

BIBLICAL PLAYS IN THE LOW COUNTRIES

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Introduction

In her book about the biblical drama in Europe Lynette Muir has given us an efficient matrix for the classification and the discussion of biblical drama in individual countries and I hope in some measure to follow her example, and to use her findings, gratefully, to chart the survival and the production of some biblical plays in the Low Countries.¹ In this contribution in honour of David Mills, a scholar who has extensively and fruitfully worked in the vineyard of biblical drama, I will focus on a selection of biblical plays from the Low Countries, in particular Old Testament plays, with brief discussions about New Testament plays, especially parables, and topical plays.² Special attention will be given to the manner in which the material is used to convey those matters which were foremost in the minds of the Rhetoricians.

Cycles and Passion Plays

A startling difference between the drama of the Low Countries and its neighbours is the absence of cycle plays: the only survival of anything analogous to the English Mystery Cycles, the French *Passions* and the German *Passionsspiele*, are the two *Bliscapen*, remnants of a seven-part cycle of The Joys of Our Lady and different in performance practice from the cycles: the plays were meant to be performed in seven consecutive years.³

This cycle brought together Old and New Testament material, and the First Joy (*Eerste bliscap*) included the Temptation of Adam, the Expulsion from Paradise, the Trial in Heaven, Joachim and Anna, the early life of the Virgin and the Annunciation. The Seventh Joy (*Sevenste bliscap*) is entirely about the Death and the Assumption of Our Lady. The missing plays, according to the Epilogue attached to the Seventh Joy, were about the Nativity, the Three Magi, Jesus and the Doctors in the Temple, the Resurrection, and Pentecost. The Passion obviously did not fit the focus on the Joys of Our Lady.

There is no other play surviving which can be called a Passion Play, apart from the so-called Maastricht (Ripuarian) Passion Play which is

neither from Maastricht nor a play: claims that it was an early example of religious drama from the Netherlands were already discredited in the nineteenth century. Its language places it very much at the edge of the Low Countries, in the area around Cologne, and it has most recently been judged, by Carla Dauven-van Knippenberg, not to be a dramatic but a devotional reading text.⁴

Old Testament Plays

The Old Testament plays do not readily fall into clear cut groups with particular foci and this is a first attempt at describing them in order to discover what variety of topics caught the attention of playwrights and how they used their material for different purposes.⁵ The lack of cycle plays in the Low Countries means that a number of episodes which feature regularly in the English Mystery Cycles, French *Passions* or German *Passionsspiele*, are not dramatised. For instance, the story of the Fall of Adam and the Expulsion from Paradise has only one play 'to itself', and that was performed after a procession in Oudenaarde.⁶

Amongst the subjects chosen for Old Testament plays there are quite a few which occur prominently in other European Countries: Abraham, Joseph, Judith, are just a few examples, but there are others which seem to have stirred up interest in the Low Countries but not much elsewhere. Thus there are two plays about the Maccabees in Dutch and two procession plays in French in Lille; the only other full scale treatment of the matter is the French *La Machabée* by Jean Virey de Gravier.⁷

Some biblical figures which feature much in visual and processional material do not appear in dramatised form.⁸

In general, it can be said that these plays portray the conflict between Good and Evil with reference to a redeemer (a pre-figuration of Christ) who enables an elect people to have an insight into their sins and can thus be liberated from the clutches of evil.⁹

Naturally, the biblical stories are suitable vehicles for the illustration of moral lessons and truths, such as the two (anonymous) plays about Susanna.¹⁰

Other plays, while stressing moral lessons to be learned, connect their narratives with events in the New Testament and particularly with the Coming of Christ. Their precursor function does not prevent the development of the Old Testament material in elaborate, often allegorical, plots within which several themes are intertwined. This is the case, for instance, with the anonymous *Naaman prinche of Syrien*, based on 2 Kings

5, in which the physical suffering caused by Naaman's leprosy and the mental suffering of his faithful wife as well as the seeking of a cure from *bona fide* sources form two important strands. The final scene however explains the pre-figurative interpretation of the story; it shows, as the editors put it: 'how, on the basis of a plot which is more about the redemption than about the redeemer, in the interpretation nevertheless the figure of the Redeemer can be effectively positioned as the central focus'.¹¹

A similar interpretative strategy can be found in a play about Joseph and Potiphar's wife and one about Abraham's sacrifice.¹² In *Joseph* the suffering of the hero at the hands of his brothers and his steadfastness in his dealings with Potiphar's wife are both important themes. In the epilogue the allegorical significance of the play is made clear: Joseph's suffering is compared to that of Christ's; his steadfastness to that of Christ's resistance against the Temptation by Satan in the desert.

