CHAPTER THREE

'PLEASE DO NOT MIND THE CRUDENESS OF ITS WEAVE': LITERATURE, GENDER AND THE POLEMIC AUTHORITY OF ANNA BIJNS

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When Martin Luther caused a commotion in the Catholic world in 1517 with his 95 theses against the selling of indulgences and the authority of the Pope, the Church quickly and firmly reacted in a variety of ways. Lutheran books and writings were censored, scholarly books in Latin argued against the heretical doctrines of the Augustine monk and the new doctrine was attacked from the pulpit. Apart from these strategies of defence, in the Low Countries another weapon in the war against Luther was wielded which was highly unusual: the writings of a laywoman. More precisely, this laywoman was made—and made herself—the mouthpiece of the small but very successful centre of resistance in Antwerp that was created by the Franciscans, or Minorites. Instead of writing or preaching themselves (or, at least, in addition to that), they powerfully supported this single person in her own personal campaign against Luther by compiling her works more than once and presumably also by publishing these compilations. The name of the poetess who seems to have impressed the Franciscans with her poems was Anna Bijns.¹ Born and bred in Antwerp and brought up in a traditional Catholic way, she could in no way agree with Luther's vision of the content of the Christian faith without devotion to Mary, without honouring all the sacraments and without obedience to the Pope. As one of the first of Luther's adversaries in Dutch, she responded to his ideas with sharp attacks in the vernacular.

Even though we are currently familiar with a long medieval tradition of influential women and female authors who were hermits and

¹ Her biography by Van den Branden (*Anna Bijns*) dates from 1911. The most important monograph about her works, also reacting to earlier research, is Roose, *Anna Bijns*, published in 1963. Results of recent research can be found in Pleij, *Het gevleugelde woord* (2007).

Beguines,² it seems astonishing that one of the first printed polemics against Luther in the Netherlands was written by a laywoman, especially when we consider the fact that this woman did not speak just for herself, but in the name of a larger group of the faithful. This contribution will therefore investigate how and why Anna Bijns could become their mouthpiece. What role did the Franciscans play? How could she, a female author, acquire such standing that members of a monastic order supported her and that her readers accepted her authority, as becomes apparent from the large number of reprints of her books continuing well into the seventeenth century?³ As a part of my investigations, I will look at her self-presentation and at the extent to which this self-presentation affected her reception. I also will discuss the part the printing of her poems played in the distribution of her ideas and the consolidation of her fame. The fact that the Franciscans were involved raises interesting questions about their joint struggle against Luther: why would the Franciscans raise a laywoman to the level of their most visible spokesperson in the public polemics against the Lutherans? It still seems striking that the members of the Antwerp order did not choose a male author, perhaps one of their own community, to defend the Catholic cause, but instead a laywoman who was not learned, who was not a member of a religious order and who was not a Beguine.

METHOD AND SOURCES

There are three printed poetry collections (1528, circa 1548 and 1567)⁴ from which we can infer something about the (self-)presentation of Anna Bijns as an authority in the public debates about Luther. I have chosen to concentrate on the three printed compilations rather than

² For the Netherlands, one could think of the mystical authors Beatrijs of Nazareth or Hadewijch. On mystical female literature see Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages*. Specifically for Beatrijs of Nazareth see Huls, *Seuen manieren van minnen*; for Hadewijch see the series by Willaert and Fraters, *Hadewijchs verzameld werk*; still important is also Willaert, *De poëtica van Hadewijch*.

³ All her collections published in the sixteenth century were reprinted well into the seventeenth century; the first edition dates from 1528, the last from 1668. See also Roose, *Anna Bijns*, pp. 53–70. Moreover, there are manuscripts—see n. 4.

⁴ The collections are available online: Keßler and Oosterman, *Schoon ende suverlijc boecxken* (first collection), Keßler and Oosterman, *Tweede boeck vol schoone ende constighe refereynen* (second collection), and Keßler and Oosterman, *Seer scoon ende suyver boeck* (third collection).

on the extant manuscripts. The printing press could, after all, reach many more readers than manuscripts could, whereas a (self-)presentation can only be successful when disseminated amongst as many people as possible.

The crucial information is contained not in the main text of the poems collected in these three books, but in the 'paratexts': it is hidden in the title, the preface, the epilogue and any other text not included in the poems themselves.⁵ In these paratexts, Bijns or the compiler of the book explain to the reader why certain poems were chosen and what the overall purpose of the collection was. This might show how, and by whom, Bijns was made into an authority with regard to such a highly sensitive theological matter as the struggle against Luther. An analysis of the paratexts, which carefully distinguishes the various authors and their purposes, appears to be an auspicious approach in order to detect the strategies of (self-)presentation used by Anna Bijns and the compilers of her books.

However, before we analyse the paratexts, we first need a better understanding of Anna Bijns's biography and the literary, social and intellectual context in which she lived and worked—notably that of the chambers of rhetoric. Greater understanding of the organization of the three printed collections and the genres of the poems will help to determine what the paratexts reveal about Bijns's polemical role.

ANNA BIJNS, RHETORICIANS AND REFRAINS

Anna Bijns (1493–1575) lived in Antwerp where she worked as a teacher. She never married and she lived alone, not as a nun and not as a Beguine. To live this way was quite unusual for a woman in this

⁵ For a definition of paratexts see Genette, *Paratexts*, esp. pp. 1–2. I use the term in the general sense, comprising also peritexts. It is not implied that no paratexts (as important instruments for self-fashioning) are contained in the manuscripts. For instance, in the large compilation of manuscript B (signature Ghent, UB, 2166) with its 112 poems, many are dated, so this is an important clue to the period in which Bijns was writing. According to the dates given there, the poems in the manuscript were written between 1523 and 1529. Manuscript A (signature Brussels, KB, 19547), a compilation of about 60 poems made by Bijns and many poems from other authors, also has some paratexts, e.g. an extensive table of contents. But in both cases (and these are the most important, because they are the most voluminous, manuscript compilations of Bijns's works), the paratexts do not convey anything about the intentions of the (author of the) poems and/or the compilations. They were not meant to be read by many people and remained rather inaccessible.

period, because she did not have the protection and safety of a religious community.⁶ Bijns earned her own living, working in her own small school until the age of 80.⁷

As a deeply devout Christian, she was interested in the recent developments in religious affairs. Because of her commitment to these issues she was informed of Martin Luther's new ideas at an early stage. She must have known about him as early as 1519, when a monk from Ypres called Jacobus Praepositus—a friend of Luther's and, just like him, a member of the Augustinian order—came to Antwerp to preach Luther's teachings.⁸ It is possible that from what she heard at the convent of the Franciscans—with whom she maintained close contact⁹—she developed her own highly critical opinions of Luther. She seems to have been absolutely convinced that Catholic doctrine alone can guide man to heaven; in her opinion,¹⁰ Luther's doctrine plotted a path

⁶ Unfortunately, not much is known about her life. The only biography is written by the Antwerp archivist Van den Branden in 1911 and much of what he tells us is a romantic glorification. His account indeed is based on facts found in the Antwerp archives, but it is sometimes difficult to see what is fact and what is mystification. Van den Branden does not know about the reasons why she stayed unmarried. He believes that she first had to help her mother in housekeeping for the family (one younger brother, Meerten, and one younger sister, Margriete) after her father's death, and after mother's death she took her place. Later on, he assumes, she might have had prejudices against marriage, see Van den Branden, *Anna Bijns*, pp. 68–69. For more information on Bijns and her works see also Pleij, *Het geveleugelde woord*, pp. 370–91. A short overview about her life, works and her way of responding to the threat of Luther and his teachings is given by Pollmann, “Each Should Tend his Own Garden”.

⁷ From 1536 on she was a member of the St. Ambrosius guild for teachers, see Van den Branden, *Anna Bijns*, p. 63. According to Van den Branden she asked only 26 ‘stuivers’ per pupil per year. He calculated that she, with 40 pupils, earned about 52 ‘gulden’ per year—a small sum (*ibidem*, pp. 85–86).

⁸ On Praepositus: Bautz, *Biographisch-bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, vol. 7, cols. 966–68; Roose, *Anna Bijns*, pp. 6–10; Visser, *Luther's geschriften in de Nederlanden tot 1546*, pp. 153–56.

⁹ This is known through the large number of acrostics in her poems; she used them to dedicate the refrains to her friends. Most of them are about a man called ‘Bonaventura’ who is thought to be Bonaventura Vorsel, her confessor and a member of the Antwerp Franciscan order (on him see: Julius, ‘Anna Bijns en Bonaventura’), but there are also other acrostics. All of them are the reflections of close amicable connections between Bijns and her friends. See: Pleij, ‘Anna Bijns als pamflettiste’, and Keßler, ‘Wie is Cornelis Damas?’.

