 6-7, Luke 4: 34, 41, 8: 28, 10: 17, Acts 16: 16-8).

3. The "incarnation" and *modus operandi* of the devil in *Mariken van Nieuweghen*

The demonic inversion of the incarnation in *Mariken van Nieuweghen* would appear to be a conscious application of the *topos* of the dichotomy of Good and Evil on the part of the author(s).⁴ This is the impression given by the information which devil characters, Moenen in particular, provide about their human "disguises" and their *modus operandi*. That

4 Since the scholarly debate on the authorship question (cf Coigneau 1982, Jonckheere in Jonckheere & Conradie (eds) 1992, Janssen 1967, and Willemsen 1972/3) is not strictly relevant to my topic, I have chosen to use the term "author(s)" as a generic form, and to confine my argument to a consideration of the extant late-medieval Dutch text.

this inversion is more than coincidental or clichéd is also suggested by the use of the technique in the very structuring of the play, with Mariken's initiation into the world of evil being accomplished by means of what may be seen as a series of inversions of the sacraments of the Catholic Church (cf Roeck 1974).

There are two devil characters in *Mariken van Nieuwneghen*; however, the role of Masscheroen in the play-within-the-play is brief, circumscribed and stylised: that of a devil claiming the souls of humankind in the court of Heaven, and losing his case to the advocate for the defence, Our Lady (cf Raftery 1993). While it is interesting to note that Masscheroen is correct in many of the claims he makes on behalf of the devils, including their function of chastising humanity, it must be borne in mind that within the world and “reality” of the drama he is not actually a devil, but merely a pageant actor playing the role of a devil. Hence it is on Moenen, the “real” devil within the dramatic world, that this discussion will focus. Unlike many of the devils in late-medieval Dutch dramas, Moenen is a central character, and a more than worthy antagonist for Mariken as he pretends to be her loyal “cavalier” while initiating her into the world and the power of evil.

Moenen first makes his appearance to Mariken as she sits, in despair, under a hedge outside the town of Nijmegen, lamenting her “accursed” state and even contemplating suicide. Despair was considered a dangerous state, in which the sufferer could all too easily fall prey to the devil — as in the case of Judas, whose suicide and supposed damnation were attributed to it. Because it appears to deny the omnipotence of God, it was often described as the “unforgivable” sin against the Holy Spirit. In a monologue addressed to the audience, Moenen explains his nature and his appearance:

Ick hebbe mi selven toghemaect rechtveerdich
Al waer ick een mensche, ende al bi Gods ghedoochge;
Tes al te passe sonder mijn een oghe.
Die is of si mi uut waer ghesworen;
Wi gheesten en hebben dye macht niet, dats verloren,
Ons te volmakenne doer gheen bespreck.
Altoos es aen ons eenich ghebreck,
Tsi aen thoot, aen handen oft aen voeten.

[158-65]

In this speech, as in others through the play, Moenen emphasises for the benefit of the audience that although his appearance is human, his nature and substance are of the spirit (“gheest”) — in his case, demonic. He has “disguised” himself as a human being (“toeghemaect” suggests both concealment and covering, as with flesh in an “incarnation”) but, unlike Christ, he is unable to take on human nature and shape flawlessly: the devil, it was believed, would always reveal his demonic nature by a flaw in his disguise, whether on his head, his hands or his feet.⁵ Moenen is described in the text as one-eyed.⁶ Moenen presents himself as “een meester vol consten” [196], which is generally taken to mean a university scholar, and in addition to offering Mariken money and jewels, he promises to teach her the “seven liberal arts” as well as all the languages of the world.⁷ The “arts” which they will both eventually demonstrate are, however, debased: his powers are plainly those of a conman; her accomplishments (apart from the “refrain” in praise of rhetoric) mere party tricks. For instance, “geometry” (one of the seven liberal arts taught at the medieval university) is debased to the level of merely guessing how many drops of wine there are in a beaker. Moenen’s offer to make Mariken “der vrouwen vrouwe” [182] — a woman above all other women — may be read as a blasphemous inversion of the effect of Christ’s incarnation upon Our Lady, as represented not only in the doctrines and dogmas of the immaculate conception, annunciation, virgin birth, and assumption, but also the panoply of medieval lyrics in praise of Our Lady’s peerless state, from “Adam lay ybownden” to “I syng of a maydyn that is makeles”. Moenen’s presentation of himself as a courtly squire or cavalier (“een goet knecht” [172]), ready to avenge any wrong done to Mariken, echoes the *topos* of Christ as the true lover-knight, riding his Cross as a steed and fighting for the salvation of the souls of humanity from the devil and damnation, as in various medieval lyrics and, in particular, *Piers Plouman* (B-text, *passus* XVII and XVIII, Schmidt

