

MONTAIGNE AND JACOB CATS

Frans R.E. Blom

One of the first authors in The Netherlands to read and use Montaigne extensively in his works was Jacob Cats. He was, by far, the most productive of all Dutch authors in the first half of the seventeenth century. Not only did he write an impressive oeuvre, but all of his works continued to be printed long after their first editions. Montaigne could have had less influential ambassadors for the divulgation of his writings and name in the Netherlands.

Jacob Cats (1577–1659) was born and reared in a wealthy, eminent family in the province of Zeeland. He studied law at the Universities of Leiden and of Orléans. Upon his return to Zeeland, he made a fortune through his marriage with the rich Elisabeth van Valckenburgh, as well as through several profitable land gaining projects. Both his wealth and his professional career as a lawyer made him an influential local politician. In 1621, he became a city magistrate, first in Zeeland's capital Middelburg, and later in Dordrecht. His political zenith came in 1636, when he was appointed Holland's *Raadspensionaris*, the position once held by as great a statesman as Johan van Oldenbarnevelt. It was not until he reached the age of 73 years, that he resigned from politics and decided to live the last years of his life in the quietness of his country house, Sorghvliet, which nowadays still functions as a refuge for Holland's busy prime minister.

His political activities did not prevent Cats from having a brilliant literary career as well. In his Leiden period, like most students of his time, he wrote academic occasional poetry in Latin. His public debut, however, took place many years later. In 1618, at the age of forty, he published two conspicuous love emblem books, the *Proteus* and the *Maechden-plicht* (Rules for Girls). Both were paramount literary successes at the heart of a highly popular genre at the time. Love emblem books had been a real rage among Dutch readers for the last two decades. Humanist writers, such as the Leiden professor Daniel Heinsius and Otto Vaenius, had published beautiful collections that were followed and emulated by the most elegant of all, P.C. Hooft's *Emblemata amatoria* (1611, with a second edition in 1618). Hooft's work

in its turn was emulated by Jacob Cats. In fact, not only Hooft but the genre of love emblems itself was surpassed by these new editions, for both of his emblem books presented something new. The *Maechdenplicht* addressed a very particular public and was meant especially for the socially vulnerable group of girls at marriageable age, who had so much to lose in the game of love. *Proteus*, on the other hand, aimed at both parties involved, but the lessons in this book exceeded the field of love. In a three partite division, Cats lifted up the theme from love to social relationships and religious devotion. The idea was just as simple as it was effective: each of the three parts had the same set of *picturae* by Adriaan van de Venne, but they were differently enriched by verses, citations and prose comments in Dutch, other vernacular languages or Latin. By doing so, the author managed to first instruct his readers in the field of love, then give them moral rules, and thirdly guide them in their religious meditations.

Proteus, in terms of scope, may be regarded as the blueprint for the oeuvre as a whole; all works were meant to instruct in daily life practical affairs, moral behaviour and religion. After the immense success of *Proteus*, with several reprints in different qualities, Cats continued to develop the love theme in two major publications that both dealt with matrimony and the relation between man and woman in general. First, *Houwelick* (Wedding, 1625) was a life long guide well ordered in a practical way, along the traditional six stages of female life: from a young girl, to a marriageable girl, a bride, a wife, a mother, and finally, a widow. This work is intellectually less demanding than the earlier publications. Here, instruction outdoes art. The language is mostly vernacular, the verses run soberly. Nonetheless, just like his literary debut, *Houwelick* is built up from many literary sources, suggesting a wide reading in biblical, classical and humanist texts. Moreover, in the didactic poem, the literary tradition appears mainly in the use of *exempla*.

That same characteristic can be found in Jacob Cats's last great work on love, *Trou-ringh* (Wedding Ring, 1637). This didactic poem is subdivided into four parts, dealing with exemplary cases of matrimony from different periods of time. The first book is based on biblical material, the second on pagan antiquity, and the third is derived from 'histories up to our own times, some even quite recent'. The last book, as we may expect, deals entirely with religion and focuses on the 'spiritual matrimony between God's Son and the Church'. Once again, *Trou-ringh* is a low key poem, written in vernacular language. It is perhaps his most didactic work, since each versified case of matrimony is followed by a

prose dialogue that provides the reader with further exegetical instructions and guidelines. On the other hand, however, these dialogues are full of references to literary sources, the Old and New Testaments, a wide range of classical writers like Herodotus, Strabo, Ovid, Pliny, Plutarch, Lucan, Athenaeus and Achilles Tatius, as well as several modern authors including Boccaccio, Cervantes and Lipsius.¹

In the meantime, Cats had continued working in the emblematic genre with his paramount three volume edition of *Spiegel van den ouden en nieuwen tyt* (Mirror of old and recent days, 1632). This work was meant to instruct readers in more areas than love alone. It dealt with all aspects and stages of human life, starting from childhood and following its course, in the author's words, to the end of all flesh. This huge work was built up from engravings by Adriaan van de Venne, with literary counterparts both in Cats's verses and in aphorisms, *sententiae* and each and every kind of useful quotation taken from various literary sources. Here, the invention draws on living languages on the one hand and an immensely wide reading on the other hand, whereas the poetry itself speaks in a low key voice to the common man. A contemporary commented on it in a letter to the author: 'You combine instruction and pleasure, and give straightforward explanations. Your book is open to anyone, and you write to be read by anyone, in all moments of life, be it in public matters, or in bedroom affairs or at the dining table'.² The formula, once more, proved successful. After *Houwelyck* with approximately fifty thousand copies, the *Spiegel* was published in ten different editions over three decades and sold more than twenty-five thousand copies.³ Cats was the most popular vernacular Golden Age writer by far. His influence can even be traced in the development of the Dutch language, for quite a number of his verses have become proverbial, even in our days.