¹⁰ See about the difference between the opinion of a real person and the opinion the reader can extract from a written text the standard works of Barthes (‘The Death of the Author’), Foucault (‘What is an author?’; I used the Dutch translation under the title ‘Wat is een auteur?’) and Booth (*The Rhetoric of Fiction*). For the application of their theories about opinions of several readers from the past on Bijns; see Keßler, ‘Anna in veelvoud’.

straight to hell. Her objections to Luther prompted her to write against him in particular. But even though she also wrote about many other topics (such as her devotion to Mary or Christ, or her derisive view of marriage), the poems in which she sharply attacked the Reformer were the ones that created her fame as the great female opponent of Luther in the Low Countries.

When Bijns wrote against Luther, she always used the form of the *refrein* ('refrain'), a popular genre between the fifteenth and the early seventeenth century.¹¹ This variant of the French ballad consists of at least four stanzas and employs an intricate rhyme scheme. The last line of a stanza (*stokregel*) is repeated at the end of each stanza and has the character of a maxim; for that reason, the *stokregel* is often used as the refrain's title. The last stanza routinely addresses a non-specific 'prince'. This can be the prince (president) of a chamber of rhetoric or, in religious refrains, it can also be God or Christ.¹²

The refrains were one of the quintessential forms of the rhetoricians ('rederijkers'). Rhetoricians assembled in the chambers of rhetoric ('rederijkerskamers'), which were the influential literary institutions, organized in cities, towns and villages of the most urbanized regions of the late medieval and early modern Low Countries. Within the context of chamber meetings, rhetorician contests and local festive culture, rhetoricians (mainly from the middle groups of society, often including individual priests and teachers) produced literary texts for private and public performance, mainly (and most regularly) refrains and songs, but also plays.¹³

The rhetoricians organized interlocal festive contests where the participating chambers performed plays, songs, and refrains as an answer to a predetermined prize question.¹⁴ Rhetoricians' plays and poems

¹¹ There is only one exception: Oosterman recovered a song that must have been written by her (manuscript Leiden, UB, BPL 1289): (Oosterman, 'Jenneken Verelst en Anna Bijns'). The song is also extant in manuscript Utrecht, BMH, 111.

¹² For a good definition see also Coigneau, *Refreinen in het zotte bij de rederijkers*, vol. 1, pp. 9–13. A contemporary of Bijns, Matthijs de Castelein, wrote, in 1555, the only known rhetoricians poetics: the *Const van Rethoriken*. A facsimile was published in 1986.

¹³ See for recent research into rhetoricians and their chambers: Pleij, *Het gevleugelde woord*; Van Bruaene, *Om beters wille*, and Van Dixhoorn, *Lustige geesten*.

¹⁴ To get an idea of these competitions: Strietman, 'The drama of the rhetoricians in the Low Countries', Ramakers, *Op de Hollandse Parnas*, or Oosterman and Ramakers, *Kamers, kunst en competitie*. On the way rhetoricians probed public opinion: Hollar, *Van weelde en andere plagen* and *idem*, *De Rotterdamse spelen van 1561*.

must always be read with this highly performative and competitive culture in mind. The allegorical plays were argumentative, and often discussed the pros and cons of an answer to a prize question. The refrains were composed in the same culture of debate, often for competitions that called for refrains on a prize question. This argumentative aspect of rhetoricians' literature was ever present, and so it was in Bijns's refrains. Her refrains can be characterized as poems stating and defending opinions, and in some cases she explicitly states that a refrain is meant as a reaction to another refrain. Bijns's refrains (as a genre) are therefore embedded in a culture of argumentation and persuasion with a strong focus on competition and polemic texts. All texts belonging to that culture are created in highly intricate literary forms. In short, this was the ideal environment for the talented young poet Anna Bijns to hone her poetic skills.

As far as we know, Bijns was never a member of a chamber of rhetoric, since chambers were on the whole exclusively male. Yet she must have been very familiar with this culture since, according to Herman Pleij, Bijns was raised in rhetorician circles. Her father was likely the author of one refrain, and as early as 1512, Anna Bijns is supposed to have won a prize at a rhetoricians contest (although this cannot be proven conclusively).¹⁵ In any case, it is safe to say that she wrote her first dateable refrain in 1522, when she was 29.¹⁶

More than 200 refrains are extant. Her first and second printed collections each contain 23 refrains, the third has 70 refrains. There are also two extensive collections in manuscript ms B (signature Ghent, UB, 2166) with 112 refrains and ms A (signature Brussels, KB, 19547) with 62 refrains. Some of those in manuscript are extant in printed form as well: the number of about 200 refrains applies only to those accessible in a single copy. The latest dateable poem must have been written about 1543–1545,¹⁷ but most of the refrains were made in

¹⁵ See Pleij, *Het gevleugelde woord*, p. 372 and Pleij, '1512: Antwerpse maagd wint aanmoedigingsprijs'. Van den Branden mentions that she began writing only in 1517, but without saying more about his sources than a vague 'volgens getuigenis van een harer geleerde geestelijke tijdgenoten' ('according to the testimony of one of her learned clergyman contemporaries'); Van den Branden, *Anna Bijns*, p. 12.

¹⁶ This refrain, 'Tprijst al den rumen wech weert man of wijf is' ('They praise the wide road, whether they are man or woman'), was published in her first collection of 1528 (see Roose, *Anna Bijns*, p. 210). It is also transmitted in manuscript A where it is dated 'Vijfthienhondert [...] tweentwintich jaer' ('fifteen hundred twenty-two years').

¹⁷ It is the refrain 'Noch schijndt Merten van Rossum de beste van twee' ('Then Maarten of Rossum seems to be the best of the two'), a comparison between the

the years 1520 to 1530. This becomes apparent from manuscript B: the refrains contained in this collection are dated between 1523 and 1529 (see ills. 1 and 2). Although the last compilation was published in 1567, all of her refrains were written much earlier. This explains why she only writes against Luther and does not include Calvin in her attacks, although the latter became increasingly influential in the Low Countries after 1555. The fact that Calvin is not mentioned suggests that Bijns had stopped writing before his doctrine arrived in the Low Countries.

THE COLLECTIONS

As mentioned, there are two collections in manuscript, mss A and B, and three in printed form.¹⁸ I will focus only on the printed editions, which were part of an exceptional publishing project initiated by a Franciscan network in Brabant and Flanders.

The first collection was printed by Jacob van Liesvelt of Antwerp in 1528. All the refrains were written by Bijns, and all of them are vehemently anti-Lutheran.¹⁹ The title indicates what readers could expect to find in this book:

dreaded commander Rossum and Martin Luther, whereby Luther at the end is judged to be worse, because Rossum only kills the bodies of the people, whereas Luther kills their souls. The metaphor is obviously inspired by Matthew 10:28: 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell'. The refrain is to be found in manuscript A and must have been written after Rossum's siege of Antwerp in 1542.

¹⁸ Apart from these large collections there are also some manuscripts handed down in which only a few refrains are copied (for a survey of these manuscripts see Roose, *Anna Bijns*, pp. 71–138; for the printed collections see idem, pp. 53–70). The earliest of them is manuscript collection Brussels, KB, II 270 which contains six refrains from ca. 1527 also extant in manuscript B. All the collections containing a small number of refrains do not include new refrains. A late but special case is manuscript A (Brussels, KB, 19547), written in about 1545. It contains many refrains by Bijns (most of them already handed down in manuscript B) and also many works by other authors. In the case of some of the poems the author cannot be identified. Only the poems handed down in other collections are claimed to be by Bijns (see Roose, *Anna Bijns*, pp. 85–118). It is therefore possible that Bijns wrote some more of the refrains contained there, but this is difficult to prove by lack of an acrostic or her signature. Both manuscripts, A and B, are supposed to have been made by the Antwerpian Franciscan Enghelbrecht vander Donck (on this see Roose, *Anna Bijns*, pp. 71–72). They both contain refrains with a diversity of subjects, from anti-Lutheran to jesting, from intensely devotional to comic.

¹⁹ For a detailed analysis of this and the other printed collection of Bijns, I refer to my dissertation (forthcoming 2011).

III. 1. MS Ghent 2166, fol. 162r. The refrain ‘Ic groete u zoete boete voor quale’ (‘I greet you, sweet recompense for pain’), praising the virgin Mary (as can be seen in the three acrostics AVE MARIA), is dated January 23th, 1529.

Ill. 2. MS Brussels 19547, fol. 37v–38r. The refrains, here the last stanza's from 'Int boeck des crucen moet elck studeren' ('Everyone has to study in the Book of the Cross') and the first stanza's from 'Hoe hoogher gheleert hoe eer ghemist' ('The more learned, the easier gone wrong'), are not dated in this manuscript.