- 5 This belief persisted into later centuries, as evidenced by Shakespeare, among others — cf King Lear IV.ii.60: “Proper deformity seems not in the fiend / So horrid as in woman [...]”.
- 6 Interestingly, the woodcut illustrator uses a flaw more obviously recognisable to his audience as demonic: he depicts him with horns protruding through his academic cap.
- 7 Unlearned knowledge of foreign languages was reckoned by the Roman ritual among the signs of demonic possession (Hinwood 1983: 67, Wolthuis 1952: 139).

(ed) 1984). This series of inversions is confirmed when Moenen admits in the final aside of the scene that his real objective is the damnation of Mariken's soul ("Maer ten eynde hope ick salder u siele bliven" [328]).

Apart from expecting sexual favours, Moenen also makes two crucial demands of Mariken, the first being that she give up her name (which is a diminutive form of "Mary"). As Moenen says, in a scarcely veiled reference to Our Lady's role as *Theotokos* in Christ's incarnation, "Bi eender Marien ic ende mijn geselschap sulc grief hebben, / Dat wi nemmermeer dien naem en sullen lief hebben" [275-6]. Mariken demurs, but eventually Moenen hits on the compromise of allowing her to retain the initial "M" and be known as "Emmeken" (literally, "little M", but not an unusual name in the Netherlands). This renaming amounts to a demonic inversion of the first of the sacraments of the Catholic Church: baptism. It could be argued that not only baptism, but both confirmation and the entry into the religious life via holy orders, involve the taking of a new name, but in neither of these instances must the old name be renounced, as here. Moenen never actually speaks Mariken's name, but always addresses her by means of euphemisms: it would appear as if he is as afraid of her name (because of its connection to Our Lady) as he is of the name of God.

Baptism is the first and most crucial step in the process of Christian initiation and salvation. By baptism, one becomes a child of God, a member of Christ and the Christian community, and a temple of the Holy Spirit (Hinwood 1983: 89, cf Matthew 28: 19, Romans 6: 3-4, 8: 14-7, John 3: 5, 14: 16-23, Ephesians 4: 11-2, 5: 26, 1 Corinthians 12: 12-3). By contrast, Moenen's demonic rebaptism of Mariken initiates her into the world and the power of evil. In this world, the "father" is Lucifer himself; she is united in a pact with a devil (thus becoming a "witch"); her destined community is in hell, and her earthly body is a "temple" of all kinds of sin, since in the case of a woman, at least, a pact with the devil was considered to include sexual intercourse, the devil being referred to as an *incubus* (Summers 1928: 109ff [II.1.4], cf Aquinas *Summa* Q51.a.3, in Parsons & Pinheiro 1971).

The inquisitors' handbook of 1486-7, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, clearly describes a pact such as that into which Mariken enters with Moenen as transforming the human partner into a witch (Summers 1928: 99 [II.2.2], cf Aquinas *Summa* Q117.a.3, in Parsons & Pinheiro 1971). The word

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“maleficium” (*Malleus* II.1.5-8, 11-2, 14-5) was used for the evil power derived by the witch and used to harm fellow human beings. It functions as an inversion of Christian charity (cf Roeck 1974: 315). The ninth-century story of Theophilus is possibly the earliest surviving example of a pact; the story of Faust one of the most persistent. The idea was given official credence by the Church only in the thirteenth century, and the mass persecution of “witches” began only in the later fifteenth century (Cross & Livingstone 1974/77: 1494) but persisted in Europe into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as both histories of “witchcraft” (cf Cohn 1976) and literary history (eg the popularity of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*) demonstrate.