¹ Worp J.A., "De bronnen van den Trou-ringh van Cats", in *Noord en zuid. Tijdschrift ten dienste van onderwijzers bij de studie der Nederlandsche taal- en letterkunde* 20 (1897) 39–66.

² Letter from Casper Barlaeus to Jacob Cats, a.d. 1634. Cited from Jansen J., "The Emblem Theory and Audience of Jacob Cats", in Manning J. – Porteman K. – Vaeck M. van (eds.), *The Emblem Tradition and the Low Countries* (Turnhout: 1999) 228.

³ One of his publishers, Jan Jacobsz. Schipper, estimated in 1655 that fifty thousand copies of *Houwelyck* were sold and for some of his other titles, it was half that number or more. See Klock J.J., "Burgerdeugd of burgermansdeugd? Het beeld van Jacob Cats als nationaal zedenmeester", in Aerts R. – Velde H. te (eds.), *De stijl van de burger. Over Nederlandse burgerlijke cultuur vanaf de middeleeuwen* (Kampen: 1998) 103.

By now, the first stage of Jacob Cats's literary production came to an end. His five major works, in chronological order *Proteus* and *Mae-gden-plicht*, *Houwelick*, *Spiegel* and *Trou-ringh*, constituted a complete and successful oeuvre, providing a wide range of readers with guidelines for life, in the fields of love, marriage and the obligations between man and woman, in moral and social behaviour, in religious matters, and any other major and minor aspects of human existence. While these works were continually published in several reprints, no new works by Cats appeared. It was not until fifteen years later, in 1652, when the politician-poet resigned from his service to the country at the age of 73, that he once more devoted his life to writing at his country house Sorghvliet. His new creations were brought together in the publication of *Ovderdom, buyten-leven, en hof-gedachten, op Sorgh-Vliet* (Old Age, Country Life and Garden Thoughts at Sorghvliet, 1656). Unfortunately, it is not only by name that these poems refer to his old age and retired status: the impetus and spirit of his first literary period, had gone. The didactic poems of old age fail to capture the reader's attention. It seems as if the poet is writing to himself, in endless verses of ongoing contemplation and piety. However, many of his 'younger' themes and thoughts still occur. And, once in while, quotations from literary tradition are reused, along with examples. In his ultimate works, his reflections on life and pious thoughts of earthly *vanitas* are predominant. The emblematic *Doodkiste voor de levende* (Coffin for the Living, 1657) is no artistic match to the *Proteus* or *Spiegel*, and it only draws from biblical tradition. And art, in terms of poetical diction and literary adoptions, is all but absent in the *Tachtigh-jarige Bedenckingen* (Thoughts at Eighty Years, 1658) and in the unpublished autobiographical poem *Twee-en-tachtigjaarig leven* (Eighty two Years of Life, 1659). In these later works, Jacob Cats clearly attempted to merely render an account of his life and to prepare for his appearance before God's Tribunal – without much artistic finery.

As a moralist, pedagogue, educator and instructor, Cats repeats voices from past and present authorities. In fact, the most astonishing characteristic of his oeuvre is the massive re-cycling and compiling of literature. Both his emblematic and his didactic works, therefore, are full of references to the Holy Book in the first place, and to the early Christian fathers. Readers may also find pieces of Greek literature, from Homer to Plutarch. Latin literature is naturally covered from Antiquity towards modern times. And among all Biblical wisdom, as well as the

extensive erudition from Greek and Latin sources, Cats does not omit the contemporary vernacular languages either. There are quotations and references from Italian, Spanish and English literature, and the most frequently used vernacular, by far, is French.

Due to the impressive amount of pages and by the compounded nature of his literary works, analytical studies on Cats have proven to be very difficult, and most results in this field are based on incidental observations, rather than on a systematic approach. An overall study to the literary sources of Jacob Cats is still a strong *desideratum*.⁴ Furthermore, we have no proper insight into his techniques of invention. Was the author compiling directly from literary sources, or, more likely, did he use intermediary sources such as *florilegia*? In this respect, tracing the influence of Montaigne in the works of Cats might be a useful, perhaps exemplary case-study.⁵

The emblem works: Proteus, Maechden-plicht and Spiegel

Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* are ever present in the works of Jacob Cats, starting from his very first literary publication, the emblem book *Proteus*. Emblem no. 39 presents the picture of a web in which a thick and filthy spider waits for her harmless prey [Fig. 1].⁶ In case readers might miss the point of this love emblem, the title reads: 'Do not go in, unless you go all the way through'. In other words: do not allow Venus's tricks to be fatal. In the quotation area below the image, the advice is stressed by two passages taken from literary authorities. The first is Ovid, who states in the Latin of his *Art of Love*: Do not make

⁴ There is the searchable electronic edition of *Sinne en Minnebeelden* by the Utrecht Emblem Project (at <http://emblems.let.uu.nl/emblems/html/c1627front.html>), which is based on the Luijten edition (The Hague: 1996). More digital Cats editions are forthcoming in the *Digital Library of Dutch Literature*, at <http://www.dbnl.nl/auteurs/auteur.php?id=cats001>.

⁵ A relevant partial study, as far as the early emblems of Cats are concerned, is Thorpe L., "Montaigne and the Emblems of Jacob Cats", *Modern Language Quarterly* 10 (1949) 419–428.