This is a beautiful and pure booklet containing many well-written and ingenious refrains full of scriptural knowledge and doctrines with a diversity of subjects, as the items in the table of contents, which follows here, tell us. [It is] very well made by the respectable and ingenious virgin Anna Bijns. [It is made] in truth refuting all these errors and serious mistakes that come from the damned Lutheran sect. This is not only justly condemned by all doctors and universities but also by the imperial majesty.²⁰

There is no doubt: these are refrains attacking Luther. One of their many slanderous allegations is that Luther and his followers are the 'devils on earth'; the Reformer himself is called a 'fanatic monk' and 'worse than a Jew'.²¹

The book contains a small number of paratexts. Apart from the title, which is obviously not written by Bijns but probably by the (unknown) compiler of the book (or the publisher or printer), there are two short poems surrounding the main refrains. One poem of eleven lines precedes the refrains by way of an introduction; it contains the name of Anna Bijns as an acrostic and a modesty formula which tells the readers that this is a woman's work ('vrouwen werck'). This formula becomes important later on. In the second short poem following the refrains, Bijns uses another modesty formula, begging her readers to inform her about any mistakes, adding that she will only accept criticism from experts in rhetoricians' poetry: everyone else should remain silent:

Woman or man who knows about rhetoric
List the mistakes, for if there's anything wrong in this book
In the art, show it bravely without fear.
But he who doesn't know about these things, who isn't clever enough
At any time to read or to write:
Let it be. If you think it is bad, just let it be.²²

²⁰ 'Dit is een schoon ende suverlijc boecxken / inhoudende veel scoone constige refereinen / vol scrifturen ende doctrinen / van diveerscen materien / na uut wisen der regelen / als hier int register na volgen / seer wel gemaect vander eersame ende ingeniose maecht / Anna Bijns subtilic en retorijsckelic / refuterende inder warachtheit alle dese dolingen ende grote abusyen comende uut de vermaledide Luterse secte. De welcke niet al leene van allen doctoren ende universiteyten mer ooc vander keyserlijcke majesteyt rechtverdelijc gecondemneert is.'

²¹ Examples chosen from the poem 'Tsijs eertsche duvels die de menscen quellen' ('They are devils on earth who crucify the people'), stanza 1.

²² 'Wijf oft man / wie conste can / van rethorijcken / Faulten noteert / is gefaelleert / in dit boec yet / Der consten aert / onvervaert / laet coenlic bliken / Maer die geen

In the course of the 23 refrains Anna Bijns changes from a straightforward modesty formula (it's only women's work) to another much more self-confident statement about her poetic skills. She plays with the readers' expectations, showing off her expertise as a rhetorician.

Her first book was a great success and her work was published by well-established Antwerp printers: Van Liesvelt already issued a reprint in the same year, 1528, followed by other editions by Vorsterman in 1541, Nuyts in circa 1548, Van Ghelen in 1564.²³ The first collection was published in revised editions with the second and third collection in 1646 and in 1668. The first collection was also translated into Latin in 1529 by the humanist Eligius Eucharius.²⁴

In its long printing history few things changed; only small variations occurred, except in orthography. Though the content did not change, the title did. That of 1548 reads: 'The first book of beautiful and pure refrains full of Scriptural knowledge [...]'. The change was necessary when Nuyts not only made a reprint of the first book but also got permission to print an entirely new collection: the second book with refrains by Anna Bijns. He mostly bound the two collections together, hoping that the popular first book would fuel people's interest in the second one.²⁵

It is assumed that the Franciscans were involved in supporting the publication of the first book. Pleij believes that the influential Franciscan preacher Matthias Weynsen was one of the main instigators of Bijns's first printed collection; he also played an important part in the publication of other pro-Catholic poetry collections and songbooks. He was, for instance, one of the two censors who, in 1539, issued the

besceet / daer af en weet / so cloec / niet / Dat hi doe / af oft toe / int lesen oft scriven /
Latet soot staet / duncket u quaet / latet driven.'

²³ Both Van Liesvelt and Vosterman were especially well-known for their Bible editions. Van den Branden thinks that Van Liesvelt was permitted to print Bijns's book because he lived in a house that belonged to the wardens of the church of Our Dear Lady in Antwerp. Van Liesvelt must have had good connections with the clergy, and was also known as a good Christian (Van den Branden, *Anna Bijns*, pp. 48–49). Van Liesvelt specialized in religious literature. He published the Dutch translation of the Lutheran Bible in a new edition with Luther's commentary (1542). Being condemned for having printed clandestine books, however, he was beheaded on 28 November 1545.

²⁴ At least one copy of each of the editions survived. There are two copies of the 1528 edition: Brussels, KB, II 25.947b A1 and Maastricht, SB, 6001 E 2. The title of the Latin translation is 'Iste est pulcher et syncerus libellus [...]' ('This is a beautiful and sincere booklet').

²⁵ For an extensive list of all the printed collections see the appendix.

printers' privilege for the strictly Catholic Antwerp *Devoot ende profitylyck boecxken*, and he is known to have encouraged more authors to write anti-Lutheran texts.²⁶ Moreover, he knew Bijns personally. Thanks to the somewhat modified acrostic PATEh MATdIAS ANNA (meaning Pater Mattias Anna) in the last stanza of the refrain 'God grant us peace this year' ('God verleen ons vrede dit nieuwe Jaer') from the third collection—no earlier source for an acrostic with this name is known—we know that Bijns must have known someone called 'pater Mattias'. Pleij argues that in Antwerp Franciscan circles at that time this could only refer to Weynsen. We do not know what the nature of these connections was; it might be that he encouraged her to publish and that she willingly obliged. These are no far-fetched assumptions given his own anti-Lutheran background.²⁷

Not only the first but also the second collection must have been very popular. A first edition was published in 1548 by Nuyts. In 1553, Van Ghelen printed a second edition,²⁸ and a third one in 1565. This collection contains many more paratexts than the first: apart from the title page and a preface, there is a number of small poems added to single refrains that are written by Bijns. Verses of two or four lines explain the reason for a refrain and sometimes even indicate which blasphemous and/or Lutheran poem was the object of her ire. The most intriguing are some texts, three poems neatly placed together at the end of the collection, which not only demonstrate Bijns's hatred for Luther but also show her own perception as well as that of someone else. The collection contains 24 refrains, 23 of them written by Anna Bijns. The 22nd was composed by an admirer, Stevijn, who has been identified as Stevijn vanden Gheenste, and thus might have been a rhetorician and priest from Bruges.²⁹ His refrain is the centrepiece of an exchange of poems between him and Bijns in which he encourages her to persist in her struggle against Luther.

²⁶ For the publication of the songbook see Scheurleer, *Een devoot ende profitylyck boecxken*.

²⁷ Concerning the acrostic and about Weynsen encouraging authors to write in the way of the Franciscans see Pleij, 'Anna Bijns als pamflettiste?', pp. 202–04, and Roose, *Anna Bijns*, p. 46.

²⁸ The copies printed by Nuyts (circa 1548) and Van Ghelen (ca. 1553) are not dated. The date is derived from the printer's privilege which in both editions is put at the end of the collection.

²⁹ On Stevijn see Ern, *Anna Bijns en Stevijn* (for Bijns's readers see Roose, *Anna Bijns*, pp. 43–52, and Keler, 'Wie is Cornelis Damas?').

Stevijn's refrain is not the only evidence of other people's opinions on Bijns. The preface, for example, is written by Levinus Brechtanus, a humanist and a Franciscan from Ghent, who, on that basis, is supposed to have been the compiler of this book as well. The introductory text is in Latin, perhaps to make her collection look like the product of a learned author. Brechtanus is no less full of hatred for Luther than Bijns, which immediately makes the reader aware of the anti-Lutheran nature of all the refrains of this collection. The intention of the second collection is very similar to that of the first, yet the exchange of letters with Stevijn and the laudatory preface of Brechtanus in the second volume are evidence of the fame Bijns had already acquired. Learned men now openly engaged with her works and did their best to promote them.

Van Keerbergh published the third and last collection of Bijns's poems for the first time in 1567; Vorsterman reprinted it in 1602 and 1611. Three different editions followed rapidly (1564, 1565 and 1567). In between the editions of 1565 and 1567, in 1566, the Iconoclastic Fury had taken place. In August of that year, Calvinists in Antwerp raided churches and cloisters and destroyed all symbols of the Catholic faith, from altarpieces to statues. They also destroyed the Franciscan monastery. At the end of his preface, the compiler of the third collection, Henrick Pippinck, complains that he is writing his introduction in 'our poor burnt down monastery of the Minorites'.³⁰

For this collection, Pippinck had chosen 70 refrains that had never been published before. All of them are devotional, none of them are anti-Lutheran. The many paratexts from this collection are different from those in the first two collections. Many refrains are now followed

³⁰ It is obvious that to compile Bijns's third collection and have it printed was not an act of pure charity on Pippinck's behalf. He had a financial stake in it, and his remark about the burnt down cloister shows this clearly. He addressed his preface to 'Maria van Marmerancy' or 'Mary of Montmorency', the wife of the very influential Count of Mansvelt. They were both known as good Christians who fought for the rights of Catholics. In the preface, Pippinck praises Mary for her steadfastness in the Catholic faith and her husband, the Count of Mansvelt, who as governor was 'een van die salvatueren der Nederlant' ('one of the saviours of the Netherlands'). Mansvelt was at this time the secretary of the States-General, a very influential position, and he was probably also a very rich man. To dedicate the collection to Mary of Montmorency suggests that Pippinck hoped to get some funding for the rebuilding of the cloister. Mary of Montmorency died on 5 February 1570, three years after publication of the book. For her and her husband, Peter Ernst of Mansfelt, see: Geevers, *Gevalen vazallen*; De Schepper, *Peter Ernst, graaf van Mansfeld*; Boden, *Gezin: von Mansfeld/de Montmorency-Nivelles*.

by poems of four to nine lines, their length being determined by the inclusion of acrostics on the name ANNA or ANNA BIINS. Most of these poems are called 'conclusions'. They refer to the preceding text, but are mostly general in nature and have little connection with the refrain: they mostly give some moral advice. It seems that these 'conclusions' are meant as the author's signatures. They might also have been composed earlier as a special type of letter sent to friends.³¹

The poems have religious subjects, and testify to a strong Catholic faith. In the preface Pippinck claims that the refrains compiled in this volume are meant to show sinful people how to return to the right path. He also explains that their sinfulness is the reason for the plagues with which God punishes people. His preface reflects the dominant Catholic opinion of the proper reaction to heresy: 'obedience to God, to the Church and to the authorities, was the Christian watchword.'³²

It is evident that in all three collections the Franciscans play an important role in compiling and editing the printed volumes. But why did they do so? Pippinck provides an explicit motive: fundraising for the rebuilding of his monastery. Yet in the two other collections, the paratexts also inform us about the motivations of the Franciscans and the gains they expected from sales of these books.

