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Haar, A.D.M. van de; Levelt, S.; Raamsdonk, E. van; Rose, M.D.

Citation

Haar, A. D. M. van de. (2023). From Antwerpen to London and back via Paris: Jan van der Noot's theatre connecting people and languages. In S. Levelt, E. van Raamsdonk, & M. D. Rose (Eds.), *Anglo-Dutch connections in the early modern world* (pp. 183-191). New York/London: Routledge. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3641056>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

15 From Antwerpen to London and Back via Paris

Jan van der Noot's *Theatre* Connecting People and Languages

Alisa van de Haar

When nobleman Jan van der Noot (c.1539–c.1595) was forced to leave Antwerpen and flee to London in 1567, this was not only a formative moment in his own life; it also profoundly marked the English literary scene. In the following year, Van der Noot started publishing his *Theatre* in Dutch (1568), French (1568), and English (1569).¹ In the multilingual *Theatre* series, Van der Noot brought together cultural traditions and talented individuals from the Low Countries, France, and England. His *Theatre* was partly based on the writings of famous French poets such as Clément Marot (1496–1544) and Joachim Du Bellay (1522–1560), which Van der Noot juxtaposed with high-quality engravings by Dutch artist Marcus Gheeraerts (c.1521–c.1590). He collaborated with the highly skilled local printers Henry Byneman (c.1542–1583) and John Day (c.1522–1584), and for the English version, he employed the talents of the young Edmund Spenser (c.1552–1599). This chapter examines Van der Noot's multilingual publication strategy, uniting cultural forces in both the languages of his native Low Countries and in the tongue of the country that had welcomed him as a refugee.

Van der Noot on His Way to London

'Jonker' Jan van der Noot was born in Brecht, near Antwerpen, into a relatively wealthy family of patricians, although he lost his parents at a young age.² Being part of the higher echelons of society, he learned to speak and write French alongside his Dutch mother tongue.³ He moved to Antwerpen, where he obtained the respectable position of alderman, bought a house on the central Meir street, and got married to Cecilia de Billië.⁴ Van der Noot seemed, in short, to have his life on track.

In 1567, however, events took an unexpected turn. On 13 March of that year, the young aristocrat, who had become interested in the Protestant sentiments that were on the rise in the Low Countries, joined a group of active Calvinists who occupied the Meir.⁵ They demanded, among other things, that Van der Noot be named margrave or bailiff. The uprising

failed, and the young nobleman was no longer safe in Antwerpen. On 25 March, he sold his home on the Meir, and by the 30th, he had made his way to London to escape prosecution.⁶ His wife, who seems to have remained Catholic, did not follow him into exile.⁷ Van der Noot had good reason to flee: for his participation in the Calvinist uprising he was later sentenced *in absentia* to banishment, and his possessions were declared forfeit.⁸ Archival records show that ‘John van de Note’ and his servant ‘Tris’ (Dries?) settled in Botolph Wharf, near London Bridge.⁹ It was during his time in London that his first poetic works were printed, which will be discussed in more detail below. Around 1571, he left Britain for unknown reasons and moved to the German Rhineland. He was active in Cologne for some time and printed various poetic collections, before undertaking a journey through German lands, possibly Italy, and France, which finally led him home to Antwerpen in 1578, now under Calvinist dominion and thus safe for the former exile.¹⁰

Van der Noot’s *Theatre* in Three Languages

Overall, Van der Noot thus only spent some three years in London. However, the mark he left on English literature and culture was substantial. There is one text in particular, published during his London years, that has attracted the attention of present-day English literary historians: the *Theatre*.¹¹ In 1568, a year and a half after Van der Noot’s arrival in London, John Day printed the Dutch *Het theatre oft Toon-neel* (The Theatre or Stage). Its dedication to Roger Martyn (*fl.* 1559–*c.* 1573), Lord Mayor of London, carries the date 18 September 1568. The French *Le Theatre*, also printed by Day, was dedicated to Elizabeth I on October 28 of that year. The English *A theatre* was published early in 1569, this time by another printer, Henry Bynneman. Its full title is *A theatre wherein be represented as wel the miseries & calamities that follow the voluptuous worldlings as also the greate joyes and plesures which the faithfull do enjoy*. This edition, too, was dedicated to the Queen, on 25 March 1569.