Moenen’s second demand is that Mariken refrain from blessing herself with the sign of the cross. This sign is not only the prelude to all prayer, including the Mass and the sacraments, but also the symbol of salvation and a powerful instrument in exorcism, as are the Holy Names, including that of Our Lady, as confirmed by the inquisitors’ handbook (Summers 1928: 92 [II.1]). The protective power of prayer is confirmed by Moenen, when he complains that the prayers of Mariken’s uncle, the priest, have prevented him from killing her and carrying her soul off to hell [660-4]. Moenen clearly fears God and the power of Good. Indeed, in other “asides” intended to emphasise his demonic nature, even when stating explicitly that he operates only within the limits allowed to him by God, he avoids naming the Almighty, referring to God only as “the Highest”:

Maer dat ic veel scicke oft coute,
Tes al niet, en mi die Opperst warachtich
Gheen volle consent en gheeft eendrachtich:
Boven hem en ben ic niet een haer te verwerven machtich.
[682-5]

Other examples include:

Ent mi die Opperste niet en belet,
Ick sal eer een iaer meer dan duysent sielen verlacken,
Maer alst hem belieft, so heb ick uut ghebacken
[587-9]

and, in reference to his limited power to create “wonders” (or false “miracles”):

Ick sal voort stellen dmeeste wondere,
Comet gheen belet van boven.
[643-4]

Once Mariken has reluctantly consented to be his paramour, Moenen takes her first to s'Hertogenbosch and then to Antwerp. At the inn, the “Gulden Boom”, he makes use of her new-found talents, which may be seen as an inversion of the “gifts” of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of confirmation — a sacrament which also involves a renaming, though as a reinforcement of the identity conferred by baptism, strengthening the Christian in order that he or she may take part actively in the ministry of the Church, be an active witness to Christ in the world, and defend his truth by word and deed. Indeed, although the sacrament of the eucharist is generally received at an earlier age than that of confirmation in our day, the traditional order of the Christian rites of initiation was: baptism, confirmation, communion (Hinwood 1980: 69).

A soliloquy informs the audience that Moenen’s intention with Mariken is to draw crowds, sow disunity, and provoke murder, thus bringing many thousands of souls to damnation. Again, this is in direct contrast with Christ who, in his incarnation as man, himself undergoes death in order to ensure eternal life for the souls of humanity. The maleficent human dynamic which Moenen creates in the crowds drawn by Mariken may also be seen as a demonic inversion of the sacrament of the eucharist, where a community gathers in harmony to give thanks for Christ’s having offered himself for humanity’s reconciliation with God. (The word “eucharist” is derived from the Greek for “thanksgiving”.)

One of Moenen’s other practices in Antwerp is to present himself as a doctor (in which guise he gives women sexual counselling which proves fatal to their husbands within eight days — a radical inversion of the ideal relationship within the sacrament of matrimony!) and a fortune-teller. In describing himself as a doctor, he uses the obscene term “kijcpisse” [578] — literally “piss examiner” — referring to the interpretation of the colour, smell and taste of urine in medical diagnosis since ancient times. This would appear to be intended as a demonic inversion of the *topos* of Christ as the divine physician, or “doctor” of the soul.⁸ His role as a fortune-teller and a diviner of hidden treasure — with the intention of using the deadly sin of covetousness to lure souls to their damnation — is also a challenge to and an inversion of

8 Cf Geldenhuys 2000 and Geldenhuys & Raftery 2003 for the *topos*, Raftery 1993: 160 for details of an illustration.

the omniscience of God, and hence of Christ. Clairvoyance, incidentally, is reckoned by the *Roman ritual* as one of the signs of demonic possession (Hinwood 1980: 32, cf Luke 8: 28, Acts 16: 16-9).

After seven years with the devil, Mariken becomes homesick, and Moenen allows her to return to Nijmegen to see her friends and family. The “Play of Masscheroen” is being performed in the square as they arrive. It is a souls’ judgement play, with actors representing Christ (“God”) and Our Lady as well as the devil. In this sense the play-within-the-play may also be seen as an “incarnation” of both good and evil. While Mariken wants to watch this play, recalling her uncle’s comment that it is better than many a sermon [718], Moenen’s counter-proposal, suggestive of the deadly sin of gluttony, is to head for the tavern in search of food and drink: “Ke, ga wi biden roost ende biden wine” [715]. This choice of diction may well be intended to represent a quotidian inversion of the eucharistic transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the flesh and blood of the incarnated Christ at the moment of consecration in the Mass, which communicates the divine nature to humanity (*CE V*: 573).