MODESTLY APOLOGIZING FOR HER OWN WRITING

It is striking that in the Southern Low Countries the Franciscans seem to have needed a woman's voice to crusade against Luther. According to Pollmann, until 1566 (the year of the Iconoclastic Fury) the Catholics of the region had no reason and, it seems, no will, to fight against Luther. Only the violent action taken by the Calvinists seemed to provide a catalyst for Catholics to react in a similarly aggressive way, but until then Catholics had remained rather tolerant.³³ Apart from the

³¹ It is also possible that they were printed first as pamphlets. If this is the case, then Pippinck would seem to be mistaken when he claims that he only wanted to edit poems that had never been printed before; or had at least not been published together in one volume. See for Bijns's poems as pamphlets: Kossmann, 'Refereynen en liedekens op losse bladen'.

³² Pollmann, 'Countering the Reformation', p. 110.

³³ Pollmann points to the very different progress of the Catholic reaction in France and in the Netherlands. The French reacted much angrier and much more violent, while the Dutch stayed calm. Pollmann believes that one reason might be that in the sixteenth century much less Dutch people said to find the Mass important than

traditional devotional works that were published in the sixteenth century, apparently only Bijns published in the vernacular against Luther in the early decades of the century. Because she was a woman, printing her works needed an apology; being female she had to overcome a number of constraints in order to be taken seriously as a poet. The general opinion was that public poetry (poems recited in public or published in print) was not a woman's occupation; an impression strengthened by the poem introducing the first collection in 1528, and in such paratexts we encounter apologetic elements. In the introductory poem to this book, Bijns asks the reader not to hold it against her if mistakes are found in the refrains, for: 'Consider that this is all the work of a woman' ('peinst tis al vrouwen werc') and that it might well be faulty ('misraect'). At first sight, Bijns seems to give the impression that literary works only amount to something if written by men. She does apologize for the audacity to take up the pen as a woman, given that in doing so she transgresses constraints set on women who were believed never to be able to write as well as a man.

Bijns modestly indicates that she was no master of poetry. However apologetic this statement sounds to modern readers, it is expressed in a poem that is excellent in form. It boasts a rather intricate rhyme scheme and contains her first and last name in acrostic. If the author was able to work in these stylistic sleights of hand without making the poem feel contrived or unnatural, how could she fear her mistakes? The apparent paradox has raised questions before; recently, Orlanda Lie was struck by it. She wondered how apparently perfect formal control and pronounced modesty could be compatible. Was Bijns not sufficiently self-confident? Lie indeed calls the combination 'paradoxical', because Bijns belies her own words: the poem is in no way 'misraect'.

French. An exception is Flanders which, as Pollmann says, 'had a very active inquisitor' (Pollmann, 'Countering the Reformation', p. 90). There was also only a limited production of books that could help people to counter the Protestants, as, according to Pollmann, devotional books just were not explicit enough. Especially in the first half of the sixteenth century only in the Southern Low Countries some publications came out against Luther. The most important are the books from Anna Bijns, because they told people what to think about the Protestants and what to do against them (*ibidem*, pp. 105–09); on the Dutch Revolt and its causes see, amongst many others, Woltjer, *Tussen vrijheidsstrijd en burgeroorlog* and Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots*.

What Lie thought to be puzzling is in fact a combination of three issues that are at stake: a gender problem, a theological issue, and the commonplace of (rhetorical) modesty. The first one, the gender problem, means that Bijns, being a woman, normally would not belong to the group of people allowed to write. There are exceptions, of course, and surely there were in the Low Countries: especially in mystic literature many female writers had been active, such as Beatrijs of Nazareth and Hadewijch. Throughout the Middle Ages, more and more examples are known of women whose counsel was heeded, whose education was admired and who had authority because of their knowledge. And yet their statements concerning theological affairs and sacred subjects were always a very delicate matter. Lacey shows that 'women in general were not expected to speak of the things of God [...]. However, it does seem that in the Middle Ages it was accepted that a Holy Mystic might speak of God through visions'.³⁴ Apparently, certain preconditions were attached to the permission to speak of God, such as living the life of a saint, of which, apart from faith, virginity was most certainly a part. Lacey illustrates this with the example of Catherine of Siena, who gained huge authority as a mystic because she remained a virgin, which is to say that her 'physical-body status was that of the holy virgin', because 'virginity has a long history as a privileged status'.³⁵

Still, women's poetry was not established yet in Bijns's time. Thus every book written by a woman needed a special reason. For the second and the third book the Franciscans provided this reason; for the first one, no other name than hers was given. She therefore had to write her own apology, in the form of a poem. The title page at least helps just a little: it claims that the book was reviewed 'by all the learned men and universities and also by the imperial majesty' ('van allen doctoren ende universiteyten mer ooc vander keyserlijcke majesteyt').

The second problem has to do with the fact that Bijns aims to play a role in a theological discussion. The title page already proclaims that the book is full of Scriptural theses and doctrines. Normally subjects like these were reserved exclusively for learned theologians. Because women were not allowed to study in a formal context such as a university, they were believed not to be able to discuss these subjects with authority. Here the reference to the learned men who reviewed the

³⁴ Lacey, 'Gendered Language and the Mystic Voice', p. 331.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

book becomes relevant. In both cases, the gender problem and the theological issue could be overcome by the confidence of readers in authorities who could help Bijns to be heard and heeded.

In both cases it is even more important that Bijns did not refer to herself as a self-confident writer. She had to submit to the widespread view that women should not publish. If she, as a particular exception, was granted the right to do so, she had to show gratitude and modesty. If publishing her first book meant that she might acquire fame as a writer and gain authority through her poems, then in the next book she could be more self-confident. This is precisely what happens in the second book. The poem mentioned earlier, in which she asks that only other rhetoricians react to her poems, testifies to a growing self-confidence. It was placed at the end of the book, when the reader had read all her poems and had had the opportunity to form his or her own opinions of her qualities as a skilled writer with an important message. In the introductory poem she does not take this risk of appearing too self-assured; she is modest and begs the reader's pardon in case she has made mistakes.

In the second stanza of this short poem Bijns uses the word 'conste' ('art'), in which, as she says, her 'perfection is little' ('perfectie [is] cleene'). This seems to be puzzling. Orlanda Lie apparently assumed that by 'conste' Bijns meant only the formal aspect of her work; according to her, Bijns seems to say that she is not experienced enough to use the rhetorician rules on writing refrains correctly. The rhetorician Matthijs de Castelein described in detail the various types of rhyme forms, the length of stanzas, and many other formal aspects. His *Conste van rhetoriken* (*Art of Rhetoric*, published 1555) does not deal with issues of content. Whereas Lie only focuses on the formal aspects of the notion of 'conste', in Bijns's poem 'conste' does not solely refer to 'literary errors or shortcomings'.³⁶ I argue instead that Bijns could (also) be referring to the content of her poems. Referring to the fact that she is a laywoman who, despite the fact she is not a learned theologian, deals with complicated theological topics, she seems to point out that she could very well have made mistakes in the message she wants to convey to her readers. She does the best she can—both in form and content—but is no theologian; it is all just a woman's work: 'vrouwen werc'.

³⁶ Lie, 'Middel nederlandse literatuur vanuit genderperspectief', esp. p. 258.

There is no doubt that Bijns really was treading on dangerous ground, since in a number of refrains she is arguing at a truly elevated theological level.³⁷ The modesty formula shows Bijns as a talented rhetorician. Well aware of her very real humble sociocultural position in the prestigious field of theological argumentation, she clearly knew how to turn her disadvantage into an advantage. Bijns cleverly plays on the fact that she is a woman and that the reader knows this too. She employed the modesty formula as an important rhetorical trick giving her the freedom to speak more freely. Her skilful sophistication in the use of the modesty formula combined with her showing off her mastery of art and knowledge is characteristic of her work.