The title of the *Theatre* refers to the notion of the *theatrum mundi* (theatre of the world), the idea that earthly things are only short-lived and of little importance, as in a play.¹² What truly matters is the eternal kingdom of heaven. This *vanitas* theme underlies the entire work. The *Theatre* opens with a dedication and several laudatory poems written for Van der Noot by fellow poets Melchior Barlaeus (*c.* 1540–*c.* 1584), Gerard Goossens (*c.* 1545–1603), and Lucas d’Heere (1534–1584). The latter had fled to England in 1568. There follows a series of six epigrams, reworkings of Italian poems by Petrarch on the vanity of earthly love, although Van der Noot most likely used the French translations made by court poet Clément Marot for his Dutch translations. Next come eleven sonnets dealing with the decline of Rome. They are translated from *Les Antiquitez de Rome* (1558) by Joachim

Du Bellay, a renowned French poet. The final set of poems contains four sonnets by Van der Noot himself, based on the Book of Revelation, describing the beast of the apocalypse and the whore of Babylon.¹³ The French *Theatre* contains the original poems by Marot and Du Bellay on the pages where the Dutch version gives Van der Noot's translations. The poems are followed by a prose commentary by Van der Noot, based on both Heinrich Bullinger's (1504–1575) commentary on the apocalypse and John Bale's (1495–1563) *The Image of Both Churches* (c.1545), each of which Van der Noot had probably read in a Dutch translation.¹⁴

The poems are adorned with twenty copper engravings, made by the accomplished artist Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder. Gheeraerts had only just arrived in London himself when the *Theatre* series was published. In 1568, he had fled from his hometown of Brugge because of his protestant sympathies. Because of their level of detail, his engravings were of a much higher quality than the images to which the English audience were accustomed.¹⁵ Clearly, the Dutch and French *Theatre* were intended as luxury editions.¹⁶ This was not the case for the English *Theatre*, however: instead of Gheeraerts' quality copper engravings, a set of solid woodcuts showing very similar, albeit cruder, images were used. Woodcuts wear down more slowly than engravings and can be used to print more copies, so it has been suggested that printer Bynneman and Van der Noot expected the English edition to sell better than the French and Dutch ones.¹⁷

This 'popular' English edition has retained the attention of literary historians for multiple reasons. The most obvious of these is that the young Edmund Spenser, then a seventeen-year-old schoolboy, was asked to translate the epigrams and sonnets into English.¹⁸ Moreover, this poetry collection translated by Spenser constitutes one of the oldest-known sonnet cycles in English.¹⁹ A final aspect that makes the *Theatre* of importance for the history of English literature is the combination of these poems with the meaningful images by Gheeraerts, giving the collection what has been called an 'emblematical' character. The emblem would become highly popular. It is generally based on a tripartite structure: each individual emblem combines a motto with an allegorical image, explained in an epigram. Later in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, readers would indulge in emblem books that brought together dozens of emblems, guessing at the meaning of the images.

The *Theatre* already seems to contain two emblematical elements: the allegorical image, which was certainly influenced by the symbolism of the earliest emblem books, and the epigram. There has been ample discussion among emblem scholars, however, on whether or not Van der Noot's work can be called the first (proto-)emblem book in English. The consensus leans towards a negative answer, though this does not take away from the importance of Van der Noot and Gheeraerts' collaboration for text-image relations in early modern England.²⁰

The *Theatre* Connecting People

This chapter argues that the connections between the different individuals involved in the creation of the *Theatre* series form an additional reason for the importance of Van der Noot's work. First of all, the Antwerpian nobleman deserves praise for his intermediary role between English literary culture and his sources – Marot, Du Bellay, Bullinger, and, to a lesser extent, Petrarch. Moreover, Van der Noot formed the central figure that brought together the rising star Spenser and cultural frontrunners such as the highly skilled engraver Gheeraerts, and printers Day and Bynneman.