⁶ Jacob Cats, *Silenus Alcibiadis, sive Proteus, vitae humanae ideam, emblemate trifariam variato, oculis subjiciens* (Middelburg, Johannes Hellenius: 1618) embl. 39 (fol. K4r) "Non intrandum, aut penetrandum". Later editions, that were published as the *Minne en Sinnebeelden* since 1627, include one more emblem in the opening section. In these editions the emblem concerned, is number 40.

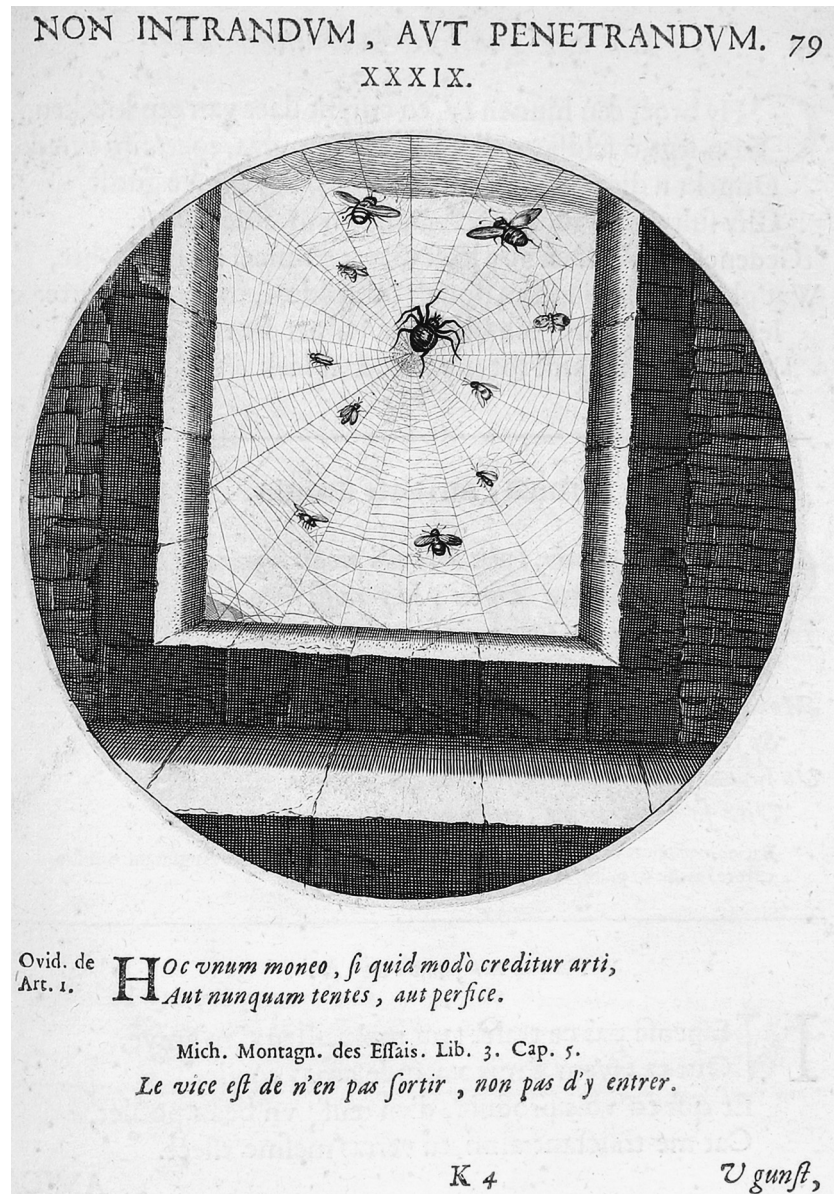


Fig. 1. Jacob Cats, *Proteus* (Middelburg: 1618), emblem 39.

any attempt, unless you finish it. And the other one is by Montaigne. Quoting him, Cats seems to refer to the same meaning: 'The vice is: not to get *out*, rather than to get *in*' (Le vice est de n'en pas sortir, non pas d'y entrer).

In *Proteus*, with its triple fifty emblems, the French philosopher features three times.⁷ Among so many other authorities, three quotations may be scanty, but their appearance is very significant. Firstly, there are two quotations in the first partition of *Proteus* that deal with lessons in love affairs. The other one is in the second division, on social behaviour. Secondly, while the two citations in the love section both have an exact provenance description, the third one is roughly labelled 'Mich. Montagn'. according to most other source indications, as for example, 'Lucrece, book one' or even less precisely 'Alciato, speaking of love'.⁸ And finally: the ones that have a detailed source description are both taken from chapter III 5. Why is that? Of all the *Essais*, this particular chapter has the least telling name. It does not mention its theme in the title as other chapters that are entitled, for instance, *De la tristesse* or *De la peur* or "De la vanité". On the contrary, chapter III 5 looks like a philological treatise on the poetry of Vergil, which is suggested by its name: "Sur des vers de Vergil". Although readers may find some lines taken from *Aeneid* book 8 here, they merely make up a starting point for some highly fascinating observations on love and sexual behaviour in past and present days. With unrestrained freedom and frankness, Montaigne wanders through most aspects of sex, both within the bonds of matrimony and without. Moreover, his quotations from ancient poets are explicit to the utmost degree due to the inclusion of words like 'mentula' and 'rigida vulva'. Not surprisingly, contemporary and later translators of the *Essais* have been quite reluctant in rendering such passages into vernacular. As a Dutch Calvinist, Jacob Cats must have had unusual thoughts reading passages that discuss the maximum frequency of sexual intercourse per day, or descriptions of the 'membrum virile' as an untamed, furious beast, and its female counterpart as a greedy, devouring and rebellious creature. On the other hand, though, this chapter in its more decent parts had great value for his subject matter. Thus, by quoting carefully, Cats managed

⁷ Cats, *Proteus* embl. 33 (fol. J3r), embl. 37 (fol. K2r) and embl. 39 (fol. K4r).

