

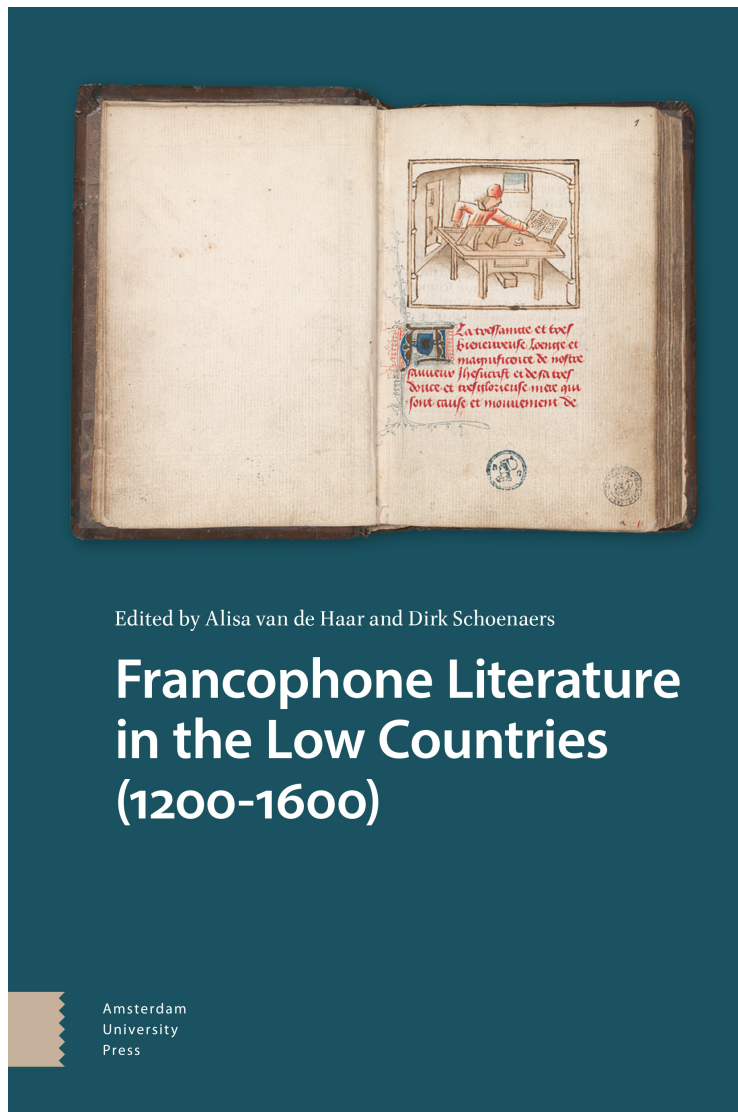
## Review

**Alisa van de Haar and Dirk Schoenaers (eds):  
*Francophone literature in the Low Countries (1200-1600)***

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This work contains six scholarly contributions of which five are in English, while the last one is in French. In addition, twenty-two copies of manuscripts, frontispieces, statistics, and the like, are included. The first article, “Een bouc in walsche, a book written in French,” written by the editors, functions as the general introduction. In it, they stress the “omnipresence of French in the Low Countries” and “consciously use the term francophone lower case f) to refer to the use of French in the pre-colonial context of the Low Countries” (4). They indicate that in “the Burgundian Netherlands francophone authors moved between regions with ease” and that “within francophone areas of the Low Countries each area had its own particular dialect” (7). French literary texts produced in the Low Countries were firmly rooted in the local soil but also embedded in cross-regional and/or international networks and texts in French, Latin, and Dutch were as interrelated and mobile as their authors (22-24).