Both printers were renowned for the high quality of their work. They would collaborate on Van der Noot's subsequent London publication, *Het Bosken* (The Forest), which contained poems he wrote during his youth. Werner Waterschoot has suggested that Van der Noot asked Day to contribute as well because he was making haste to leave for Germany.²¹ It was probably through their collaboration on the *Theatre* that Bynneman and Day first came in contact with engraver Gheeraerts. It seems that this led to further fruitful collaborative projects, as multiple images in later prints by Bynneman and Day have been attributed to the craftsman from Bruges.²² In any case, both Bynneman and Day were known for their excellent printing and their interest in new developments in the field.²³ Meeting Gheeraerts and seeing the detail of his work must have been an interesting experience for them.²⁴

Finally, Bynneman seems to have stayed in contact with Edmund Spenser, with whom he later published other works.²⁵ The connection between Spenser and Van der Noot – and thus Bynneman – was probably made by Richard Mulcaster (1561–1611), headmaster of the Merchant Taylors' School in London, not far from Van der Noot's residence, that was attended by Spenser.²⁶ For the young student, this collaborative project was perhaps his first experience with the world of printing and publishing poetry, of which the impact resonates in his later work. His translations of Petrarch and Du Bellay for the *Theatre* reappear in his *Complaints* (1591). Moreover, his work for Van der Noot seems to have inspired him to engage more deeply with Du Bellay: Spenser added the complete translation of *Les Antiquitez de Rome* (1558) to the *Complaints*.²⁷ Moreover, Andrew Hadfield has argued that veiled descriptions of the hardship of tyranny and exile, which he recognizes in the poems of the *Theatre*, later influenced certain passages of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1596).²⁸ Van der Noot's short stay in London would, indeed, have long-lasting ripple effects on English cultural life.

The *Theatre* Connecting Languages

Through his *Theatre*, Jan van der Noot thus acted as a go-between connecting cultural actors, authors, and readers from the Low Countries, England, and France, and even – indirectly – Italy (Petrarch) and Switzerland (Bullinger).

To do so, he employed various languages in this ambitious trilingual undertaking. The final part of this contribution will zoom in on the use of languages in the *Theatre* in order to illustrate the complex language situation that marked the cultural exchanges between the Low Countries and Britain, and in which French played a central intermediary role.

While Van der Noot's mother tongue was Dutch, he was also fluent in the second language of his country, French. It was the native language of inhabitants of the southern regions of the Low Countries and of the higher levels of nobility, besides being a transregional cultural language and a language of interregional diplomatic and commercial exchange.²⁹ A language that Van der Noot in all probability did not speak when he hastily fled to London was English. As John Florio wrote on the English tongue in 1578, 'passe Dover, it is worth nothing'.³⁰ English was seldomly learned by inhabitants of the Low Countries: in 1576, Antwerpen counted 75 schoolmasters teaching French, versus only one teaching English.³¹ There are indications that the speakers of English and Dutch sometimes used a mixture of the two, a pidgin of some sort, to communicate.³²

In the case of the French-speaking Van der Noot, it is likely that he communicated with at least some of the English collaborators in the *Theatre* project in French. As in the Low Countries, French was a cultural prestige language in England that often took an intermediary position between Latin, Greek, Italian, or Spanish and the local vernacular. The way in which Van der Noot used Marot's French translation of Petrarch rather than the original is a telling example in this respect.

When Edmund Spenser was asked to translate the poems of the *Theatre* into English, he probably used the French text as his point of departure, placing French in a central position between English on the one hand, and Dutch and Italian on the other. Andrew Hadfield has suggested that Spenser may have worked with an assistant who knew Dutch and Italian.³³ However, a complete French version of the text was readily available and Spenser knew French. Moreover, a comparative reading of the different versions of the *Theatre* points toward a direct translation from French into English.