⁸ The citation that was roughly indicated 'Mich. Montagn', is from Michel de Montaigne, *Essais* 19. Both other examples derive from *Proteus* embl. 15: 'Lucret. Lib. 1', and 'Alciat. De amore loquens'.

to incorporate Montaigne's independent and unashamed ideas into his own austere emblematic rules of conduct. The above mentioned Spider emblem, for example, is highly selective in its quotation from chapter III 5. Applied by Cats to the stage of entering the game of love, the words 'le vice est de n'en pas sortir, non pas d'y entrer' function as a fairly innocent *sententia*. In the *Essais*, however, they appear to be the down to earth words of Aristippus, who was not commenting on love, but rather justified his visit to a prostitute:

Car, comme dit le compte d'Aristippus, parlant à des jeunes hommes, qui rougissoient de le veoir entrer chez une courtisane: 'Le vice est, de n'en pas sortir, non pas d'y entrer'. Qui ne veut exempter sa conscience, qu'elle exempte son nom: si le fons n'en vaut guere, que l'apparence tienne bon.

After revealing the (partial) relevance of chapter III 5 to Cats's first publication on love, it will not come as a surprise that the other works include a special Montaigne-focus as well. The emblems in *Maechden-plicht*, the second book published in 1618, make up a single series, each *pictura* featuring on the first, recto page of the emblem, combined with two sententious quotations and additional poetry from various ancient and contemporary sources. Here, Montaigne is even more prominent. In fact the French author is in first position, in the opening emblem, which traditionally stresses the omnipotence of love [Fig. 2].⁹ Below the picture are two quotations, on the left are verses of Lucrece and on the right is Montaigne. Here we find the same characteristics as in the *Proteus*. In contrast to so many other quotations, the Montaigne occurrence has a precise provenance description and the source yet again appears to be chapter III 5. In contrast, the left quotation does not give any more information than that these words are taken from Lucrece. But were they, really? The classical poet who actually wrote these lines is Vergil, in his third book of the *Georgics*. This could naturally have been a *lapsus memoriae* or the *florilegium* used by Cats might have been wrong. However, what is more likely is that Cats found these verses along with the Montaigne quotation on the right side. This is confirmed by the fact that the same Latin lines appear in *Essais* III 5 they do not contain a single word more or less, except that any source

⁹ Jacob Cats, *Maechden-plicht ofte ampt der ionck-vrouwen, in eerbaer liefde, aen-ghewesen door sinne-beelden. Officium puellarum, in castis amoribus, emblemata expressum* (Middelburg, Hans vander Hellen: 1618) embl. 1 (fol. A2r).

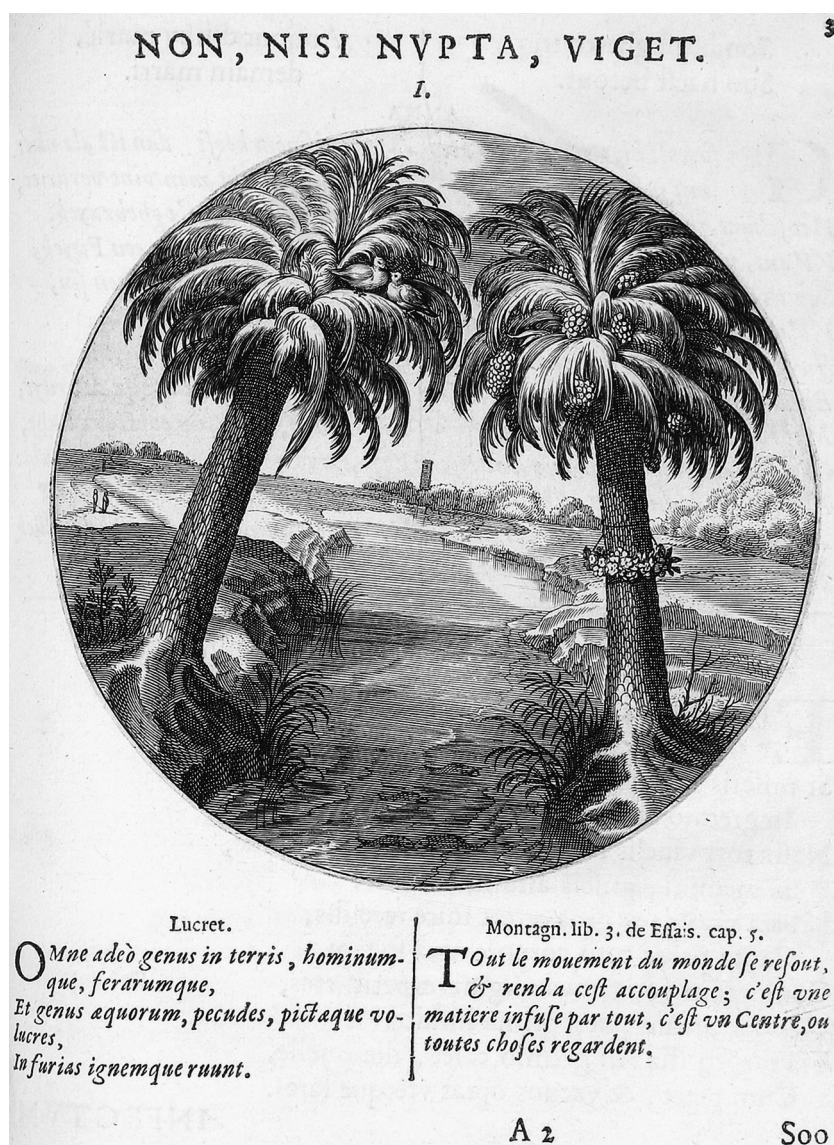


Fig. 2. Jacob Cats, *Maechden-plicht* (Middelburg: 1618), emblem 1.

description is absent there. Taking over the anonymous verses from the *Essais*, Cats could have labelled them Lucretian, based on the nature of the quotation. However, this makes the Montaigne credits, as an intermediary source for *Maechden-plicht*, even stronger.