In *Abrahams Offerhande* the protagonist's dilemma, torn between love for his son and the obedience exacted by God, is equally important but also prefigures Christ's purity and sacrifice.¹³

The relationship between Abraham, Sara and Hagar caught the imagination again in a play by Abraham de Koning, *Hagars vluchte*.¹⁴ Other episodes from Abraham's life were also dramatised: the story of the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 18:1, 19:35) features twice. In both plays the emphasis on the damage caused by giving in to lust and sloth is prominent, especially in *Sodoma*, written by the Southern-Dutch priest François Machet, where the focus is on the psychological/spiritual damage incurred by the individual sinner.¹⁵ An earlier, incomplete, play, *Abraham ende Lot*, is about the promise given to Abraham and Sara that they will have a son, about Abraham's plea with God to spare Sodom and the subsequent rescue and seduction of Lot.¹⁶

The different use of material about the prophets is shown by a play about Jonah, which is not about his encounter with the whale but about his rôle as the prophet of doom foretelling the destruction of Nineveh, as a consequence of the disobedience shown to God by its citizens. The play, following the biblical story closely, portrays a wise and remorseful ruler who sets an example for his subjects in his obedience to God, and shows the *hubris* of the prophet. The brief epilogue of two citizens expresses a wish that all princes and kings would do likewise and that all citizens too would show obedience to God; echoes, possibly, of debates about religion and obedience to secular authorities which were prominent in the Northern Netherlands in the 1580s.¹⁷

By contrast, a play about the prophet Elisha weaves into the biblical material a contemporary discourse about the art of the Rhetoricians; its enemies argue that it deflects people from going to church; its defenders that it can show the wonders of God's power and promote the moral education of the community, here demonstrated through the miracles performed by the prophet Elisha and the impact of his wisdom on kings and citizens alike (2 Kings 2, 3, 4, 5).¹⁸ The story of the siege of Samaria in 2 Kings 6:24–33 and 7:1–20 further expounds the idea that those who have God on their side, are invincible.¹⁹

Stories about heroic women too were dramatised: that about Judith twice, not surprising in the context of the prominence of this heroic female figure in European literature and the visual arts. It was particularly popular in the sixteenth century when its theme of resistance against tyranny struck a chord in the Low Countries as well. An (incomplete) play of *Judich ende Holofernes* exists with a cast of no less than 28 characters and a complex structure with frequent scenes of 'ordinary people' allowing multiple perspectives and some comic relief.²⁰ Even though the surviving text only goes so far as Judith preparing to go to Holofernes' camp, there is enough of the play left to allow an insight into the interpretative flexibility of the Judith theme. It reflects the prominence of the theme of resistance against tyranny which is also found in other biblical Rhetoricians plays, and highlights the stagecraft of the Rhetoricians in alternating and interweaving serious and comic matter, which is clearly designed to keep the audience interested and entertained.

Lawet does not show here, as he undoubtedly does in his play about the Prodigal Son, an antagonism against some Catholic practices and dogmas but focuses on the steadfastness, sprung from her unswerving faith, with which Judith carries out her plan.²¹ She is the Christian warrior sallying forth to defeat evil, here personified in Nabugodonosor (Nebuchadnezzar)'s megalomania and his blasphemous presumption to become 'king and god of all the earth'.²² Anne-Marie Musschoot, in her penetrating chapter about the Judith plays, sees Lawet's *Judich ende Holofernes* as strongly indebted to the medieval mystery plays in its structure and in the stark contrast in the portrayal of the two protagonists: Judith as the force of good, the redeemer, and Holofernes as the personification of evil, the devil.²³

That indebtedness is even stronger since the driving force behind Holofernes is Nabugodonosor (Nebuchadnezzar), whose blasphemous pride infects his captains and threatens to destroy all countries, including that of

the Jews. Their resistance, like that of David against Goliath, is wholly fuelled by a weak woman, an example of the way in which the weak can resist the strong. This can be interpreted in the context of the Christian faith but also in a more contemporary political context: the resistance of the Dutch against their Spanish rulers.