While Moenen’s soliloquies function as inverted, boasting “confessions” in the dramatic sense, the sacrament of Penance, which is a major theme of the play, is presented explicitly rather than in inversion, in two areas of the text. The first occurrence is in Mariken’s tears [858] and contrition [809] at the Play of Masscheroen (in which it is Masscheroen, rather than Moenen, who represents the demonic, although Moenen provides a commentary on Mariken’s response and his own waning influence). The second occurs in the lengthy final section, where Mariken’s priestly uncle, having exorcised the devil, takes her on a pilgrimage in search of absolution, reducing Moenen to frustrated impotence. The powers conferred on Moenen by his servitude to Lucifer may thus be seen as an inversion of the uncle’s special consecration to God in Holy Orders. The exorcism verbally and visually unmasks Moenen as a devil, transforming him from the suavely compelling gentleman-scholar into a violent and at times ludicrous monster, mouthing obscenities and making vociferous but ultimately empty threats, while growing increasingly fearful of Lucifer’s punishment of his failure. The woodcut illustrations at this point show him in the air as a dark, perhaps scaly creature with wings, horns, claws, and possibly a tail. In the later illustration accompanying Mariken’s visit to the Bishop

of Cologne, Moenen is hairy, ox-horned, and clawed, with a snout like a tapir. In addition, he is exposing his posterior, and either scratching or pointing to it, in a manner possibly ultimately derived from the Babylonian demon, Pazuzu (Roeck 1974: 313). Moenen's failure and fear, once he has been unmasked from his human "incarnation" or disguise, may be contrasted with the incarnated Christ's willing and successful fulfilment of his Father's design.

While the last of the sacraments, extreme unction (the anointing of the terminally sick), is not presented in any way in the parts of the play relating to Mariken, it may be seen as represented in inversion by the death-scene of her aunt. Here, a possibly invisible devil (depicted in the woodcut illustration of the departure of her soul as a pair of typically demonic figures with bestial heads, claws and shaggy coats) expresses sympathy with her at her political disappointment, in order to encourage her to commit suicide, at the same time informing the audience (in much the same way as Moenen throughout the play) that souls such as hers all belong to Lucifer and to hell. It is significant that much of the discourse in this scene echoes the earlier scene of Mariken's temptation by Moenen (for instance, "spijt" [141, 425]; "quaet" [145, 406]; the references to suicide [147-8, 424-5, 430-1], and the "summoning" of the devil [1556, 414-6]). A comparison is thus created between the two women, as (potential) victims of the devil's wiles. The aunt serves as an object lesson to the audience of what Mariken could become. It has in fact been argued (cf Bromberg 1978: 39-47) that this is the reason why her death-scene is presented at an earlier stage in the play than is warranted by chronology.)

Interestingly enough, just as the human enemies of the incarnated Christ fail to recognise him as anything other than a human being, those who are to be the victims of the devil incarnated in human form — whether the aunt in this scene or the hundreds of victims of Moenen's wiles in s'Hertogenbosch and Antwerp — are equally unable to recognise him as demonic. This is, of course, an important aspect of his power, and it is all the more effective because of his own constant reminders to the audience of the demonic nature which his costume and his demeanour conceal from his intended victims.

4. Issues of power in *Mariken van Nieumeghen*

In *Mariken van Nieumeghen* the issue of power — verbal, visual, or otherwise — is highly relevant. For instance, as has been shown, certain words, or names, in daily life are presented as powerful, often in prayer or in exorcism (or, indeed, in rhetoric, as displayed by Mariken in the tavern scene) and the full force of the eschatological powers of Good and Evil is displayed, with the former always ultimately triumphing.