Direct adoptions of Montaigne's words appear relatively frequent in the *Maechden-plicht*. In the overall number of 44 emblems, five quotations are from the *Essais*.¹⁰ They all have well defined provenance descriptions. And each and every time the words are taken from that same chapter III 5. In addition to these cases, it only occurs once that Cats does not give the exact location and then labels a French citation as words from 'M. Montagne' without including any further information.¹¹ Indeed, these lines are not from his main source, neither are they from the third book. In fact, they never flowed from Montaigne's pen at all. Here in his method, there might be some resemblance with the above mentioned Lucrece fragment. The French prose quotation, wherever it was found, has the nature to fit the work of the famous Frenchman, and its content is worthy of him. So Cats must have been happy enough to label it Montaigne's.

With so many references in *Proteus* and *Maechden-plicht*, one would expect a truly high frequency of the *Essais* in the third emblem book, *Spiegel vanden Ouden en nieuwen Tijd* (1632). Despite its large volume and the huge variety of themes and topics, the name of Montaigne occurs only once.¹² Examining the case is even more disappointing, since the French citation cannot be traced back to its source and appears to be falsely ascribed. For all the worldly wisdoms, popular sayings and educational aphorisms in this compilation, the *Essais* were left completely unused.¹³

After examining the emblem publications of Jacob Cats, the conclusions are illuminating. In the first place Montaigne has been used exclusively in those works that deal with the theme of love. Furthermore, he is

¹⁰ Cats, *Maechden-plicht* embl. 1 (fol. A2r); embl. 3 (fol. A4r); embl. 11 (fol. C4r); embl. 37 (fol. K2r); embl. 39 (fol. K4r).

¹¹ Cats, *Maechden-plicht* embl. 34 (fol. J3r).

¹² Jacob Cats, *Spiegel van den oude ende nieuwen tijdt, bestaende uyt spreek-vwoorden ende sin-spreucken* [...] ('s-Graven-Hage, Isaac Burchoorn: 1632) part 1, the emblem section 'Jongelingh', fol. C1r (= p. 17).

¹³ One could argue that the *Spiegel* is merely based on popular wisdoms and sayings, thus citing less from other authors. Literary citations, however, are quite frequent. In French wisdoms, for example, Ronsard is a main source.

a strong authority, being present in the company of so many biblical quotations, ancient and contemporary writers. In fact, Cats is more indebted to him than to any other vernacular writer. In overall figures, Montaigne is quoted eight times, with three instances in *Proteus* and five in *Maechden-plicht*. The third conclusion is that chapter III 5 is his *Fundgrube*: the quotations are all from the same chapter except for one.¹⁴ And each time the *Essais* are quoted, the provenance description is far more precise than in most of the other quotations. Finally, as was pointed out with the Lucrece example in the opening emblem of *Maechden-plicht*, there are quite a few quotations from other writers, that also appear in chapter III 5. In this respect, Montaigne's abundantly quoting prose, served as an intermediary source for Cats.¹⁵

Didactic poetry on love and marriage: Houwelick and Trou-ringh

Compared to the emblematic works, the massive didactic poem *Houwelick*, with its clear ordering along the six stages of female life, is less demanding, more transparent and straightforward in its diction. However, there is erudition in the footnotes to the Dutch verses, with references to quite a number of authorities. Does Montaigne show up again here, and if so, in what way are the *Essais* used now? In fact, *Houwelick* is the work that owes more to Montaigne than any other of Cats's publications. The French philosopher is quoted ten times, and the quotations are derived from a wider range of chapters. Still, key chapter III 5 remains relatively predominant as it is referred to four times.¹⁶ The other six cases derive from various hitherto unused parts, each having an exact provenance description.¹⁷

¹⁴ In a minor poetic work of 1620, *Selfstrijt*, Montaigne is cited once on fol. E1r (p. 33), again from *Essais* III 5.

¹⁵ Perhaps Cats also quoted ancient sources through Montaigne in the extra opening emblem of *Proteus* that was added in later editions (e.g. 1627 on which Luijten based his edition; see note 4). Here the Latin words 'Incassum furit' (Vergil *Georgica* III 98) and the phrase 'Quod perdidit optat' (Petronius, *Satyricon* 128) might well have been taken from *Essais* III 5.

¹⁶ *Essais* III 5 appears in Jacob Cats, *Houwelick: dat is het gansch beleyt des echten-staets, afgedeylt in zes hooft-stucken, te weten: maeght, vrijster, bruyt, vrouwe, moeder, weduwe, behelsende mede de mannelicke tegen-plichten* (Middelburg, Jan Pieterss vande Venne: (1625) "Vryster", (fol. DD1r); in "Voor-reden" to "Bruyt", (fol. *1v); in "Huysvrouwe" (fol. Nn2v p. 49); and in "Moeder" (fol. Aaa4r).