In her article, “The production and reception of French literary manuscripts in thirteenth-century Flanders,” Lisa Demets notes that,

medieval texts could be multifunctional: they were first aimed at a courtly milieu but also reached additional audiences and manuscripts produced in monastic contexts moved into an urban environment; [aside from] monasteries, the centres of learning were the courts [... while] urban and noble elites in Flanders shared Picard French as a common cultural language. (33)

Demets adds: “The production of French manuscripts was mainly concentrated in the south: the traditionally francophone region and also the County’s administrative centre” (38). But, by the late 15<sup>th</sup> century Bruges became the leading supplier of French manuscripts: “[When] the Counts of Flanders moved their political centre to the north Flemish industries followed suit: Ypres and subsequently Ghent and Bruges became economic hotspots [and] the County’s main trading centre, specializing in luxury goods such as manuscripts” (39).

The famous “*molet Mout sont vallant cil de Gand*” (‘How magnificent are the people of Ghent’) describes the golden age of the Ghent elite (45). Demets concludes that “most of the modest number of multilingual manuscript cases discussed here are Latin-French examples [...] although we know that the court environment was multilingual, including Dutch speaking administrative functionaries” (46).

Hannah Morcos’s chapter, “Compilation as palimpsest: Tracing origins of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu’à César in Liber Floridus*,” indicates that this “earliest French chronicle was composed in the region of medieval Flanders in the first quarter of the thirteenth century” (61). Morcos adds:

The first redaction [...] largely followed [...] Orosius' *Historia adversus paganos* [and the] prologue [...] suggests that it will begin with the first man and continue [up into] contemporary Flanders. [However,] the work concludes [...] with Caesar's activities in Gaul, fifty-seven years before the birth of Christ. (62-63)

She focuses on "the different ways the author of the *Histoire ancienne* exploited and integrated material from Lambert's *Liber Floridus*" (65). The point is made that in one of the sections "of the *Histoire ancienne* the Frank's origin is traced back to Noah," (68) while in other manuscripts "the genealogies of the Franks are repositioned so that the histories of Troy, Rome, and the Franks form a series" (69). Morcos also explains that Alexander's "visit to Jerusalem represents a key part of the rehabilitation of the negative portrayal of Alexander in Orosius. And from Lambert's version of the *Epitome* it inherits the characterization of Alexander as a proto-Christian" (86). Morcos concludes that:

The layers [of] material extracted, re-contextualized and translated in the *Histoire ancienne*, the reworked witness of the *Liber Floridus* used by the *Histoire ancienne*'s compiler and the sources compiled [...] by Lambert underline the palimpsestic nature of medieval compilation. (90)

Catherine Emerson's contribution, "Brabant, Holland and confessions in the Cent Nouvelles nouvelles: Regional stereotypes and provincial commonplaces," observes that these tales "have been repurposed with a Burgundian setting to fit the collection" (96). And that,

the tales set in Holland and Brabant reveal that, while Holland is presented as 'other' from the male aristocratic society of the Burgundian ducal court, Brabant is treated as local even when tales with similar themes are set in both regions. (96)

Its author claims that these tales deal with "recent events" which are still "fresh in people's mind" and that "they are the products of the lands within the Burgundian sphere of influence" (97). But these claims are in fact "quite dubious" because "most were inspired either by originals or by fabliaux that had circulated previously in French" (98). The first tale "deals with a husband who, suspicious of his wife's wealth during his absence in the Holy Land, disguises himself as a priest to hear her confession" [and] "not surprisingly it has been given a Burgundian location since this is a common strategy adopted to nativize texts" (100). Another tale is situated "in Holland" and also "features the sacrament of confession" (100). Emerson wonders if the fact that both tales query "the status of truth and the spoken word in confession" is due to the "linguistic difference between the

francophone tales and the Dutch-speaking characters that are featured in them” but remarks that the example of “*Dat Bedroch der Vrouwen*” (‘the deceit of women’) “shows that Dutch speakers’ access to the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* did not regard this feature as the exclusive property of francophone literary culture” (101-102).

She considers the definition of Brabant as “fluid but that ‘Holland’ is seen as ‘exotic’” (109). Sometimes a tale refers “to a genuine event [such as] tale 6 that took place in Brussels and, although the city is not specifically mentioned, it is strongly implied as the plot features a statue of the Archangel Michael, to whom the jealous husband makes an offering” (110).