MOTIVATION FOR SPECIFIC POEMS BY BIJNS

While the modesty formula tells us something about Bijns's skills as a rhetorician and about how she wanted people to read her works, the short poems accompanying some of the refrains tell us more about *why* Bijns wrote them in the first place. Sometimes the possible reason is mentioned several times in the short poems that precede the refrains by way of captions. For instance, these captions appear in the second book, where they show that the refrain in question was written as a reaction to a Lutheran poem. In the second book this is the case with almost every refrain. A good example is the following verse, preceding the refrain 'And under the appearance of virtue, you search the people's coffers' ('En onder tshijn van duechden soect ghy der lien kiste'):

Against a Lutheran venomous refrain
The following was written because a friend asked me.
Of this, the *stokregel* was—the writer thought this was neat
'And under the appearance of virtue, they shear the sheep'.³⁸

³⁷ For instance, in the last refrain of her first collection, 'Werden meest prophetien in zijn bruit volbracht' ('Most of the prophecies were fulfilled in his bride'), Bijns speaks about the fulfilment of Old and New Testament prophesies. To be able to treat such a subject, one had to be familiar with contemporary Bible exegesis. I believe that this was even more sensitive (and more dangerous?) for her than for the aforementioned saintly women who had visions and therefore were considered to be inspired by God. Bijns was not just the passive vessel through which God transmitted his message, but she shows her active use of reason and argumentation by entering into theological debates at such a high level.

³⁸ 'Teghen een Luters Refereyn / vol venijns / Es dnavolghende ghemaect duer vrients begeeren / Daer den stock af was / tdocht selcken wat fijns / En onder tshijn van duechden sy de schapen scheeren.' (p. 114)

With this refrain, Bijns claims to be reacting to a Lutheran refrain 'And under the appearance of virtue, they shear the sheep' ('En onder tschijn van duechden sy de schapen scheeren'). Bijns responded by retaining the first half of the *stokregel* and changing the second to obtain the new one: 'And under the appearance of virtue, you search the people's coffers' ('En onder tschijn van duechden soect ghy der lien kiste'). The maxim now points out that the Lutherans merely pretend to have the best intentions, but in fact wish to rob people of their money. Bijns thus upbraids them for their greed, nicely mirroring the polemic of the Lutheran *stokregel*, which exposes the Catholics' greed (for instance, with reference to the selling of indulgences, a special form of sheepshearing: 'sheep' is a concept Bijns often uses for the faithful flock),³⁹ and reversing it. Bijns used the procedure of inversion as a rhetorical trick—deliberately, it would seem.

Bijns seems to have rejoiced in writing against Luther, but sometimes suddenly returns to a modesty formula, as if she were afraid to have taken her attack too far or maybe fearing that others might think so. This is the case, for example, just before the last refrain, in a verse of seven lines. The brief rhyme is a justification and compares the polemic qualities of her refrains to the writings of the opposition:

Even if I have written something reprehensible
against the Lutherans, it would be no wonder,
for they write as least as hatefully
against the Holy Church, to bring down
faith. What I write is specifically based
on the word of the Wise Man who says without mocking.
You will answer the fool according to his foolishness.⁴⁰

This seems to be an apologia for her aggressive style: the Lutherans write pieces that are reprehensible, because they write against the Church. It is therefore only right for her to react in the same fierce and crude manner. She supports this point with a Biblical argument, the 'word of the Wise Man', which refers to Proverbs 26:5: 'Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit' ('Antwoerde

³⁹ Of course, Bijns is not the only one who uses this concept. It is very common in both Catholic and evangelical circles.

⁴⁰ 'Al hebic hier gescreven wat verwytelijc // yet / Tegen de Luteranen ten es gheen wonder // vry / Want sy scrijven wel noch eens so spytelijc // siet / Teghen de heylighe kercke daer sy tonder // by / Brenghen tgheloove ic fundere bysonder // my / Opt woort dat de Wijseman sonder spot // seyt / Ghy seltd den sot antwoorde naer sijn sotheyt.' (pp. 183–84).

den sot nae sine sotheit, dat hem niet en duncke, dat hi wijs si'). With the authority of the Bible she apologizes for attacking the Lutherans in general, and for the manner in which she does so in particular.

THE FRANCISCANS' ROLE

The way in which Bijns presents herself in the first compilation, especially her playing with the expectations the readers might have knowing they were reading a woman's poems, she creates authority by influencing the reader precisely through his opinions about her as a poet. We have seen how she builds on this in the second compilation where she appears as highly aware of her own skills, much more so than in the first one. This owes much to Bijns's intelligent use of verses, but also to the compilers of her works, the Franciscans and other theologians. I will now discuss their views of Bijns and how they worked to increase her authority in their struggle against Luther. I will therefore focus on the prefaces of the printed compilations and the exchange of letters with Stevijn.

I already argued that the Franciscans were involved in the compilation of the three books and that Matthias Weynsen is said to have published the first volume. However, her contacts with the theologians can also be seen in another way. The second collection includes a refrain composed by one Stevijn.⁴¹ This poem is a response to an earlier refrain by Bijns, placed as number 21 in the collection. Bijns again responded with refrain number 23 in the collection, 'I am of good will, but I cannot finish it' ('Den wille is goet maer ic en cans volbringen // niet'). The 'exchange of refrains' was subsequently printed in the collection.

⁴¹ Ern only identified Stevijn with the priest and rhetorician Stevijn vande Gheeste from Bruges based on their sharing of a first name (see Ern, 'Anna Bijns en Stevijn'). However, what if this 'contact' with Stevijn just was part of the tricks the Franciscans used to give Bijns more authority? Stevijn was not engaged in publishing or compiling the collection; the author of the preface, Levinus Brechtanus, might therefore also have done the work. Of course, Stevijn's style in the refrain differs from that of Bijns: for instance, the choice of words and rhyme techniques are really different. Alternatively, what if Brechtanus used the name of (any) Stevijn, unknown to the readers among the Antwerp clergy, as an *alter ego*? He could then make clear that Bijns was known not only in Antwerp, but also in other regions such as Flanders. It would strengthen her authority more than contacts only within Antwerp could do. So the question is: did Ern find Bijns's real correspondent, or did he just find someone who coincidentally shared the alter ego's name?

The *stokregel* of Stevijn's refrain is a double play on Bijns's motto 'meer suers dan soets' ('more sour than sweet') and on the *stokregel* of her own refrain: 'More sour than sweet will make the sweet taste sour' ('Meer suers dan soets / sal noch tsoete voor tsuer smaken'). Stevijn shows amazement at Bijns's poems, caused by the fact that Bijns is a woman and yet such an able composer of refrains:

A great amazement has disturbed my brain
because I saw many a male heart stumble for fear
and fall dismally out of Peter's ship
on which your ably rowing female spirit lives⁴²

While many men have already given up ('have fallen from Peter's ship'), Bijns keeps on fighting for the Church, Stevijn exclaims. He clearly admires such perseverance and likes to encourage her to continue the struggle against Luther. In this way, Stevijn tells Bijns (and her readers!) how much he agrees with her and how much he adores her poetry. By being printed, of course, this poem was made known to the reader of Bijns's book. The question is: do we know for sure that this is what her admirer wanted? Did he write the poem for Bijns only and did it get into the collection by accident, or did he really write it to be read by everyone?

It is possible that initially the exchange of refrains was not meant to be published, because Bijns 'signed' her response with an acrostic of her name and that of her supporter, Stevijn, and she also added a sort of conclusion, as we have seen in the third collection, adding her name by way of four acrostics too. In a printed collection this does not make much sense. This could mean that both refrains were sent as letters first. On the other hand, the use of so many acrostics and the play on the *stokregels* again show Bijns's talents as a rhetorician. Stevijn's admiration can be seen as a rhetorical trick in the game of increasing her authority as a poetess who has to be taken seriously as an expert in theological matters, since she obviously can communicate on the same level with such a learned theologian.

Bijns responds to Stevijn's refrain by postulating that she will never give up the fight:

⁴² 'Een groot verwonderen mi den sin duerteest // heeft / Siende menich manlijc herte dwelc nu bevreest // sneeft / Uut Petrus scheepken allendich gevallen // nu / In welcke cloec roeyende u vrouwelijc gheest // leeft' (stanza 1, ll. 1–4).

I wish to keep on fighting them until the day I die
and do not mind if I will only receive small thanks.⁴³

On her own, however, she is too weak. What Stevijn admires—her strength as a woman—is represented by Bijns as her weakness, and she entreats the priest to join her struggle. Using a modesty formula, she says that Stevijn could do this better:

Please provide that which is lacking in me.
Show me your light, that I can light mine from you.⁴⁴

At first sight, the modesty formula in this refrain clashes with the self-confidence Bijns shows in the paratexts to this collection, in which she does not mince her words in the battle against Luther. Yet again, just as with the modesty formula in the first collection, she is playing with the expectations of the readers. She now also shows her obedience to the Church and to a priest; she clearly knows how to be modest. At the same time she argues that fighting against Luther—which Stevijn praised—is something she cannot do all by herself. If Catholics want Luther to be banished, they have to join the fight. This is especially relevant for priests:

The heretics know about my writings
but they don't take it seriously, because it's made by a woman
[...]
You have been placed as a guardsman, so let sound the trumpet
because you find the enemies surrounding God's people⁴⁵

She incites Stevijn to write against Luther too, and has a very precise idea about what he should do. According to Pollmann, in the Catholic Low Countries very little was written against Luther in the vernacular or in Latin that was useful for the faithful,⁴⁶ and Bijns seems to have noticed this too. She clearly indicates that writings are very important, the more so because she probably knew Stevijn as a priest *and* a rhetorician, in which case he surely could take action. She invites him to

⁴³ 'Ic wil tegen hen vechten tot dat ic sterven // sal / Niet achtende al sal ic danck verwerven // smal' (stanza 5, ll. 15–16).