The triumph of Good over Evil is particularly striking in the scene where Moenen attempts to kill Mariken in order to win her soul for his master Lucifer, but Our Lady's intercession ensures the miracle which saves her life. Krispyn (1976), however, describes Mariken as surrounded throughout by "constellations" of characters representing Good and Evil. Her survival in this particular scene may presumably be taken as the play's most performatively miraculous moment. (Although the text as we have it is not strictly dramatic,⁹ one cannot imagine a production failing to present a miracle as impressive as this, presumably by means of wires, a harness and the substitution of a "dummy" in the fall.) Yet the physical miracle, though impressive, is not ultimately the main thrust of the story: it is the spiritual "miracle" of Mariken's contrition and forgiveness which constitutes the actual focus of the plot, and this "miracle" is made possible only by the passion of Christ, which would have been meaningless if his incarnation had not made him fully human and thus capable of suffering, as well as fully divine and thus capable of redeeming humanity. Hence, it would seem, the need to include the lengthy final section of the text dealing with events which lend themselves less easily to performance: Mariken's long pilgrimage in search of absolution, the concluding information about her life of penance as a nun and her miraculous release from that penance, as well as her eventual holy death.

9 I leave aside as irrelevant to the present discussion the issue of whether the "volksboek", or chapbook, is a reworking of an actual play for a reading audience, or its dramatic sections are a reworking of a complete prose text (cf Jonckheere in Jonckheere & Conradie 1992 and Coigneau 1982), although I (like Coigneau) believe the original version of the story to have been a prose tale, like the English *Mary of Nemmegen*, cf Raftery (ed) 1991 as well as Van Dijk 1984.

A second explicit instance of the triumph of Good over Evil is provided by Moenen's exorcism. It is noteworthy that the text provides no actual prayers, ritual actions or formulaic bannings to be used by Mariken's priestly uncle in exorcising the devil; he simply mentions that he has some lines on a piece of paper in his breviary which will deal with the devil. The effect of these words is instant: Moenen's next speech indicates that the exorcism has taken place, that the devil's power has been broken, and that his transformation from human "incarnation" back to his real demonic form has been effected.

In terms of the issue of power, it is significant that at Moenen's very first appearance he noted that it was Mariken's words (although spoken in despair, rather than with necromantic intent) which had summoned him to action ("Dat woert werdt mi die siele weerdich" [157]), while his exorcism, too, is accomplished by means of (written and spoken) words. Words are thus responsible for both his human "incarnation" and his unmasking as a devil. And, clearly, the power of the word can operate either to good or to evil effect, in incarnation or in other contexts, such as the dichotomy between the willingly filial divine *Logos* ("Thy Will be done") and the rebellious words of Lucifer and his cohort at the beginning of human history.

Traditionally, Lucifer's "Non serviam!" transformed a portion of the angelic host, by a calamitous fall, into their own inversion: devils. Initially this demonstrated the power of a word to perform Evil. Ultimately, after the temptation and fall of humanity, it led to the Incarnation of Christ, the Divine *Logos*, to perform Good in bringing redemption and salvation for God's creation.¹⁰ In dramatic representation, of course, the power of the word — for Good or Evil — is all the greater, since it is made visible, almost tangible, to the audience in performance. Although this paper focuses on theological and literary-critical con-

10 The issue of causality versus omniscience raised here has been debated over the centuries. Fr Bonaventure Hinwood (1980: 16), a leading Catholic theologian, explains it in the following way: "Even before the world was made, God had already chosen us to be his through our union with Christ, so that we should be holy and without fault before him. Because of his love God had already decided that through Jesus Christ he would make us his sons. But foreseeing our sin, the Father provided in addition that we would receive the forgiveness of our sins and achieve the spiritual freedom of his children through Christ's blood (cf Eph 1: 7).

cepts rather than on actual performance, the text's potential power is none the less striking.

Unlike Christ in his incarnation, Moenen in *Mariken van Nieumeghen* was never fully human; unlike Christ in his divinity, Moenen was never completely possessed of power. The miracle of Mariken's survival demonstrates his loss of power over her body, while the exorcism visibly strips him of both his human disguise and the last vestiges of his hold over her soul. By her next "rite of passage" through the sacrament of penance Mariken is fully restored to the unity with the incarnated Christ which her original baptism, confirmation and communion had achieved before the powers of evil and a devil incarnate entered her life.

