

BOOK REVIEWS

Marianne Brandis. 'Artist at Work: Gerard Brender à Brandis, wood engraver and bookwright.' In *DA, A Journal of the Printing Arts*, number 64, spring/summer 2009.

Available from The Porcupine's Quill, 68 Main Street, Box 160, Erin, Ontario N0B 1T0.

Gerard Brender à Brandis is one of a handful of makers of limited-edition privately printed books in Canada and one of even fewer practitioners of wood engraving. For more than four decades he has created wood engravings, printed in books produced by himself, often including handmade paper and his woven cloth bindings. He practices a discipline in which art and craft at their most successful are perfectly harmonized.

Brender à Brandis was born in the Netherlands in 1942 and emigrated with his family to northern British Columbia. The family eventually moved to a property near Carlisle, Ontario, giving him the opportunity to enjoy the richness and inspiration of nature. Brender à Brandis studied fine arts at McMaster University and discovered wood engraving in his third year. His instructor, George Wallace, helped him acquire supplies and introduced him to the distinguished Canadian wood engraver Rosemary Kilbourn, who offered occasional critiques of his work.

Wood engraving is one of the most demanding of printmaking media. Working on the polished endgrain of wood (traditionally pear wood or other hard, fine-grained wood), the artist enters the block with his burin, and each cut of the tool effectively releases light from dark. Each stroke is uncompromising and irrevocable; corrections are virtually impossible. A good engraving contains areas of solid black, white space, and well-conceived greys created through texture, shape, and pattern. Wood engraving is not for the faint of heart, but a successful wood engraving has a unique crispness and clarity, and its own integrity.

After graduation in 1965 Brender à Brandis focused on his artistic career and was soon exhibiting and selling his wood engravings. He did some part-time teaching, including at Sheridan College, where he learned and taught papermaking: a skill that would be useful for his future work. He became interested in the book as artifact and container of text and image, acquiring a platen press and printing equipment in 1969, later adding an Albion handpress and printing on dampened handmade paper. He also learned to spin, dye, and weave wool to create his own binding cloth. The Brandstead Press was in operation.

Eventually, after some experimentation of combining two different typefaces throughout the text, Brender à Brandis selected a distinctive uncial letterform for the press's use, its weight balancing the strength of the engravings. He also became a member of the prestigious British organization, the Society of Wood Engravers, and produced a series of books from his imprint. The preliminary checklist (by an uncredited author) includes 38 books privately printed by Brender à Brandis – a remarkable achievement – as well as a list of his work published elsewhere. Among the most outstanding is *A Gathering of Flowers from Shakespeare* (1997), with text by F. David Hoener, reprinted in 2006 by The Porcupine's Quill. The book contains 64 engravings showing Brender à Brandis' response to a variety of botanical forms and his sensitive investigation of nature.

Marianne Brandis conveys with affection her brother's development as printmaker and book creator. Brender à Brandis exposed the public to contemporary Canadian wood engraving in 1990 through *The White Line*, a major exhibition he curated for the Carnegie Gallery in Dundas, Ontario, and later through talks and exhibits of his work.

Since 1991 Brender à Brandis has lived in Stratford, Ontario, where his studio is open to the public. He produces editions of engravings, and his one-of-a-kind books avoid the 'inhibiting effect' of the National Library's deposit regulations. He continues to make his livelihood as a full-time artist. He writes: "My subjects may come from the events of my daily life or from the results of research, but my reason for going on from block to block comes from the knowledge that wherever and whenever I happened to be born, this is what I was meant to do."

With the strength of his European heritage and his profound love of nature, Gerard Brender à Brandis quietly concentrates on his work and maintains art as the centre of his life. His independence and integrity are inspiring.

WILL RUETER
University of Toronto Press

Judit Gera and A. Agnes Sneller, *Inleiding literatuurgeschiedenis voor de internationale neerlandistiek*. Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2010. Pp. 213. € 20.00.

With this book the authors, both of whom have taught Dutch language and literature courses at Hungarian universities, intend to fill what they believe to be a void in the teaching of Dutch literature outside of Belgium and The Netherlands at the post-secondary level. In the introduction they write that all existing textbooks (*studieboeken*) used in courses on Dutch literature outside of Belgium and The Netherlands are either in the student's native language, or they are in Dutch, written specifically for Dutch and/or Belgian students. This relatively brief work, in the Dutch language, provides both instructors and students with an overview of the history of Dutch literature with the special challenges faced by, and needs of, international students in mind. Important to note is that the authors have tried to strike a balance between Dutch literature and Flemish literature, and their respective histories.

Following the lead of F.W. Korsten's textbook on European literature, entitled *Lessen in Literatuur*, the authors have opted for a chronological approach in their book and have divided the history of Dutch literature into seven more or less distinct periods with a chapter devoted to each one of them: Middle Ages, Renaissance, Enlightenment, Romanticism, Naturalism, Modernism, and Post-Modernism/Post-Colonialism. The structure of each chapter is identical and, to provide the historical context required for an understanding of literature, begins with a survey of the political and social conditions and developments in Flanders and The Netherlands for the period in question. The historical survey is followed, in each chapter, by a discussion of one of the forms of literary analysis employed in modern literary studies but, as the authors point out, the literary analysis used in any given chapter is not necessarily the only one that can be employed for the literature of the period under discussion.

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The purpose is to familiarize students with different forms, or types, of literary analysis. Following the theoretical exposition and exploration, the third constituent part of each chapter is a survey of the literature of the period which, understandably, does not aim at being comprehensive. It looks at the dominant literary genres of the period by examining representative works in each genre and how that genre and the specific titles selected illustrate the type of literary analysis introduced and discussed in the previous section. Medieval literature, for example, is divided into three genres: religious, courtly and bourgeois, and the analytical principle employed for an understanding of each of these three genres is that of “representation”. The fourth, and final, component of each chapter is an analysis and interpretation of an important and representative text of the period, one that best illustrates the literary trends of the era in question. For the Middle Ages, for example, the authors chose *Mariken van Nieumeghen*, for the Enlightenment Elizabeth Wolff-Bekker’s *Proeve over de opvoeding*, for Romanticism Hendrik Conscience’s *De leeuw van Vlaanderen*, and for Modernism Carry van Bruggen’s “Avondwandeling.”

Finally, this being a textbook, there is a separate section at the back with assignments for each of the seven chapters for students to complete. For the majority of the assignments the authors have included one possible answer or solution. One of the assignments for each of the seven distinct periods in Dutch and Flemish literary history asks the students to establish a connection between what they have learned about Dutch and Flemish literature and what they know about the literature of their own country. A bibliography of literary works and one of secondary literature, as well as helpful indices, complete the volume.

The authors’ objective in the writing this book is a very laudable one, but its success will be determined by the degree of its usefulness in the classroom. The one thought that comes to mind here is that the students’ proficiency in the Dutch language will have to be relatively advanced if they are to benefit fully from this textbook. It strikes this reviewer that in regards to language no concessions were made to those whose native tongue is not Dutch. As to the book’s structure and the pedagogical approach employed therein, one cannot but assume that, in view of the authors’ own experiences in teaching Dutch language and literature courses in Hungary, it will go a long way in answering the needs of both instructors and students. One question, at least from an historian’s point of view, is whether the brief historical survey with which each chapter begins is adequate to place, and to understand, the literature of the period in its political and social context: social understood here in broad terms. Finally, while this (text)book was written specifically with instructors and students in mind, it is not without appeal for anyone interested in the history of Dutch literature.

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