⁴⁴ 'Vervuldt ghy tghene dat mach gebreken // my / Toont u licht datter dmyne wert ontsteken // by' (stanza 3, ll. 1–2).

⁴⁵ 'Legghen de ketters ooc aen mijn scrijven merck / Maer slaent voor boerte denckende tes wijven // werc / [...] / Ghy sijt wachter ghestelt laet clincken de basoen // dijn / Want gy de vianden tvolc gods omringen // siet'.

⁴⁶ See Pollmann, 'Countering the Reformation', p. 108.

take part in her struggle and, by printing this exchange of refrains, the compiler—who probably chose the refrains—also invites the readers to write, or at least to read the refrains attentively and follow Bijns's advice: avoid any kind of contact with the Lutherans.⁴⁷

The 'problem' of women's writings, remarked on by Bijns herself, also plays a role in the third collection, published in 1567 by Van Keerbergh in Antwerp. It was compiled by Henrick Pippinck, 'minister provinciael' ('provincial head') of the Franciscan province of 'Nederduytsland' (the Low Countries). It was clearly important to him to mention in his preface the fact that he had compiled the works of a woman. It is striking that Pippinck still finds it necessary to apologize for what he had done, since the first and the second collection had been reprinted at least three times before 1567—the latest in 1564/1565. The entire city of Antwerp most likely already knew about Bijns and her opinion of Luther. As it would appear, many people bought her books—the necessity to reprint provides ample evidence.

Nonetheless, Pippinck apologizes. He seems to do this in order to stabilize and even increase her authority as a poet and lay theologian who is admired and supported by learned theologians. Pippinck therefore shows at first that the refrains are constructed 'very artfully [...] by a godly, wise, Catholic virgin' ('seer constelijck [...] van een godlijcke wijse Catholicke maget'). If there is any reader who might have some doubts, then Pippinck can provide the ultimate argument, derived from Holy Scripture itself:

Even though a virgin wrote this, do not condemn it. Learned men have read it and approved of it. Moreover, the Spirit was promised to everyone, as Joel [3:1] says: 'Your sons and daughters will prophesy, and in those days I will pour my spirit out over my servants and maids'.⁴⁸

Pippinck thus provides two arguments for listening to Bijns: firstly, (learned) men have read her refrains and have approved of them, and secondly, the Bible says that God explicitly granted the gift of prophesy

⁴⁷ In this fragment we also encounter the only reference to the fact that Luther and/or (some of) his followers knew about her writings, but that they did not take her seriously. Sadly, Bijns does not write more about this. Nothing is known about Lutherans reacting to Bijns's works.

⁴⁸ '[...] al ist een maghet die dit heeft gheschreven / ende wilt daeromme niet verwerpen gheleerde mannen hebbent gelesen ende geaprobeert / daerboven den Geest naer Johelis oorconde is beloofte alle vleesche / u Soonen ende dochteren sullen propheeten op mijn knechten / en maerten / sal ic in die dagen van mijnen geest storten' (pp. 24–25).

not to the learned, but to uneducated laymen and women. In the margin, he gives a second verse concerning this claim, Acts 2:17–18: ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit over all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even over my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.’ The Bible itself therefore allows women to preach about important matters in apocalyptic times, because the Holy Ghost was also poured out upon them. With such authority, Bijns’s authorship was sufficiently justified: she received her inspiration from the Holy Ghost. The urgency arises because the gift of prophesy is only to be given at the end of time, as the Bible says. Bijns seems to have believed that the end was nigh, a view that is affirmed in many of her refrains too.⁴⁹

Pippinck does not neglect to stress Bijns’s educational credentials: he says that she taught pupils and at the same time he links her to the famous learned women known in Classical times and throughout the Middle Ages. This seems puzzling: although Bijns was a teacher, we do not know anything about her higher education.⁵⁰ Pippinck does not point to a university education, but to her skills as a rhetorician and her knowledge of the Bible and the Catholic tradition.⁵¹ This is also important for the other women he lists: they are good writers and, in the best case, they know much about religious issues. He says: ‘Earlier, many learned women and virgins have been found who were better than the men’ (‘Daer zijn hier voortijts veel geleerde vrouwen / ende maechden ghevonden die mannen hebben verwonnen’), and, among others, he mentions Cornelia, praised by Quintilian, or Diotima, who

⁴⁹ The inspiration received from the Holy Ghost is also a well-known topos in rhetorician literature; see Moser, *De strijd voor rhetorica*, pp. 69–97. Probably the most famous example comes from the miracle play *Mariken van Nieumeghen* (*Mary of Nimmegen*) in which Mary is asked by the Devil to recite a refrain. At first, she refuses, because the composition of such a poem cannot be taught, but is a gift from the Holy Ghost. Because she has been living in sin with the Devil for seven years, she fears that she can no longer exercise this gift. But it turns out that she can do it, so her connection with God is not totally broken. There is a chance of forgiveness. A recent edition of *Mariken van Nieumeghen* is to be found in Ramakers and Wilmink, *Mariken van Nieumeghen & Elckerlijc*.

⁵⁰ See her biography: Van den Branden, *Anna Bijns*.

⁵¹ Earlier, in his Latin preface to Bijns’s second collection, Levinus Brechtanus called Bijns a ‘Sappho in Dutch rhymes’ (‘in rithmis Sappho Lesbia teutonicis’). Brechtanus is especially known as a writer of drama. His *Euripus* is one of the plays most frequently performed by the Jesuits—see Valentin, ‘Aux origines du théâtre Néo-latin’.

was addressed with the title of 'mistress' even by Socrates. Most praise however is awarded to those women who knew the Bible, such as Catharine of Siena, Hildegard of Bingen or 'the second Apaides'.⁵²

But it is not like the woman who is so enlightened in Godly knowledge like the second Apaides who was well-versed in Holy Scripture and in the exegesis of the whole Bible. There is also Catharine of Siena, praised by Volateranus, and then there is the virgin Hildegard [...]⁵³

According to Pippinck, many women still seem to need the approval of male authorities—as in the case of Diotima—but others, especially the latter three, no longer needed this, probably because the Holy Ghost himself enlightened them, since there was no other way in which they could know so much about the Bible. Anna Bijns seems to be one of those women.

With the third collection, Anna Bijns for the first time seems not to have been involved in the compilation and publishing process. She quite likely did have a hand in the first collection, as can be shown from the introductory poem that seems to have been specially written for this collection. The large number of paratexts by Bijns in the second collection also shows that she was engaged in that publishing project. The third collection, however, does not contain paratexts written by her other than the conclusions mentioned earlier. These, however, seem to have been disseminated earlier in the form of pamphlets. Could Pippinck be making use of Bijns's fame to support his own objectives without her knowledge?⁵⁴ And why did he not write any poems himself? He is very clear about this: he, the famous preacher from the pulpit, known for his sharp attacks on the heretics,⁵⁵ wishes

⁵² As far as I know it is not known who 'the second Apaides' ('childless woman' or 'virgin') is.

⁵³ 'Maer het en is niet by deser vrouwe te gelijcken / die in godlijcke scientie soo hooge is verlicht als die tweede Apaides die inder heylicher scriftuere ende het recht / verstant van den geheelen Bijbel was geverseert. Dit is die tweede Catherina van Senen die Volateranus prijst / dit is die andere maget Hildegardis [...]' 'Volateranus' presumably refers to Raffaello Maffei (1451–1522), an Italian humanist, historian and theologian who was born in Volterra, Italy. For example, Johannes Ravisius cited him for a collection of biographies of famous women, especially for the chapter on 'De moribus mulierum, et de ducenda' (see Ravisius, *De memorabilibus et claris mulieribus*). Volateranus also wrote an encyclopedia about all the subjects known at that time: the 'Commentariorum rerum urbanarum libri XXXVIII' (Rome, 1506). About Maffei and his works: Maissen, *Von der Legende zum Modell*, especially pp. 139–40.

⁵⁴ Thus Roose, *Anna Bijns*, pp. 58–59.