There are no other Rhetoricians plays which set Judith in a propagandistic context, though both Catholic school drama and Protestant humanist drama, in the Low Countries and in Germany, do employ her as a model or example of their own ideologies.²⁴ The Judith plays share this flexibility of religious interpretation with much of biblical sixteenth-century drama.

The *Judith* in the Hasselt collection shows a different flexibility. Judith is portrayed as an exemplary heroine who is nevertheless aware that without God she will not achieve anything. Nabugodonosor's boundless pride and the outbursts of tyrannical anger in which both the King and Holofernes indulge demonstrate the excess and therefore the moral invalidity of these characters. Sexual indulgence, gluttony and drinking are also shown as leading people away from the awareness of God and moral living.²⁵ There is a curious unevenness of tone in this play, demonstrated for example in the scene where Holofernes entertains Judith. That he should praise her physical beauty and voice his own desires is not surprising, that Judith answers him in an equally amorous refrain promising to be his until death, is somewhat off key. There may be a good deal of dramatic irony here: she will after all stay with him until (his) death, but the classical references to famous star-crossed lovers, Pyramus and Thisbe, Hero and Leander, undo the dramatic irony. Judith too, is shown as indulging in excess, of language and emotion.

Warnings against excess are a frequent element in Rhetoricians drama, in this *Judith* play, however, the presentation of excess on the stage has consequences for the structure of the play which consists of rather loosely connected scenes, with banquets, amorous episodes, musical intermezzi, classical allusions, Old Testament references, and military parades. The play thus employs a great variety of 'spectacular' elements which we do not often encounter in Rhetoricians plays.

This leads Musschoot to evaluate the Hasselt *Judith* as a brief new development in Rhetoricians drama, a merging of the morality with popular entertainment drama, which does, however, not turn into a Rhetoricians 'genre' but does manifest itself prominently in the German *Volksschauspiele* of the sixteenth century.²⁶

Another one of the Nine Heroines, and equally popular in the visual and the literary arts, was Esther. However, there is only one vernacular sixteenth-century Rhetoricians play though a number of Latin school-dramas use her story.²⁷ Tamar, the daughter of David and sister to Absalom (2 Samuel 13), occurs in *Amnon en Thamar* (c.1610), where incest and its terrible consequences are the central theme, and in *Amon* (an incomplete play using the same biblical story), where they are used to portray, amongst other things, the contemporary turmoil in religious matters.²⁸

Plays based on heroic episodes in the history of the Jews, such as the two plays about the Maccabees, use their material to demonstrate how the relationship between the believer and God can be maintained, or tested, in the face of great suffering. In the later of the Maccabees Plays, written by Pieter Aelbertsz of Haarlem and performed there in 1590, there are clear references to the historical turmoil in the Low Countries, their struggle against Spain is seen as a struggle against tyranny, just as the Maccabees fought against the might of the Roman Empire and its representatives.²⁹

New Testament Plays

There are sixty New Testament plays recorded in Hummelen's *Repertorium* of which twenty-three use material from the parables.³⁰ Seen against the background of the European tradition, this is a surprising number for elsewhere we usually find no more than four of Jesus' parables in dramatic form: there are several versions in different languages of the Wise and the Foolish Virgins, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Good Samaritan and, very widespread and in great numbers, the Prodigal Son.³¹

In the Low Countries parable plays were, with some exceptions, the products of the Rhetoricians Chambers, and it is not difficult to see how they would fit into the didactic and moral objectives of the Rhetoricians, in their mission to educate their own members as well as their wider aim of educating and instructing the public. To these incentives should be added their intentions to provide their audiences with access to God's word; both reform minded Catholics as well as dissidents emphasised the importance of the New Testament in this campaign.³²

Topical Plays

Another difference between the drama of the Low Countries and that of Britain is a relative absence of explicit topicality: there are not many plays

which directly engage with the political issues of the time and playwrights writing for the court or the monarch are not prominent.³³ Of course there are plays which focus on (dissident) religious issues but it is not always easy to link them with specific events or towns. This is understandable: it was dangerous to voice dissident ideas, but it was also an aspect of the nature of Rhetoricians drama: 'urban drama' it might have been but the moral-didactic or moral-religious focus is on mankind in general and in some ways these plays continue a medieval dramatic tradition in that the interaction between God and a representative of mankind is central, not the relationship between God and a certain individual set in a specific contemporary context.