¹⁷ *Essais* I 24 in Cats, *Houwelick* "Huysvrouwe" (fol. Gg1r. = p. 116); I 25 in idem,

Thus, composing *Houwelick*, Cats clearly had a wider focus on Montaigne. Furthermore, he had started to use his source in a different way now. In the earlier works he had merely selected aphoristic *sententiae*, which was obviously required by the nature of the emblems. In the didactic style of *Houwelick*, Montaigne's aphorisms still occur, but the *Essais* are now more productive for their rich historical and exemplary materials. A fine demonstration of this application can be found in the chapter "Vrijster" ("Spinster") that contains a large passage in which girls of marriageable age are given advice about their public appearance. They should be decent and silent, to the extent of shyness. In the margin, references are made to a series of authorities, all proclaiming how fitting it is for girls to be obedient and modest. Along with several Latin authorities, cited at large, is Montaigne, who disapproved of the freedoms in modern times that encourage girls to behave like the bold and barbarian Sarmatians in the past:¹⁸

Noz peres dressoient la contenance de leur filles à la honte et à la crainte (les courages et les desirs tousiours pareils) nous à l'assurance; nous n'y entendons rien: c'est à faire aux Sarmates, qui n'ont loy de coucher avec homme, que de leurs mains elles n'ayent tué un autre à la guerre. Mont. lib 3,5

Sometimes the historical examples seem to have been just too large to fit in the margin. In such cases Cats resorted to working in a rather scholarly way, only referring to the source without the actual citation. When discussing women's faithfulness and loyalty in marriage, he mentions the behaviour of certain wives in exotic regions who even choose to die along with their husbands. The information source is given in the footnote, reading: 'see a remarkable description in Mich. de la Montagne 2,29, at the end'.¹⁹ And, just as in scholarly footnotes nowadays, the proof is empowered by a second reference: 'See in the same author some extraordinary examples of other women who in love of their husbands chose to die together. Bk. 2 chap. "De trois bonnes femmes"'.²⁰

"Moeder" (fol. Hhh4v p. 64); and "Moeder" fol. Hhh3r p. 61; I 43 in idem, "Huysvrouwe" (fol. *bb1v p. 97); II 29 and II 35 in idem, "Huysvrouwe" (fol. kk4r p. 131); III 9 in idem, "Voor-reden" to "Bruyt" fol. *2v.

¹⁸ Idem, "Vryster" (fol. DD1r p. 25), quoting *Essais* III 5.

¹⁹ Idem, "Huysvrouwe" (fol. Kk4r p. 131), reads: 'Siet hiervan een seldsame beschrijvinge by Mich. de la Montagne 2,29 in fin. Siet by den selven bysondere exempelen van andere vrouwen, die uyt enckeke liefde voor hebben genomen om benevens haren man te sterven. Liv 2 cap de trois bonnes femmes'.

Altogether, among the Montaigne references in *Houwelick*, seven cases deal with *exempla*. Since the French author compiled most of these from other writings, he functioned as an intermediary source. The passage about the Sarmatian girls that was cited above, for example, was derived from a well known passage in the *Historiae* of Herodotus.²⁰ Cats, however, did not bother tracing its origin at all. Even when a provenance is mentioned in the *Essais*, for example in phrases such as ‘comme dit le comte d’Aristippus’ or ‘dit Aristote’, this particular source description is selectively omitted from the quotation in *Houwelick*, merely labelling it as Montaigne’s.²¹ In fact, for all the historical examples taken from them, the *Essais* have *not* been the intermediary source only once. In the fifth book, bringing up the topic of child education, the inevitable question is raised as to what is the best way to teach the fruits of our marriage. Cats prescribes a method of pleasure and playful learning. In this passage, Montaigne is quoted extensively on his own experiences in learning Latin: he was not bothered by any grammar or boring books, and learned it through a game with a governor who only spoke Latin to him. The autobiographical passage from chapter I 25 is cited at length in the footnote, while in the Dutch verses, the example is presented as an anonymous, universal model.

After *Houwelick*, with its high frequency in aphorisms and examples from chapter III 5 and other places in the *Essais*, it is interesting to see how Montaigne features in Cats’s final work on marriage, the *Trouwingh* (1637). This didactic poem, with its interwoven, exegetical dialogues, includes five occurrences with a character that is similar to the works analysed above.²² Three cases contain exact provenance descriptions of the favourite chapter III 5 again. The new element here is that these references were no new findings. In fact, Cats had started to repeat his inventions from earlier works. Thus, readers may again find the above mentioned Sarmatians example of the bold girls that featured in

²⁰ Herodotus, *Historiae* IV 107.

²¹ ‘Le comte d’Aristippus’ [viz. Diogenes Laërtius *Vita Aristippi* II 69] is mentioned as a source in III 5 and left out of the citation in *Proteus* embl. 39 (see note 6). Aristotle is mentioned as a source in III 5, whereas he is left out of the quotation in *Houwelick* ‘Moeder’ fol. Aaa4r.

²² *Essais* III 5 in Jacob Cat’s, *Werelts begin, midden, eynde besloten in den trov-ringh, met den proef-steen van den selven* (Dordrecht, Hendrick van Esch: 1637) “Bedenckingen op Jacobs Houwelick” (fol. E2v), in ‘Roerende Ontschakinge’ (fol. O1r) and in ‘Van harderinne tot Koninginne’ (fol. V1r). *Essais* II 35 in *Trouwingh* ‘Voor-reden’ (B3r). The fifth occurrence has no exact provenance description, roughly indicating Montaigne as a source (‘as Michel de la Montagne and others write’) in Cats, *Trouwingh* ‘Bedenckingen op Jacobs Houwelick’ (fol. E2v).