⁵⁵ Roose, *Anna Bijns*, p. 57.

to warn the Christians of an evil doctrine, but he just lacks the time to write:

And because I had so much work to do in the province that is given to me, and which is an unfair burden, in these Low Countries where many cloisters were robbed and destroyed and burned down with intense hate against me and my subjects, and many monks were banished, so I could not do my most important work; thus, I've seen some very fruitful books that were published many years ago by Anna Bijns,⁵⁶ a respectable virgin, and they were read by many men and women, and some work was left which had never been published before, so I have compiled it for the glory of Christ and for the profit of the community [...]⁵⁷

It seems strange that the famous preacher did not write himself if he had to say something so important. The fact that some good poetry was available seems fortuitous, but is this really what he wants to say? Of course, the argument might also be another rhetorical trick to turn Bijns into an authority once more: he offers his fame to add to the fame of the one who was a very talented poet and could so aptly reach laypeople with her poems.

THE WORDS OF A VIRGIN

It should always be taken into account that the compilers of the collections tried to increase Bijns's authority on theological issues by stressing her elevated knowledge of these matters, as is asserted in the title pages, by Stevijn, and by placing her in a long tradition of female writers, as Pippinck did. They all stress her respectability too. This attribute is more important than it might seem at first sight. It is closely con-

⁵⁶ Could Bijns—as a woman who did not have much funding—go to a printer and have her refrains printed? Pleij believes this to be an unconvincing story (Pleij, 'Komt een vrouwtje bij de drukker...'). However, nothing suggests that Pippinck believed that his Franciscan colleagues published the refrains instead of Bijns herself.

⁵⁷ 'Ende want door den last der provincie die my onweerdich is bevolen / in dese Neder Duytslanden daer veel Cloosters gerooft / ende ghedistruweert zijn / ja ghebrant uut grooten haet / over mijn persoone ende mijn ondersaten / veel Religieusen verjaecht / niet wetende waer si soude bevaeren / so en hebbe ic mijn principale saken niet connen absolveren / dus tot een vertoeven aenmerckende seker boecken die Anna Bijns / een eerweerdige maget over menige jaren tegen die secten heeft uut gegeven / die seer vruchtbaer zijn gheweest / ende getrocken van mannen ende vrouwen / ende noch seker werck resterende was / dat noyt ghedruckt is gheweest / so hebbe ick dat tot Christus glorie int licht ghebrocht / ende profijt der ghemeente [...]'.

nected to another attribute that is attached to Bijns in all of the three books: her virginity.

The title page of the first book claims that it is 'very well done by the respectable and ingenious virgin Anna Bijns' ('seer wel gemaect vander eersame ende ingeniose maecht / Anna Bijns'). The second volume employs nearly the same words: it is 'done very rationally and in the manner of the Rhetoricians by the respectable and intelligent virgin Anna Bijns' ('seer subtielijck ende Rethorijckelijck ghemaect vander eersame ende verstandighe maecht Anna Bijns'). In the Latin preface, Levinus Brechtanus argues that the writings of this woman are so sophisticated that a man would not have to be ashamed if he had written them ('[...] que non pudeat composuisse viros'). Brechtanus now only refers to the woman Bijns, not to the virgin; in this way increasing her authority as a female poet, not as a virgin poet. The theme of the virgin poet returns when Henrick Pippinck extols her skills. On the title page he says the refrains are 'made with great artistic competence by the honourable, devout, Catholic and very famous virgin Anna Bijns' ('ghemaect met grooter const / door die eerwerdige Godvruchtige Catholijcke / ende ser vermaerde maghet Anna Bijns'). All of these three title pages stress that the refrains are of high quality and that a very respectable virgin made them.

The recurring references in all the collections to Bijns's attribute of maidenhood can only be explained if we take a look at a collection that has merely been mentioned in passing so far: the Latin version of her first collection which was printed in Antwerp just one year after the original collection, in 1529. It was the Ghent priest, humanist and teacher Eligius Eucharius who translated the complete first collection into Latin.⁵⁸ Apparently he thought it important that people from abroad could read the book. In that case it had to be translated into the Latin *lingua franca*, making the poems accessible to learned people who did not know Dutch. Perhaps he even hoped that Luther himself would read the book, although there is no evidence that he ever did.⁵⁹ In any case, Eucharius seemed to be convinced that the aim of the

⁵⁸ Concerning Eucharius: Roose, *Anna Bijns*, pp. 65–68.

⁵⁹ The fact that Luther did know what happened in the Low Countries is shown by the death of the two Augustinians mentioned at the beginning of this article. He wrote a song about this and sent a (public?) letter to the Noblemen of the Low Countries (see Akerboom and Gielis, "A new song shall begin here"). Whether he knew about all the writings against him is something that unfortunately cannot be ascertained, but it is highly unlikely.

book could be made even more explicit than it already was. Eucharius took matters into his own hands: he added a Latin preface to the book in the form of a poem, placed directly above the first refrain: 'To the true lovers of the Christian religion' ('Ad veros Christiane religionis amatores').⁶⁰ The preface is to recommend Bijns's collection to the 'true Christians', that is to say the Catholics, the ones who were probably meant to read all her books; after all, they had to be warned against the Lutheran error. With this 'song' Eucharius shows that he shares Bijns's attitude towards the Lutherans. He says, for instance:

The power of the Church means death to you, cowardly Luther,
most evil of soul thieves, from now on you can no longer
throw deceitful deathly spears at the innocents.⁶¹

Luther will be fought with the refrains. He will lose the struggle and will no longer be able to distribute his teachings, says Eucharius. And to make Luther's defeat—thus taken for granted—even more painful, he explains by whom he will be defeated:

Not a man, but a woman will conquer you with these songs
and she will crush your head with her feet.⁶²

For Luther, it would be painful to be defeated in any case, but it would, for anyone, be even more painful to be defeated by a woman. Furthermore, he will not only be defeated, he will be utterly crushed. Here Eucharius uses an analogy that could hardly be more authoritative: Bijns crushes Luther with her refrains as Mary crushed the snake by giving birth to Christ. The snake, a motif taken from the story of Adam and Eve (alluding to Genesis 3:15), represents the Devil who was defeated through the birth of Christ and thus would no longer be able to seduce mankind. This link between the Fall and the birth of Christ is often made typologically, and the emphasis is always on the important role played by women (Eve and Mary).⁶³ Eucharius has

⁶⁰ With thanks to Werner Gelderblom MA (Radboud University Nijmegen) for the translation of the entire poem and also for the Latin preface to the second volume.

⁶¹ 'Ecclesiae robur, Mors tibi Luther iners / Amplius haud posthac animarum pessime latro / Subdola in innocuos spicula mortis ages.' (ll. 4–6).

⁶² 'His te carminibus non vir sed foemina vincet—Atque tuum pedibus conteret illa caput' (ll. 7–8).

⁶³ Bijns herself often uses this image too. She frequently calls Luther and his supporters 'serpentes' ('serpents'). A good illustration is refrain no. 10 from her first collection, with the title: 'Die bi serpente gaet crijcht vanden venijne' ('Whosoever goes to the serpent will receive poison').

no qualms about comparing Bijns to Mary and to attribute a similarly beneficial function to Bijns's refrains as to the birth of Christ, even more so because both women share an important characteristic: they are virgins. He delicately points out this aspect:

With the sword of reason
the virgin has cut your reins [...]⁶⁴

What we see here, is an analogy between Mary and Bijns based in the first instance on what they do—release mankind from the Devil (or from Luther who is nearly as evil as the Devil)—and secondly on what attributes they share—they are both virgins. The use of the metaphor of crushing the snake's head is most important in constructing this connection between the two women. Bijns acts exactly as Mary did. Only the enemy and the way in which he is destroyed differ, but Bijns lives like Mary lived; she was also, and remained, a maiden when the destruction took place.⁶⁵ The extensive parallel that is created here increases Bijns's authority as a public poet and as an expert in theological matters. It could have been the most important step in making her writings acceptable to both learned and unlearned readers. It clearly shows that learned people were reading her work and that it would be worth reading her work throughout the Christian world.

CONCLUSION

This study asked which strategies were employed to make Anna Bijns an authoritative voice in the struggle against Luther in and around Antwerp. We distinguished between the strategies Bijns used and those used by the Franciscans who acted as compilers and editors of her books. It can be concluded that there were important differences between these two sets of strategies.

Firstly, those of Anna Bijns herself. She often explains to the reader why she wrote a certain refrain. Here, the struggle is really evident,

⁶⁴ '[...] gladio rationis habenas—Virgo tuas secuit [...]' (ll. 9–10).

⁶⁵ Lacey shows that the attribute of maidenhood is often used, especially in descriptions of the lives of women saints. She illustrates this with the example of Catherine of Siena, who gained huge authority as a mystic because she remained a virgin, which is to say that her 'physical-body status was that of the holy virgin', because 'Virginity has a long history as a privileged status', see Lacey, 'Gendered Language and the Mystic Voice', p. 332.

because often a refrain is meant as a response to a Lutheran refrain. Bijns's response is on the same level as the material to which she reacts and she employs the same literary style in the same way: she writes refrains, uses the vernacular, and employs the same strategies. She calls this tactic 'answering the fool according to his foolishness', as is shown from the short poems in the second collection. In these refrains, Bijns is the pugnacious poetess who does her very best to defeat Luther. But in other ways there is also a very modest Anna Bijns. We have observed her in the first poem of the first collection, using the modesty formula and telling the reader that he surely must inform her about the mistakes in her writings. If this was meant as a sign of her humility, it is a pretence: just as in other cases where such a formula was used by male authors, the writer who used it was, according to the rhetorical principles of the time, a good poet. Here it draws attention to the remarkable fact that the formula is skilfully used by a woman. Of course, the usual game with the expectations of the reader is given an extra dimension when conducted by a woman.