One can catch glimpses of contemporary reality woven into the fabric of plays which on closer scrutiny reveal an engagement with the issues of the time, even sometimes a passionate partisan position, on the part of the playwright. In some cases involvement with contemporary questions is embedded in a biblical play. An example of that is a play with material from the New Testament: *Die becooringhe des duvels hoe hi christus becoorden* ('The Temptation of the Devil, how he tempted Christ').³⁴ It was written in Amsterdam, possibly in the late 1530s when religious unrest in the town, especially because of the presence of a sizeable group of Anabaptists, was rife.

This play does not focus on Anabaptist dissent, but their strong presence in Amsterdam did greatly exacerbate the religious tensions in the town, and the playwright implicitly takes issue with the influence of the mendicant orders and their rôle in attacking and suppressing heresy. There were many mendicants who became involved in the spreading of dissident ideas but many others who verbally and/or actively participated in the persecution of dissidents.³⁵

Conclusion

The focus on Old Testament plays in this article does not allow any conclusions about the biblical drama of the Rhetoricians in general. What can be concluded, however, is that the Old Testament material was used with great flexibility of purpose and, within the conventions of Rhetoricians drama, with great variety of characterisation.

Some differences between Rhetoricians drama and English biblical drama were highlighted: the absence of mystery-play cycles in the Low Countries and the scarcity of topical drama, particularly of court plays.

Not surprisingly, the biblical drama of the Low Countries shows the religious turmoil of the sixteenth century and in the New Testament plays, with its attention for the life and ministry of Jesus, we will encounter more outspoken reformed ideas and a greater political interest than in the Old Testament plays.

Many more questions arise from a scrutiny of the existing material, such as why some subjects, not always obvious ones, are represented several times or which religious and/or political ideas are conveyed by means of the biblical material, what the geographical distribution of the plays is and in what ways that is significant. Not all the plays are or can be dated but are the dates we have significant? How do they relate to their historical context? Which genres were most used for biblical plays?

Hummelen's *Repertorium* is in itself a treasure trove from which much more relevant information can be mined; in that way the appendices below could be enhanced considerably. For the moment, however, they give a first overview of the extant biblical plays of the Rhetoricians and a brief indication of their sources.

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APPENDIX 1

Old Testament plays listed in W.M.H. Hummelen *Repertorium van het rederijkersdrama 1500–c.1620* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1968):

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1D8 | Naaman, Prince of Syria (2 Kings 5). |
| 1M8 | Judith and Holofernes (Judith). |
| 1OA3 | The Maccabees (2 Maccabees 7; 4 Maccabees 8–18). |
| 1OA4 | Abraham's Sacrifice (Genesis 22:1–19). |
| 1OB5 | The Prophet Elisha (2 Kings 5). |
| 1OC5 | The Prophet Jonah (Jonah 3, 4). |
| 1OC7 | Old Tobias (Tobit). |
| 1OC8 | The Keystone (and Maccabees) (2 Maccabees 7; 4 Maccabees 8–18). |
| 1OD6 | Saul and David (1 Samuel 19, 20). |
| 1S1 | King Belshazzar (Daniel 5). |
| 1S2 | The Siege of Samaria (2 Kings 6, 7). |
| 1S3 | Susanna (Daniel 13, Greek Version). |
| 1S4 | Joshua (Joshua 1–6). |
| 1S7 | Judith (Judith). |
| 1S8 | Esther and Ahasuerus (Esther 1–9 and Esther 1–2, Greek Version). |
| 1S9 | Amnon and Tamar (2 Samuel 13). |

- 1U5 Abraham and Loth (Genesis 18:16–33; 19).
- 1U11 Joseph (Genesis 37, 39, 41:1–19).*
- 1U13 Amon (2 Samuel 13).
- 1U14 King Darius (Ezra 1.3).
- 1V2 Hagar's Flight (Genesis 16).
- 2 06 Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21).
- 2 14 Paradise (Genesis 3).
- 2 37 Sodoma (Genesis 18:16–33, 19).
- 3Y2 The Egyptian Midwives (Exodus 1).
- 4 13 Abraham's Journey (Genesis 12).
- 4 33 Achab (1 Kings 22).

Additions from the revised edition of the *Repertorium* in the DBNL, the *Digital Library of Dutch Literature* (2003).

* Another play of Joseph existed but was lost in the nineteenth century.