This brings us to the issue of gendered power — perhaps the most fascinating of all to a modern audience — which constitutes the final focus of this paper. The powers of Good and Evil are traditionally viewed as a binary opposition, often associated with male and female, respectively. (The most obvious individual case is that of Adam and Eve, where the latter was often made to bear the blame for the Fall, but other cases include Samson and Delilah, or John the Baptist and Salome — and in the medieval mystery plays, even Mr and Mrs Noah!)

Yet in *Mariken van Nieumeghen* the dichotomy is more complicated than the traditional dynamic of a "male" devil and a female victim, as collated by De Bruyn (1979). Here, both Good (the Church) and Evil are, ironically, male-identified, while the focus of their conflict, Mariken herself, is female (cf Raftery 2002a & 2002b). The priest and the Pope are the obvious and overtly male representatives of Good. Moenen, incarnated as a male and serving Lucifer who is described in male terms as his "master", figures obviously on the side of Evil, but even the aunt who abandons Mariken to the power of the devil (and ultimately dooms herself by committing a devil-assisted suicide) employs a discourse which may be viewed as male-associated in both its political and its sexual aspects, the latter (though more colloquial) being strongly reminiscent of the more misogynistic writings of Tertullian and Jerome.

Throughout *Mariken van Nieumeghen*, in addition to the traditional operation of the powers of Good and Evil, there has been another type of power at work: the power of the construction of Mariken's identity by means of these forces. The plot, then, involves the construction of a female identity by means of male, or male-associated powers. This iden-

ty is progressively constructed: by Mariken's uncle in her innocent youth, then by her aunt's allegations of unchastity, then by Moenen's powers and demands, and finally by her uncle, once again, and the Pope. Mariken thus undergoes a performative "incarnation": as virgin, whore, witch, and finally as a wonder (in her miraculous survival of the fall and ultimately the equally miraculous removal of her penitential rings) (cf Raftery 2002b).

In each of these "incarnations" Mariken's identity is rhetorically constructed by reference to images from the authoritative discourse of the Church, whether the Bible, the Commentaries, or other writings: as virgin she emulates Our Lady; as whore she is a second Eve; as witch she fits the descriptions given in the *Malleus maleficarum*, and as a wonder she is associated with Mary Magdalen, the repentant sinner. (The convent in Maastricht which Mariken enters is described in the Dutch text simply as a convent of repentant sinners, while the English *Mary of Nimmegen* identifies it more specifically as a convent "of nonnes of Seynt Magdalenes order" [508].)

In none of these verbally-derived and imposed "incarnations" is there an authentic, autonomous female identity. Time and time again, for good or evil purposes, the rhetorical and sometimes supernatural power of discourse is used to impose a male-defined identity on Mariken — an imposed identity from which she may ultimately be seen to escape only in the dream which raises her from the "hell" of her life of patriarchally defined penance to the "heaven" of real forgiveness by God. Thus, just as the devil's human disguise may be seen as an inversion of the incarnation of Christ (the divine Word), and his *modus operandi* in the world as an inversion of the church's system of sacramental power, Mariken's progressive "incarnations" are achieved by means of discourse, of words valorised or demonised by the power of the church. Incidentally, this renders Mariken's supposed power over words in the "refrain" which she recites in the tavern to demonstrate her instant mastery of rhetoric ("een gave vanden Heylighen Gheeste" — a gift of the Holy Ghost [513]) even more ironic than I believe has yet been noted.

5. Conclusion

In *Mariken van Nieuweghen*, then, we have a particularly finely crafted literary example of the conjoined influence of theological and “folk” beliefs relating to religion on the medieval mentality. Specifically, the technique of inversion (in word or deed) is applied to very complex theological issues such as the incarnation and the fall and transformation of the angelic hierarchy into the demonic, as well as to highly systematic aspects of church practice such as the seven sacraments, which are used, along with superstitions about the *modus operandi* and appearance of devils and the presumed malpractices of witchcraft, to structure a miracle play that is as entertaining in its vivid rendering of the quotidien (complete with tavern scene and pageant drama) as it is compelling in its presentation of eternal religious truths about the for c e s of Good and Evil as well as the inevitable human course of temptation and sin, with its hoped-for positive “inversion” of salvation.

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