Houwelick. The French words were rendered in Dutch prose this time, for the sake of transparency:²³

En een ander Hoveling, ten naesten by van onsen tyt, (Mich. de Montaigne liv. 3, chap 5) seyt aldus: Onse voor ouders beleyden het gelaet en het geheel wesen van jonge deernen tot vreesse en schaemte, en haer gemoederen en driften van gelycken, wij in tegendeel tot stoutmoedigheyt en onversaegtheyt. Gewisselick wy en verstaen ons stuck niet met allen in desen deele. De Sarmaten gaen soo te werck, die geen vryster toe en laeten een man te nemen, ten zy de selve al voren met eygen hant een van de vyant om den hals heeft gebracht.

The question that arises is whether or not Cats recycled the Montaigne passages from his own earlier publications here and left his French source unused. In this respect, the second example of repetition is revealing. The duplicate is based on an even earlier publication, going back to the 1618 emblem book *Maechden-plicht*. In emblem 39, that discusses the fundamentals of a strong marriage, Cats warned against engagements based on beauty. Stressing his guideline, he cited Montaigne as follows: ‘il y faut des fondamens plus solides, cette bouillante allegresse n’y vaut rien’. When twenty years later, he touched upon the same topic in *Trouingh*, Cats used the same passage. At this point, the words cited had slightly altered: ‘il y faut des fondamens plus solides et plus constants’. Since the words ‘plus constants’ had been left out in the *Maechden-plicht*, the second quotation was not drawn from the earlier work. Cats still must have had the *Essais* at hand when he recycled this purple passage from chapter III 5, that indeed reads both adjectives.

Out of the five references that occur in *Trouingh*, only one is truly new, both in provenance and in character. It is not about love or marriage or women (although derived from chapter II 35 “De trois bonnes femmes”), but deals with the process of composing a literary work. Here, Montaigne reveals his technique of invention, based on much reading and compilation from a wide range of authorities. Cats, of course, must have recognised his own method, and accordingly, used the passage in his preface to *Trouingh* as a justification of his own writing principle:²⁴

Je m’estonne que ceux qui s’adonnent à escrire pour donner plaisir et profit au lecteur, ne s’avisent plustost de choisir dix mille tres-belles histo-

²³ Cats, *Trouingh* “Van harderinne tot Koninginne” (fol. V1r).

²⁴ *Essais* II 35 in Cats, *Trouingh* “oor-reden” (fol. B3r).

res, qui se rencontrent dans les livres: où ils auroient moins de peine, et apporteroient plus de plaisir et profit. Et qui en voudroit bastir un corps entier, et s'entretenant, il ne faudroit qu'il fournist du sien que la liaison, comme la soudure d'un autre metal: et pourroit entasser par ce moyen force veritables evenemens de toutes sortes, les disposant et diversifiant, selon que la beauté de l'ouvrage le requerroit.

Works of old age

After *Trouwingh*, Cats did not create any major new works for a period of approximately two decades. This cesura definitely marks a change of nature in the poetry. When he started publishing again in 1656, love, marriage and the relationships between men and women were no longer the main issues. Furthermore, the works of old age show a different composing technique, including significantly less references to authorities. Despite all these unfavourable factors, it is interesting to see that Montaigne is still present. The didactic poetry of *Ouderdom*, *Buytenleven* and *Hofgedachten*, and the contemplative *Tachtigjarige Bedenkingen* indeed refer to him in five footnotes.²⁵ Although the frequency is not as high as in the earlier works, the *Essais* are relatively dominant compared to other sources. As one might expect from the topics being discussed, chapter III 5 has been left out completely. Other, hitherto unused chapters are referred to with exact provenance descriptions. In addition, Montaigne is not quoted for his aphorisms. Just as in the earlier didactic works, the *Essais* are productive in their rich exemplary material. In footnotes, readers may find references such as: 'see this story told by Montaigne livre 2,12'.²⁶ For instance, a versified catalogue of famous historical persons who suddenly died on the spot (both biblical, classical and modern, including Montaigne's brother), is accompanied by this footnote: 'See these and the like examples in Mich. de la Mont 1,19 Que philosopher est apprendre à mourir'.²⁷ The *Essais* are, once again, the intermediary source for most of the examples used by Cats. The

²⁵ *Essais* II 12 twice in Jacob Cats, *Ouderdom, Buytenleven, en Hofgedachten op Sorgh-vliet* (Amsterdam, Jan Jacobsz. Schipper: 1656) "Tweede deel", fol. K2r and fol. K3v. *Essais* I 19 in "Tweede deel", fol. R2v. *Essais* II 36 in "Derde deel" fol. Ee2r. *Essais* I 2 in Jacob Cats, *Alle de werken, so ouden als nieuwen, van de Heer Jacob Cats, Ridder, oudt Raedtpensionaris van Hollandt, etc.: doorgaens vermeedert, en met achter des autheurs tachtigh-jarigh leven, Huyshoudinge en Bedenkinghe op Zorghvliet* (Amsterdam, Jan Jacobsz. Schipper: 1658) fol. A3v.

²⁶ Cats, *Ouderdom en Buytenleven* "Tweede deel", fol. K2r and fol. K3v.