APPENDIX 2

New Testament plays listed in the *Repertorium* (2003):

- 1D3 The Beheading of St John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1–12).
- 1D6 A Man Born Blind receives Sight (John 9:1–41).
- 1G1 Acts of the Apostles, 3, 4, 5 (Acts 3, 4, 5).
- 1K1 Acts of the Apostles, 16, 17, 18, 19 (Acts 16, 17, 18, 19).
- 1K2 The Conversion of Paul (Acts 9:1–31).
- 1L2 Our Lady's Assumption (*Legenda Aurea* cap. cxix).
- 1M1 The Boy Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:41–52)
- 1OB1 The Conversion of St Paul (Acts 9:1–31)
- 1OB2 The Incarnation of Christ (John 1:1–34).
- 1OB4 Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13, 14, 15).
- 1OB10 The Death and Resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:1–44).
- 1OC10 The Call of Matthew the Tax Collector (Matthew 9:9–13).
- 1OC11 The Confession of John.
- 1OD3 A Man Born Blind receives Sight (John 9:1–41).
- 1OD11 The Boy Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:41–52).
- 1OE1 The Birth of John the Baptist, and of Joseph and Mary (Luke 1).
- 1OE2 The Walk to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–53).
- 1OE9 The Birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1).
- 1OF3 The Temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–12).
- 1T1 The Stoning of St Stephen (Acts 6:8–15; 7)
- 1T2 The Conversion of St Paul (Acts 9:1–31)

- 1Y 1 The Mother of the Sons of Zebedee (Matthew 20:1–28).
- 2 08 The Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1–11).
- 2 16 Mount Thabor (Matthew 17:1–13; Luke 9:28–36).
- 2 17 The Marriage of Mary and Joseph (*Protoevangelium of James* chapter 8).
- 2 20 Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1–12).
- 3A1 Acts of the Apostles, 3, 4, 5 (Acts 3, 4, 5) (parallel text to 1G1).
- 3 F1–6 St John's Revelation 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (Revelation 1–6).
- 3P2 Apocalipsis 12:1 (Revelation 12:1–7).
- 4 12 The Blind Beggar near Jericho (Luke 18:35–43).
- 4 21 Jesus and the Woman of Samaria (John 4:1–42).
- 4 23 The Boy Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:41–52) (parallel text to 1OD11).
- 4 32 The Conflict in Athens (Acts 17:16–34).
- 4 43 The Riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:21–41).

APPENDIX 3

Parables.

- 1B33 The Labourers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16).
- 1G5 The Labourers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16).
- 1M6 The Tares (Matthew 13:24–30; 36–43).
- 1M7 The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32).
- 1M9 The Great Dinner (Luke 14:15–24).
- 1OA5 The Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1–14, Luke 14:16–24).
- 1OC4 The Rich Man and the Beggar Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31).
- 1OD7 The Sower (Matthew 13:3–23; Mark 4 1–20; Luke 8:5–15).
- 1OE3 The Unclean Spirit (Luke 11:24–6).
- 1OE4 The Two Sons (Matthew 21:28–32).
- 1OF9 The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–7).
- 1S5 The Unjust Steward (Luke 15; 1–3; 16:1–9).
- 1U6 The Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:23–35).
- 1U17a, b The Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1–14; Luke 14:16–24).
- 1U18 The Wicked Tenants (Matthew 21:33–46; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19).
- 1V3 The Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1–13) [A. de Koning].
- 2 21 The Wicked Tenants (Matthew 21:33–46; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19).
- 2 35 The Ten Foolish and the Ten Wise Virgins (Matthew 25:1–13).

- 3T2 The Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1–13), [D.V. Coornhert].
 4 16 The Rich Man [Coornhert] (Luke 16:19–31).
 4 30 The Rich Man [Coster] (Luke 16:19–31).
 7 01 The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32).

** Of the plays on the Seven Works of Mercy, Hummelen lists only the Fifth (visiting the captives) as a parable. All seven are based on Christ's comparison between himself and the unfortunates of the world; I have left them out because they are not indicated as parables in the New Testament.

APPENDIX IV

D.V. Coornhert

d'Egipsche vroeivrouwen (1570) (Exodus 1:5).

Moral lesson: fear not the kings of the earth but the king of heaven.

Abrahams wtgang (1570) (Genesis 12, 13).

Moral lesson: obedience to God brings spiritual peace.

Israel (1575).

Moral lesson: if Israel departs from God (amongst others by practising idolatry) God's wrath will be terrible but forgiveness and salvation are possible if the sinner comes to true insight into, and remorse for, his sins.