The opening stanza of the fourth Du Bellay sonnet is illustrative of Spenser's French–English translation process. In Van der Noot's Dutch, Du Bellay's French, and Spenser's English, it reads as follows:

Een Arche sach ick noch op colommen verheuen
Wiens basen ick oock sach van fijn gout altemael:
Capiteelen albast, de Frisen van Cristael,
Ter gedachten booghwijs, gewelft ende bescreuen:³⁴

Le vy haut esleué sur colomnes d'Iuoire,
Dont les bases estoient du plus riche metal,
A chapiteaux d'Albastre, & Frizes de Cristal,
Le double front d'vn arc dreßé pour la mémoire.³⁵

I Saw raise vp on pillers of Iuorie,
 Whereof the bases were of richest golde,
 The chapters Alabaster, Christall frises,
 The double front of a triumphall arke.³⁶

A first striking similarity between the English and French versions concerns the punctuation: Spenser has followed Du Bellay's series of commas, ending in a full stop, rather than Van der Noot's colons. Even more convincing are the lexical and grammatical similarities between the French and English texts. Spenser's first line, rather than adopting the word 'Arche' (arch) present in the Dutch version, maintains the 'Iuorie' that figures only in the French text. Van der Noot's use of the first person in the second line, 'ick [...] sach' (I saw), does not figure in the English poem, which follows the French sentence structure. In the fourth line, Spenser's 'double front' is a direct translation of Du Bellay's 'double front', while Van der Noot's description deviates further from the French. It is clear that Spenser's primary source was Du Bellay.

Werner Waterschoot assumed that only the English *Theatre* would have appealed at the local English audience, while the French and Dutch luxury editions would have targeted the transregional Netherlandish refugee community.³⁷ However, especially in the higher circles of English society, the French tongue was certainly known and appreciated – it was with good reason that Van der Noot dedicated the French *Theatre* to Elizabeth I. Publishing the French *Theatre* was thus a suitable way for Van der Noot to introduce himself to English high society.

The target audience of the Dutch edition, with its Protestant character, seems to have been twofold. It might have appealed to the diasporic Netherlandish Reformed community that could be found in England and Germany, as well as to Netherlandish Protestants who had decided to stay home and hide their religious beliefs. After his move from England to Germany, Van der Noot published a German translation of the *Theatre*, adorned with the woodcuts from the English version, and a booklet containing only the engravings by Gheeraerts.³⁸ None of the editions in the four languages seems to have been reprinted.

Conclusion

Jan van der Noot's trilingual *Theatre* project has rightfully received attention for the involvement of the young Edmund Spenser, and its early emblematical character. However, the long-term influence of Van der Noot's short stay in London goes beyond these two aspects. Through the intermediary French language, Van der Noot brought various cultural figures in the fields of poetry, printing, and the visual arts in contact with each other, and with each other's works. Indeed, the *Theatre* is a case in point of the interconnected nature of these three domains in the period.

Moreover, through the French and English *Theatre*, he gave many more readers a chance to read the poetic works and ideas of Petrarch and Du Bellay in a language that they understood, while he also introduced his audience to the artistic skills of Gheeraerts. Long after Van der Noot had left Britain, the influence of this multilingual collaborative project remained present. His activities illustrate the stimulating effect that immigrants can have on cultural and intellectual life in their new environment.³⁹ Finally, Van der Noot's story shows how, although he had to leave behind his material possessions – more than once – he was able to transplant his immaterial capital to new contexts: his networking skills, his knowledge of languages, and his poetic abilities.