Ana Pairet’s article, “From Lyons to Antwerp: *Paris et Vienne* in the Low Countries,” indicates that, “A survey of vernacular materials printed before 1500 reveals the key role played by printers in the Low Countries in disseminating Francophone romances throughout Northern Europe” (117). Further, “the text and rubrication of the *Istoire du tres vaillant chevalier Paris et de la belle Vienne* (Antwerp, Gheraert Leeu, May 15, 1489) closely resembles those of the second French imprint and first illustrated edition (Lyons, Mathias Huss, 1485)” (105). Clearly then, “The Dutch printer was instrumental in the European dissemination of *Paris et Vienne*, [...] published in both French and Dutch in May 1487, then in Low German in 1488” (118). Pairet highlights “textual and paratextual transformations from the French *editio princeps* (Lyons, c. 1480) in Leeu’s first three editions in French, Dutch, and Low German [in order to] illuminate [...] the ‘radiant’ circulation of *Paris et Vienne* in multiple European vernaculars” (120), and in order to “better ascertain the respective role of the Lyons and Antwerp French editions in the printed transmission of the romance,” she provides a list of all seven “known fifteen-century editions” (125). Pairet concludes that,

[the] printed transmission of *Paris et Vienne* in the Early Modern period lays bare transnational patterns of cross-cultural exchange within and beyond Europe [...and that] Leeu’s multilingual adaptation of *Paris et Vienne* offers a rare example of triangulated cross-cultural transfers. (133-134).

Renaud Adam’s article, “Le roman médiéval d’expression française dans les anciens Pays-Bas entre 1550-1600,” points out that Gutenberg’s invention of the modern printing press “did not sound the death knell of the Middle Ages” and that an “analysis of the titles printed between 1550 and 1600 and their peritexts [...] will contribute to a better understanding of the supposed rupture with the medieval literary [which in fact [navigates] between ‘old romances’ and ‘new language’” (137).

A first graph shows that of “some 150 titles of profane literary works [...] 101 were printed in Antwerp” indicating its dominant role between 1550 and 1600

(139-140); the next shows the unevenness of this production and that “only eleven fitted [the] category of medieval romance” (141). Adam concludes that “the break with the literary tradition of the Middle Ages was not as abrupt as one might have thought” and since many “books were lost, making proper estimates of print runs [is] difficult” (143) but that nevertheless, “Plantin did produce 1600 copies of *Reynaert de vos*” (145) a work put on the Index in 1570” (146).

Adam also discusses the Antwerp printer Jan van Waesberghe, who published an updated version of *Quatre fils Aymon* in 1561 and who stressed that the “tale was beautiful, entertaining and very old” (147). He also started “using Roman type,” a phenomenon that “dates back to 1520-1540” (149). Adam concludes that the Antwerp printer “Jean Bogard’s esthetic choices clearly show that he wanted to reach a public that appreciated old tales [...] and therefore he used Gothic type” (153). However, “Jan van Waesberge focussed on a public more interested in French romances of the second half of the sixteenth century. Hence, he ‘modernized’ the French of *Quatre fils Aymon*” (154).

In conclusion, *Francophone literature in the Low Countries (1200-1600)* is a collection of excellently researched essays, whose authors make an important scholarly contribution that experts will greatly appreciate.

### **About the reviewer**

Adrian van den Hoven is professor emeritus at the University of Windsor (Ontario, Canada). He earned his doctorate in comparative literature (French, English and American literature) from the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium). Founding editor of the *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies/Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises*, as well as founding executive editor of *Sartre Studies International*, he wrote and published many articles on Netherlandic topics, and produced numerous articles on Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus. In addition, he translated and edited several works by Sartre from French into English, including *Truth and existence* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), *Hope now: The 1980 interviews* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), and (with Basil Kingstone) *It is right to rebel* (Routledge, 2017), as well as the co-edited books (with Ronald Aronson) *Sartre alive* (Wayne State University Press, 1991) and *We have only this life to live: The selected essays of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York Review Books, 2013).