Anonymous:

Een Comedia ofte Speel van Susanna (1582) (Daniel 13:1–63).

Moral lesson: Innocence will triumph with the help of God and injustice will be punished.

Tspeel van Susanna (1607) (Daniel 13:1–63).

Moral lesson: love and chastity will triumph even over false accusations.

Abraham de Koning:

Achab (1610) (2 Chronicles 18, 19).

Moral lesson: lies will be found out; fear sinning, do not persecute true prophets and only God's word is truth.

Hagars vluchte ende wederkomste (1616) (Genesis 16).

Moral lesson: God protects those who learn humility.

Simson (1618).

Samson as precursor of Christ

V. Nieuwelandt:

Saul (1615) (1 Samuel).

Moral lesson; God exacts loyalty and obedience; those who follow their own inclinations will be brought down.

NOTES

1. Lynette R. Muir *The Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge UP, 1995). Appendices with the titles of extant biblical plays are appended to this article. The material is mostly gleaned from W.M.H. Hummelen *Repertorium van het Rederijkersdrama 1500–ca. 1620* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1968). See also the revised edition of the *Repertorium* (2003) in the DBNL, the *Digital Library of Dutch Literature*.
2. Two other articles are in progress, devoted, respectively, to parable plays and to other New Testament plays.
3. *Die Eerste Bliscap van Maria en Die Sevenste Bliscap van onser Vrouwen* edited W.H. Beuken (Culemborg: Tjeenk Willink/Noorduyn, 1978). An edition with a translation into English is in preparation, edited Elsa Strietman and Peter Happé.
4. Carla Dauven-van Knippenberg 'Borderline Texts: the Case of the (*Ripuarian*) *Passion Play*' in *Urban Theatre in the Low Countries 1400–1625* edited Elsa Strietman and Peter Happé (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006) 37–52.
5. See Appendix 1.
6. See for this play, *Het Paradijs*, B.A.M. Ramakers *Spelen en figuren. Toneelkunst en processiecultuur in Oudenaarde tussen Middeleeuwen en Moderne Tijd* (Amsterdam University Press, 1996) 353, 362, 372, 379. In *Die eerste bliscap van Maria* edited W.H. Beuken (see note 3), Fall and Expulsion do form part of the salvation history dramatised in that play; the only other surviving play of the cycle of seven plays about Our Lady's Joys is dedicated to the Death and Assumption of Our Lady (see Beuken *Sevenste Bliscap*). Processional plays (not included here) have a much wider range of Old and New Testament subjects: see Ramakers *Spelen en figuren* Bijlage (Appendix) 3 and 4. In the French-speaking areas of the Low Countries cycles did occur, for instance in Mons and Lille: see Muir *Biblical Drama* and Alan Knight *Les Mystères de la Procession de Lille* 4 vols (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2000–2007, 5th volume forthcoming). For a detailed study of drama in the French-speaking areas of the Low Countries, see Katell Lavéant *Théâtre et culture dramatique d'expression française dans les villes des Pays-Bas méridionaux (XVe–XVIe siècles)* (PhD dissertation, Amsterdam, 2007).
7. Much information can be found in Muir *Biblical Drama*, in particular Chapters 4, 5 and 6. However, a full overview of the prominence or rarity of dramatised

Old Testament subjects in the Low Countries compared to other European countries falls outside my scope here. See below for information about Abraham, Judith, Joseph, and the Maccabees; the text by Jean Virey de Gravier *La Machabée* (1596) has not been edited.