Notes

- 1 Jan van der Noot, *Het theatre oft Toon-neel waer in ter eender de ongelucken ende elenden die den werelts gesinden ende boosen menschen toecomen: ende op dander syde tgheluck goet ende ruste die de ghelououghe ghenieten, vertoont worden. Niet min profteelyck dan verheuchelyck voor alle lief hebbers des goddelycken woorts, der poëtieren ende schilderen* (London: John Day, 1568); Jan van der Noot, *Le theatre: auquel sont exposés & monstrés les inconueniens & misereres qui suiuent les mondains & vicieux, ensemble les plaisirs & contentemens dont les fideles iouïssent. Matiere non moins profitable, que delectable à tous amateurs de la parole de Dieu, de la Poësie, & de la peinture* (London: John Day, 1568); Jan van der Noot, *A theatre wherein be represented as wel the miseries & calamities that follow the voluptuous worldlings as also the greate joyes and plesures which the faithfull do enjoy. An argument both profitable and delectable, to all that sincerely love the word of God* (London: Henry Bynneman, 1569). For modern editions, see: Jan van der Noot, *Het Bosken en Het Theatre*, edited by Wisse Alfred Pierre Smit and W. Vermeer (Utrecht: HES Publishers, 1953); Jan van der Noot, *A Theatre for Voluptuous Worldlings*, edited by Louis S. Friedland (Delmar [NY]: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1977).
- 2 August Vermeylen, *Leven en werken van Jonker Jan van der Noot* (Antwerpen: De Nederlandsche boekhandel, 1899), pp. 18–19, 159; Jan van der Noot, *De Poeticsche Werken van Jonker Jan van der Noot: Analytische bibliografie en tekstuitgave met inleiding en verklarende aantekeningen. Vol. 2. Tekstuitgave*, edited by Werner Waterschoot (Gent: KNAW Press, 1975), pp. 10–11.
- 3 Karel Johan Stephan Bostoën, 'Van Der Noot's Apocalyptic Visions: Do You "See" What You "Read"?' in *Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Field of the Emblem*, edited by Bart Westerweel (Leiden & New York: Brill, 1997), pp. 49–62 (p. 49).
- 4 Jan van der Noot, *Epitalameon, oft Houwelycx sanck, voor Otto van Vicht en Cornelia van Balen (1583)*, edited by Wisse Alfred Pierre Smit and Wytze Gerbens Hellinga (Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink, 1953), p. vii; Jan van der Noot, *De Poeticsche Werken*, pp. 10–11.
- 5 Julian calendar (start January, NS).
- 6 Van der Noot, *De Poeticsche Werken*, pp. 10–11.
- 7 Van der Noot, *Epitalameon, oft Houwelycx sanck*, p. vii.
- 8 Van der Noot, *De Poeticsche Werken*, pp. 10–11.
- 9 Bostoën, 'Van der Noot's Apocalyptic Visions', p. 49; Andrew Hadfield, 'Edmund Spenser's Translations of Du Bellay in Jan van Der Noot's *A Theatre for Voluptuous Worldlings*, in *Tudor Translation*, edited by Fred Schurink (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 143–160, 149.