²⁷ Cats, *Ouderdom en Buytenleven* "Tweede deel", fol. R2v.

most extensive reference by far, however, deals with an autobiographical passage on physical health and inherited diseases. In chapter II 36 (“De la ressemblance des enfans aux peres”) Montaigne wonders why the gravel never caused him any pain in his youth, even though he must have gotten it from his father’s semen and have borne it all the time. Cats was charmed by this passage and gave it a twenty lines translation in his poetry, with a footnote reference to the French source.²⁸

Conclusions

Having a full scale overview of the references to Montaigne in the oeuvre of the Dutch poet Jacob Cats, the first thing to say is that the *Essais* have been a major and permanent source for invention, from the earliest publication in 1618 to the last in 1658. The highest frequencies are found in the emblem book *Maechden-plicht* and in the didactic poem *Houwelick*. Cats started his reading of Montaigne in chapter III 5, quoting exclusively from the particular chapter “Sur des vers de Vergil”, which is primarily about love and sex. Cats continued to use it in his first creative period, for as long as he wrote about love, marriage and the relationship between man and woman. In fact, he used the chapter so intensively, that a number of duplicates occur. Gradually, from *Houwelick* on, Cats also incorporated other chapters, without any specific preponderance. In his later works, references are made to a wide range of chapters and on various topics.

The *Essais* proved to be useful in various ways. Elegant aphorisms, either from Montaigne himself or in his citations, found their way into Cats’s emblematic works. Here, they were just as authoritative as any canonized biblical, classical or humanist text. Also, the rich compilation of exemplary material was used, especially in the didactic poems. For all these passages, it is noteworthy that Cats did not hesitate to label them as Montaigne’s, even in cases where the French text refers explicitly to the original source. An interesting category of *exempla*, stressing the authority of the philosopher, is the material derived from Montaigne’s own life, as written in the autobiographic passages of the *Essais*.

Just as with any other source used, Cats did not follow Montaigne in a long train of thoughts. His method is merely eclectic, building up his

²⁸ Cats, *Ouderdom en Buytenleven* “Derde deel”, fol. Ee2r.

own ideas from various convenient elements that were roughly, selectively and manipulatively detached from their source and ingenuously brought together in a new text. In this respect, Cats gladly imitated the working process of the French compiler.

Furthermore, it is highly remarkable that the *Essais*, compared to most other sources used in the works of Cats, are referred to with the utmost precision in their provenance description. Not only the books and chapters are mentioned, but chapter titles as well. Some references even indicate locations inside the chapters, like ‘lib. 3 de la Vanité à la fin’.²⁹ Cats, therefore, must have had the *Essais* at hand while composing. And this leads to the interesting question as to how Montaigne, as a compiling author, was an intermediary source to Cats. One incident pointed out that, indeed, some lines that were derived from the *Essais*, where they feature anonymously in chapter III 5, were wrongly ascribed to Lucrece. A systematic approach to this particularly complex field will be one of the future’s greatest benefits from digital research.

²⁹ Cats, *Houwelick* “Voor-reden” to “Bruyt”, fol. *2v.

Selective Bibliography

- BERGE D. TEN, *De hooggeleerde en zoetvloeiende dichter Jacob Cats* (The Hague: 1979).
- CATS JACOB, *Maechden-plicht ofte ampt der ionck-vrouwen, in eerbaer liefde, aen-ghewesen door sinne-beelden. Officium puellarum, in castis amoribus, emblemate expressum* (Middelburg, Hans vander Hellen: 1618).
- , *Silenus Alcibiadis, sive Proteus, vitae humanae ideam, emblemate trifariam variato, oculis subjiciens* (Middelburg, Hans vander Hellen: 1618).
- , *Houwelick: dat is het gansch beleyt des echten-staets, afgedeylt in zes hooft-stucken, te weten: maeght, vrijster, bruyt, vrouwe, moeder, weduwe, behelsende mede de mannelicke tegen-plichten* (Middelburg, Jan Pieters. vande Venne: (1625).
- , *Spiegel van den oude ende nieuwen tijdt, bestaende uyt spreek-woorden ende sin-spreucken [...]* (’s-Graven-Hage, Isaac Burchoorn: 1632).
- , *’s Werelts begin, midden, eynde besloten in den trof-ringh, met den proef-steen van den selven* (Dordrecht, Hendrick van Esch: 1637).
- , *Ouderdom, Buytenleven, en Hofgedachten op Sorgh-vliet* (Amsterdam, Jan Jacobsz. Schipper: 1656).
- , *Alle de wercken, so ouden als nieuwen, van de Heer Jacob Cats, Ridder, oudt Raedtpensionaris van Hollandt, etc.: doorgaens vermeerderd, en met achter des auteurs tachtigh-jarigh leven, Huys-houdinge en Bedenkinghe op Zorghvliet* (Amsterdam, Jan Jacobsz. Schipper: 1658).
- , *Alle de wercken*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: 1712; repr. Utrecht: 1976).
- , *Sinne- en Minnebeelden*, ed. H. Luijten, 3 vols. (The Hague: 1996). [Web edition at <http://emblems.let.uu.nl/emblems/html/c1627front.html>].
- , web portal in *Digital Library of Dutch Literature*: <http://www.dbnl.nl/auteurs/auteur.php?id=cats001>.
- JANSEN J., “The Emblem Theory and Audience of Jacob Cats”, in Manning J. – Porteman K. – Vaeck M. van (eds.), *The Emblem Tradition and the Low Countries* (Turnhout: 1999) 227–242.
- PORTEMAN K., “The emblem as ‘genus jocosum’: Theory and praxis (Jacob Cats and Roemer Visscher)”, in Porteman K. (ed.), *The Dutch emblem*. Special ed. of *Emblematica* 8/2 (1994) 243–260.
- THORPE L., “Montaigne and the Emblems of Jacob Cats”, *Modern Language Quarterly* 10 (1949) 419–428.