8. Muir *Biblical Drama* 79 points out that for instance Gideon, as the patron saint of the Order of the Golden Fleece, occurs frequently in processions but that no separate play is extant.
9. See Wim Hüsken 'François Machet's tragedie Sodoma' in *Wat duikers vent is dit. Opstellen voor W.M.H. Hummelen* edited G.R.W. Dibbets and P.W.M. Wackers (Wijhe: Quarto, 1989) 219–35, 232.
10. The work of the sixteenth-century humanist D.V. Coornhert is not included here: his plays do show similarities with Rhetoricians drama but were not written for Rhetoricians Chambers or for performance. Mostly my material is limited to the sixteenth century but see, however, G. van Eemeren *Elck raep wat. Inhoudsopgaven van de ernstige Nederlandstalige toneelstukken uit de periode 1575–1650* (Antwerpen: UFSIA Centrum Renaissance Drama, 1991) Appendix 4, for descriptions of Old Testament Plays before 1625.
11. *Naaman prinche van Syrien. Een rederijkersspel uit de zestiende eeuw* edited W.M.H. Hummelen and C. Schmidt (Zutphen: Thieme & Co, 1975) 31. See below note 18 for a different use of this material in a play about the Prophet Eliseus and his relationship with King Naaman: Hummelen and Schmidt *Naaman prinche van Syrien* 32–3.
12. 'Joseph, een historiaelspel van Jeronimus van der Voort(?)' edited G.R.W. Dibbets and W.M.H. Hummelen in *Jaarboek De Fonteyne* 23–4 (1973–1974) 43–166. Another Joseph play is recorded as lost: see the online revised version of Hummelen *Repertorium* nr. 2 38. *Abrahams Offerhande* edited G.R.W. Dibbets and W.M.H. Hummelen, in *Jaarboek De Fonteyne* 43–4 (1993–1994) 9–148; *De propheet Jonas in Trou Moet Blijcken, bronnenuitgave van de boeken der Haarlemse rederijderskamer 'De Pellicanisten* Deel 3, Boek C, edited W.N.M. Hüsken, B.A.M. Ramakers, and F.A.M. Schaars (Assen: Quarto, 1993) fols 47^v–62^v; *De propheet Eliseus in Trou Moet Blijcken* Deel 2, Boek B (Assen: Quarto, 1992) fols 62^r–75^v.
13. D.V.Coornhert's *Abrahams Utgang* extends the obedience theme further; it shows how the believer ought to behave towards God, the woman towards the man and both woman and man towards the servants, a slant made possible by the narratives of Sara and of Hagar in the biblical story. See P. van der Meulen *Het roerspel en de comedies van Coornhert* (Leiden: Brill, 1955).
14. *Maegdenspel en Hagar's vluchte ende wederkomst*, edited G. van Eemeren and A. Lenferink-Van Daal (Antwerpen: Centrum Renaissance drama, 1990) 73–156.

15. For a critical appraisal of the play *Sodoma* see Wim Hüsken 'Francois Machet's tragedie *Sodoma*' in *Wat duikers vent is dit. Opstellen voor W.H.M. Hummelen* edited G.R.W. Dibbets and P.W.M. Wackers (Wijhe: Quarto, 1989) 219–35. Machet's play is also interesting in that it is part of a temporary revival of Rhetoricians drama and competitions during the Truce between Spain and the Low Countries (1609–1621): Hüsken 'Sodoma' 220.
16. The text exists only in manuscript, currently in the Municipal Archive of 's-Gravenpolder: MS 387, no 5; for a description of the manuscript see W.N.M. Hüsken and F.A.M. Schaars *Sandrijn en Lanslot. Diplomatische uitgave van twee toneelrollen uit het voormalig archief van de rederijderskamer De Fiolieren te 's-Gravenpolder* (Nijmegen: Alfa, 1985).
17. *De propheet Jonas* in *Trou Moet Blijcken, bronnenuitgave van de boeken der Haarlemse rederijderskamer 'De Pellicanisten'* Deel 3, Boek C, edited W.N.M. Hüsken, B.A.M. Ramakers and F.A.M. Schaars (Assen: Quarto, 1993) fols 47^v–62^v.
18. '*De propheet Eliseus* in *Trou Moet Blijcken* Deel 2, Boek B (1992) fols 62^r–75^v.
19. '*De belegeringhe van Samarien* in *Hasseltse historiaelspelen; Coninck Balthasar — Die belegeringhe van Samarien* edited K. Ceyssens (Leuvensche Tekstuitgaven 3; Amsterdam-Leuven: Keurboekerij, 1907).
20. A.M. Musschoot *Het Judith thema in de Nederlandse letterkunde* (Gent: Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde, 1972) 77–106, chapter on 'Judith in de rederijdersperiode: moralisatie en profanatie'; Robert Lawet *Twee schoone spelen van zinnen van den vroome vrouwe Judich ende van Holifernes* (1577) (Hummelen 1M8) — see A. van Elslander and L. de Scheerder 'Een teruggevonden spel van den Roeselaersen Rederijker R. Lawet' in *Album Prof. Dr. Frank Baur* 2 vols (Antwerpen: Standaard-Boekhandel, 1948) 1 242–9. Only the first of the two plays is extant and ends with Judith preparing to go to Holofernes' camp.
21. *Twee zestiende-eeuwse spelen van de Verlooren Zoone* door Robert Lawet edited E.G.A. Galama (Utrecht-Nijmegen: Dekker & Van de Vegt, 1941); Musschoot *Het Judith thema* 94–6; Elsa Strietman 'Educational Goals and Moral Instruction in Prodigal Son Texts from the Low Countries' in *Performance, Drama, Spectacle in the Medieval City: Essays in Honour of Alan Hindley* edited A. Tudor and others (forthcoming).
22. Musschoot *Het Judith thema* 83.
23. Musschoot *Het Judith thema* 84–5.
24. Musschoot *Het Judith thema* 96.
25. For *Tspel van Judith*, see Lisette Claes 'Een onuitgegeven Hasselt's historiaelspel' in *Jaarboek De Fonteyne* 3 (1961) 19–34.
26. Musschoot *Het Judith thema* 87–93.