- 10 Van der Noot, *De Poeticsche Werken*, p. 12.
- 11 Werner Waterschoot, 'An Author's Strategy: Jan van der Noot's *Het Theatre*', in *Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Field of the Emblem*, edited by B. Westerweel (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 35–47 (p. 36); Werner Waterschoot, 'Jan van der Noot Among English and German Printers', *Quaerendo*, 42 (2012), pp. 316–321 (p. 317).
- 12 Carl J. Rasmussen, "'Quietnesse of Minde": *A Theatre for Worldlings* as a Protestant Poetics', *Spenser Studies*, 1 (1980), pp. 3–27 (pp. 7–8).
- 13 Paul J. Smith, 'Petrarch Translated and Illustrated in Jan van Der Noot's *Theatre* (1568)', in *Petrarch and his Readers in the Renaissance*, edited by Jan Papy and K.A.J. Enenkel (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2003), pp. 289–325 (p. 295).
- 14 Waterschoot, 'Jan van der Noot Among English and German Printers', p. 316.
- 15 Werner Waterschoot, 'Beeld breekt woord: Illustratie en tekst in *Das Buch Extasis* van Jonker Jan van der Noot', in *The Stone of Alciato: Literature and Visual Culture in the Low Countries: Essays in Honour of Karel Porteman*, edited by Marc Van Vaeck, Hugo Brems, and Gerard Henricus Marie Claassens (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), pp. 655–672 (p. 657).
- 16 Waterschoot, 'Beeld breekt woord', p. 655.
- 17 Waterschoot, 'An Author's Strategy', p. 42; Waterschoot, 'Jan van der Noot Among English and German Printers', p. 318.
- 18 Bostoën, 'Van der Noot's Apocalyptic Visions', p. 51.
- 19 Rasmussen, "'Quietnesse of Minde'", pp. 21–22 n2.
- 20 Rasmussen, pp. 21–22n2; Bostoën, 'Van der Noot's Apocalyptic Visions', pp. 51–52; Waterschoot, 'An Author's Strategy', p. 35.
- 21 Waterschoot, 'Jan van der Noot Among English and German Printers', p. 318.
- 22 Elizabeth Evenden, *Patents, Pictures and Patronage: John Day and the Tudor Book Trade* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 98–99; David J. Davis, *Seeing Faith, Printing Pictures: Religious Identity during the English Reformation* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2013), p. 38; Samantha Frénée-Hutchins, *Boudica's Odyssey in Early Modern England* (London & New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 37–39.
- 23 Smith, 'Petrarch Translated', 297; Waterschoot, 'Jan van der Noot Among English and German Printers', p. 317.
- 24 Paul J. Smith, *Het Schouwtoneel der Dieren. Emblemfabels in de Nederlanden (1567–ca. 1670)* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2006), p. 16.
- 25 Edmund Spenser, *Three proper, and wittie, familiar Letters [...]* (London: Henry Bynneman, 1580); Edmund Spenser, *De rebus gestis Britanniae commentarioli tres Ad ornatissimum virum M. Henricum Broncarem Armigerum. E.S* (London: Henry Bynneman, 1582).
- 26 Hadfield, 'Edmund Spenser's Translations', pp. 146, 149.
- 27 Smith, 'Petrarch Translated', p. 323.
- 28 Hadfield, 'Edmund Spenser's Translations', p. 154.
- 29 Alisa van de Haar, *The Golden Mean of Languages: Forging Dutch and French in the Early Modern Low Countries, 1540–1620* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2019), pp. 38–92.
- 30 Florio cited by: Rocío G. Sumillera, 'Language Manuals and the Book Trade in England', in *Translation and the Book Trade in Early Modern Europe*, edited by José María Pérez Fernández and Edward Wilson-Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 61–80 (p. 61); John Gallagher, *Learning Languages in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 1.
- 31 Petrus L.M. Loonen, *For to Learne to Buye and Sell: Learning English in the Low Dutch Area between 1500 and 1800: A Critical Survey* (Groningen: Universiteitsdrukkerij, 1990); W.Th.M. Frijhoff, *Meertaligheid in de Gouden Eeuw: Een verkenning* (Amsterdam: KNAW Press, 2010), pp. 40–41.

- 32 Jonathan Hsy, *Trading Tongues: Merchants, Multilingualism, and Medieval Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013), p. 3; Christopher Joby, *The Dutch Language in Britain (1550–1702): A Social History of the Use of Dutch in Early Modern Britain* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 315–322.
- 33 Hadfield, ‘Edmund Spenser’s Translations’, p. 149.
- 34 Van der Noot, *Het theatre*, fol. B2v.
- 35 Van der Noot, *Le theatre*, fol. C3v.
- 36 Van der Noot, *A theatre*, fol. C2v.
- 37 Jan van der Noot, *Theatrum das ist Schawplatz [...] vbergesatzet durch Balthasarn Froe* (Cologne, Gotfried II Heinrich Hirtzhorn, 1572); Waterschoot, ‘An Author’s Strategy’, p. 42.
- 38 Waterschoot, ‘Jan van der Noot Among English and German Printers’, p. 319.
- 39 Peter Burke, *Exiles and Expatriates in the History of Knowledge, 1500–2000* (Waltham MA: Brandeis University Press, 2017).