Through her own writings, we encounter a fierce woman who is not afraid of Lutheran reactions. The modesty formulas—in which each reader by reading just one of the refrains will recognize the irony—only serve to stress once more how artfully she knows to respond. There are also some important characteristics added by the image the Franciscans created as an extra layer around her. This extra layer is about the praising her talents as a writer and as a wise woman who is to be placed in a long tradition of wise women going back to the ancient world. The most important part of this image is the attribute of virginity. Maidenhood is a very relevant characteristic that is stressed many times in legends of saints. Here, it gives the Franciscans the possibility of connecting Bijns's life to that of the Virgin Mary. The Franciscans used her victory over the Devil as a parallel to Bijns's (desirable) victory over Luther. These strategies, and especially the analogy with Mary, enhance Bijns's authority. Anna Bijns, the new Mary, is the one Catholics could identify with. The idea of a woman defeating the frightened Reformer must also have been a very attractive one; it made Luther big like the devil but destructible like a snake.

These strategies were not only used in one collection but are recurrent; stressing the fact that she was a virgin had already been done in the first book, but it is restated in the Latin translation and in the second book. Pippinck, who explicitly refers to the Catholic tradition and stresses Bijns's maidenhood, most elaborately used it in the third

book. All those involved directly in the publications of one of the printed collections, such as Eucharius, Brechtanus or Pippinck with their fulsome praise of Bijns and the stress they put on her exceptional learnedness and talent, brought about the consolidation of her status as an authoritative poet who could effortlessly hold her own in elevated theological discussions.

How could this (formally) uneducated laywoman become the mouthpiece of the learned theologians such as the Franciscans? The easiest answer is that the Franciscans were able to hide behind her. She is the one whose name is set out on the title pages, and the Franciscans only play a minor role. This is especially true in the first book, but no longer in the second and third books: in the second one, two learned men simultaneously praise Bijns's works, and the third one is created by a Franciscan. All three men are highly visible, which is true for the maker of the Latin translation too. So *hiding* does not seem to explain her role. Could it then be, literally, what Pippinck claims in his preface: that the Franciscans wanted to convey Bijns's message but simply did not have the time to do this themselves? This, of course, also seems far from convincing. Pippinck is the only one who makes the claim, but it seems odd that he, the famous preacher and enemy of any Reform, could not have written what he wanted to say. On the other hand, Bijns could without doubt write very well. And there is another huge advantage: she could write in the literary form that was highly preferred in her time by everyone, one of the rhetoricians' favourite forms—the refrain. She also wrote in the vernacular, so it would be easily accessible to everyone, and her language is direct and easily understood. Furthermore, Bijns is the virgin whom the editors of her second and third collections compare to the Holy Virgin Mary, because she has the weapons in her hands to crush Luther in the same way as Mary had done by crushing the snake's head.

Bijns was not the only author who was encouraged to write against Luther. Pippinck's predecessor Weynsen employed the same strategy with a number of writers. It seems to be a typical Franciscan way of disseminating their ideas: to exploit someone's talents for their own goal. The Franciscans must have believed that literary texts were attractive to the Catholics, texts that could of course be highly argumentative, which they ought to be, because the goal was to warn and arm people against the Lutheran danger. The ancient idea of the *utile dulci* seems to be functioning here again: it was the popular form of the refrain that could make difficult topics interesting to the readers.

It seems evident that the Franciscans of Antwerp actively promoted Bijns to become their mouthpiece. Perhaps this idea had to grow: they, or Weynsen, could have waited to see whether the first book would be a success. When the idea proved to be unexpectedly successful—it was reprinted and, most importantly, translated into Latin—they thought about making a second one. This could also be the reason why it took so long—twenty years—before this volume was published: it had to be proven that many people would buy the first collection and that more and new refrains would be in demand. With their success, the Franciscans ventured to put themselves in the foreground by continuing to praise Bijns, but also explicitly putting their own names in the collection. The second collection was also successful, and a third collection—printed at last in 1567—must have seemed an attractive proposition.

I believe that the time gap between the first and the second collection is significant: some important parameters had changed. Luther was still active, but Bijns had become famous, the book had sold very well, and the Franciscans had the audacity not just to support her, as they did with many other authors, but even to add their names as a proof of quality and religious truth. For Bijns becoming their unique mouthpiece does not seem to have been an immediate choice of a project made at short notice, but rather the result of a long process of growth and maturing in which the impact of the first collection must be seen as a determining factor. Finally, Bijns's authority caused her work to become a fast-selling item, so that, in the third collection, Pippinck could lean on her fame as a writer of two collections still being read by the public, and on the fact that she, the well-versed lay virgin, writes so excellently that he, the learned priest, felt no need to add anything.

APPENDIX—LIST OF ALL PRINTS OF (AND FROM)
THE THREE COLLECTIONS

First collection

Van Liesvelt 1528, Antwerp (*Dit is een schoon ende suverlijc boecxken*)

- Brussels, KB, II 25.947b A1 (RP)
- Maastricht, SB, 6001 E 2

Vorsterman 1541, Antwerp (*Dit is een schoon ende suyverlijc boecxken*)

- Amsterdam, IISG, AB G 296 s

Nuyts [1548], Antwerp (*Het yerste boeck inhoudende veel scoone constige refereynen*)

- Brussels, KB, II 25.947 aA (RP)
- Den Haag, KB, 1703 G 1
- Den Haag, KB, 1703 G 2
- Den Haag, KB, 1703 G 3
- Leiden, UB, 1497 G 24

Van Ghelen 1564, Antwerp (*Dits een schoon ende suyverlijck boecxken*)

- Brussels, KB, II 25.948 A1 (RP)
- Paris, BNF, YI-1603

Latin translation

Vorsterman 1529, Antwerp (*Iste est pulcher et syncerus libellus*)

- Antwerpen, SB, C 26861
- Brussels, KB, VH 23.426 A (RP)
- Gent, UB, G 8341
- London, BL, HMNTS 3425.a.31
- Maastricht, SB, SB 6001 E 1
- Paris, BNF, RES P-YC-1045

Second collection

Nuyts [1548], Antwerp (*Het tweede boeck vol schoone ende constighe refereynen*)

- Brussels, KB, II 25.947b A2 (RP)
- Den Haag, KB, 1703 G 1
- Den Haag, KB, 1703 G 2
- Leiden, UB, 1497 G 24

Van Ghelen [1553], Antwerp (*Het tweede boeck vol schoone ende constighe refereynen*)

- Amsterdam, IISG, AB G 296 s
- Den Haag, KB, 1703 G 3

Van Ghelen 1565, Antwerp (*Het tweede boeck vol schoone ende constighe refereynen*)

- Brussel, KB, II 25.948 A2 (RP)
- Paris, BNF, YI-1604

Third collection

Van Keerberghe 1567, Antwerp (*Een seer scoon ende suyver boeck*)

- Brussel, KB, VH 23.873 A
- Den Haag, KB, 1703 D 39
- Gent, UB, RES 460
- London, BL, HMNTS 3433.aaaa.24
- Paris, BNF, YI-1608
- Utrecht, UB, Z Oct 1847 Rariora
- Trier, SB, W V 41
- Trier, SB, W III 11 8'

Verdussen 1602, Antwerp, (*Gheestelyck refereyn boeck*)

- Amsterdam, UvA, OK 63-5971 [976 C 20]
- Brussels, KB, II 25.949 A
- Gent, UB, BL 7838
- Leiden, UB, 1497 F 39
- Paris, BNF, YI-1616

Verdussen 1611, Antwerp (*Gheestelyck refereyn boeck*)

- Amsterdam, IISG, AB G 299 s
- Gent, UB, BL 1976

All three collections together

Verdussen 1646, Antwerp (*Konstighe refereynen vol schoone schrifture*)

- Amsterdam, UvA, OK 63-5973 [976 C 22]
- Antwerpen, SB, C 16144 [C2-546 f]
- Antwerpen, Plantijn-Moretus, R 50.38
- Den Haag, KB, 839 F 10
- Groningen, UB, A 6558

- Gent, UB, HER 1827
- Gent, UB, TA 262
- Leiden, UB, 1200 G 25
- Utrecht, UB, MOLTZER 6 C 14

Verhulst 1668, Antwerp (*Konstighe refereynen vol schoone schrifture*)

- Antwerpen, SB, C 12683 [C2-545 g]
- Gent, UB, HER 1431
- Gent, UB, BL 7827
- Leiden, UB, 1072 A 9: 1-3

Manuscripts Cited

Brussels, KB, II 270

Brussels, KB, 19547 (manuscript A)

Ghent, UB, 2166 (manuscript B)