27. *Tspel van Hester ende Assverus den Coninck* in the Collection of the Rhetoricians Chamber *De Roode Roos* of Hasselt. No printed edition exists; merely scant information and a description of the manuscript in O. van den Daele and F. van Veerdeghem *De Roode Roos. Zinnespelen en andere toneelstukken der zestiende eeuw* (Bergen: Dequesne-Masquillier, 1889).
28. *Tspel van sinnen van Amnon en Thamar* in the Collection of *De Roode Roos*; see Van den Daele *De Roode Roos*; *Amon*, an incomplete play in the Collection 's-Gravenpolder, see Hummelen *Repertorium* 128–9 and 373.
29. 'Een spel van sinnen genaemt *de hoecksteen*' in *Trou Moet Blijcken* Deel 3, Boek C, fols 105^r–119^r; Pieter Aelbertsz 'Een spel van sinnen genaemt der Machabeen' in *Trou Moet Blijcken* Deel 1, Boek A (1992) fols 24^v–49^r. See also Elsa Strietman 'Eenheid in verscheidenheid: twee spelen over the Machabeen in de verzameling *Trou Moet Blijcken*' in *Met eigen ogen. De rederijker als dichtend individu (1450–1600)* edited Samuel Mareel and Dirk Coigneau (Ghent: De Fonteine, 2008).
30. See Appendix 2 for the New Testament plays and Appendix 3 for the twenty-two parables listed in Hummelen *Repertorium*.
31. Muir *Biblical Drama* 121–3; Lenke Kovács 'The Dramatisation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Catalan and European Sixteenth-century Drama' in *Mainte belle oeuvre faite. Études sur le théâtre médiéval offertes à Graham A. Runnalls* edited Denis Hüe, Mario Longtin, and Lynette Muir (Orléans: Paradigme, 2005) 265–88; Alan Young *The English Prodigal Son Plays* (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1979).
32. Ramakers *Spelen en figuren* 237, signals that there are some forty small woodcuts with scenes from the life of Jesus and the parables in Vorsterman's New Testament (1546). He also mentions (253–7) that from the 1530s there was an increase in the number of New Testament *tableaux vivants* in processions, especially with scenes from Jesus' Ministry, in particular the parables, and scenes from the Acts of the Apostles.
33. This needs to be qualified: such plays are not at all prominent in Dutch but there are a number written in French for the Burgundian and the Habsburg court. Recent research has provided most valuable insights into the production of plays in the French-speaking part of the Low Countries: Katell Lavéant *Théâtre et culture dramatique d'expression française dans les villes des Pays-Bas méridionaux (XVe–XVIe siècles)* (PhD dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2007) 251–95, 252.
34. *Die becooringhe des duwels hoe hi cristus becoorden. Zestiende-eeuws rederijkersstuk van Jan Tömisz* edited Herman van Iperen, Renate Overbeek, Marijke Spies, Steffen Schol, and Susan Trompert (Amsterdam/Münster: Stichting Neerlandistiek VU/Nodus Publikationen, 1998). There are Old Testament

plays too which are used to comment on contemporary situations; an example is Pieter Aelbertsz' *Maccabeen* of 1590 (see above, page 131 and note 29).

35. This is also the case in Cornelis Everaert's *Tspel van den Wyngaert* (1534); see *De spelen van Cornelis Everaert* edited Wim Hüskens, 2 vols (Hilversum: Verloren, 2005) 2 925–70; and Elsa Strietman 'Teaching with tales: the parable plays in the Low Countries' (forthcoming).