From Francophile to Francophile:  
The Changing Attitude of Medieval Dutch Authors towards French Literature

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French Literature in a Dutch-Speaking Environment

In the middle of the thirteenth century, the patrician elite of Gent, the most important city in the county of Flanders, was singing its own praises in a remarkable polyphonic motet, which has recently been re-edited by the historian Daniel Lievois and the musicologist Mary Wolinski.1 According to the triplum (the highest voice) those of Gent — cil de Gant — are not only very brave, they are also courteous and live in great prosperity. Jealous people envy them for this:

Mout sont vallant cil de Gant  
plein de corossie  
large et corosses despendant  
et de riche vie  
S'en ont li aver mout grant envie.

The motetus (the middle voice) focuses even more on the courtly lifestyle of the city elite. Here, one of the patricians states that in the cold month of January he prefers sitting by the fireplace, eating salted meat and a fat capon. Singing and relaxing.

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1 Daniel Lievois and Mary Wolinski, 'Mout sont vallant cil de Gant: Een motet ter ere van de Gentse erfachtige lieden in het midden van de 13de eeuw', Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent, n.s., 56 (2002), 35–51; music and text of this motet on p. 38.
with a fashionably dressed lady is what pleases him, accompanied by well-prepared wines, a good fire without smoke, and dice on the table, in a friendly atmosphere:

A la cheminée eu mois fraîch de jeveuir
veuell la chair solle le chapon gras mengier
Dame bien parée chanter et envoisier
c'est ce qi magtre boens vins a remuer
cler feu sans fumeé les dez et le tablier sans tencier.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, it is noteworthy that this polyphonic song is in French. The largest city of Flanders was situated more than thirty-five kilometres north of the language boundary between French and Dutch. Most of the inhabitants of Gent were indeed Dutch-speaking, but this did not prevent the city elite who dominated the College of Aldermen from singing so proudly about their own identity in French. Apparently, in the middle of the thirteenth century, when this song was written, French was the preferred cultural language of the Gent elite.²

There are many examples of French literature functioning beyond the language boundary, especially if we look at the top of the social scale. The court of Flanders was peripatetic and thus travelled between cities like Gent, Brugge, and Lille, on both sides of the language boundary. From the twelfth century onwards, the court welcomed poets performing in French: Chrétien de Troyes, Gautier d'Arras, Baudouin de Condé, Adenet le Roi, Eustache Deschamps, to name but a few.³ This interest in French literature is not surprising since the ruling dynasty was rooted in France, and the county of Flanders was actually a feudal estate of the French crown. The literary contacts reflect the strong political, economic, and cultural ties connecting Flanders to the rest of France. However, the choice of French as a cultural language should not automatically be interpreted as a blind and unconditional adoration of France and French culture. This is illustrated in a humorous way in

² This also means that Flemish patricians should not be associated so easily with Dutch literature as is done by Fris van Oostrom in his new history of the earliest Dutch literature, Stemmen op schrif: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur vanaf het begin tot 1300 (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2006), esp. pp. 225–32 (‘De voertaal van de stad’).


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the tenor (the lowest voice) of the motet Mout sunt vallant cil de Gant where the wine of the Rhine region is said to be better than the wines of France and Auxerre.

Par vérité
j'ai esprvo
qu vin rínos
pasent frances
et tous vins aucourrois.

Interest in French literature was not restricted to those areas belonging to the kingdom of France. To the east, in the duchy of Brabant — which was part of the Holy Roman Empire and mainly Dutch-speaking — French literature seems to have played a similar role at the court, especially in the second half of the thirteenth century. Trouvères like Perrin d'Angicourt, Carasaus, and Jean Erart sent their songs to Leuven and the other residences of Duke Henry III of Brabant (d. 1261). Adenet le Roi — the famous epic poet who was later engaged by Guy de Dampierre, count of Flanders — started his career at the Duke's court. And the Duke himself wrote some French songs: two chansons d'amour, one pastourelle, and a jeu parti together with Gilletbe de Berneville, a poet from Arras who was closely connected with the Duke and his family.⁴

Duke Henry's son and successor John I favoured French literature as much as his father. When the boy was only ten years old, a romance, Sone de Nansay, was written especially for him. Later, after his marriage to a daughter of Guy de Dampierre, Duke John I ordered a treatise on the art of seduction, the Puissance d'amour. This treatise is written in French in the form of a fictitious dialogue between the anonymous author, the Duke, and the Duchess.⁵

So the language border — an imaginary line separating the people in the Southern Low Countries with a Dutch dialect from those with a French dialect — does not seem to correspond to the languages used by the elite in this region. Consequently, some scholars, such as the historian Ludo Milis, prefer talking about


⁵ Sleiderink, De stem van de meesters, pp. 69–73 (Sone de Nansay) and 77–84 (Puissance d'amour). The Puissance d'amour has only recently been edited in a doctoral dissertation: Cornelia Daurer, 'Comment amors uent en cuer d'ome: Edition der "Puissance d'amors" des Codex 2621' (Universität Wien, 2008), full text available online: <http://ethos.bl.uk/Order/vulp/448/>. 
a social language boundary as opposed to a geographical one. The social language boundary changes when people start to imitate the language behaviour of the dominant social group.4 It might be wiser to avoid terms like border, boundary, and frontier. In the Southern Low Countries, Latin, French, and Dutch (and their variants and dialects) all played a particular role in society. Which person used which language could change from one occasion to another. The linguistic situation in the Southern Low Countries can be described more accurately in terms of diglossia.

The Dynamics of Diglossia in the Southern Low Countries

Diglossia as a term was introduced by sociolinguists and refers to the phenomenon in a bilingual or multilingual society where the languages (or dialects) vary in function and status. If we want to describe the nature of diglossia in a given society, we need information about the distribution and prestige of the languages. In other words, we have to know precisely what the languages are used for, which are high-status languages (the H languages) and which low-status ones (the L languages).

In order to gain insight in the diglossic compartmentalization of languages, sociolinguists are fervent adherents of field work. When we deal with historical societies, our gathering of data is more problematic, limited as we are to written sources. If we want to know more about the multilingual situation in the medieval Southern Low Countries we cannot, for example, ask an impoverished knight in thirteenth-century Brabant how he views the French spoken and sung at the court. Was he striving to become as versed in French as his duke? There are no tapes on which those wealthy Flemish patricians described in Cil de Gant are recorded addressing their domestic servants, cuddling their children, crying, or cursing. We may assume that in those situations they used Dutch, or a local Dutch dialect, instead of French, but this assumption is difficult to substantiate. The most concrete evidence at our disposal concerns the subsequent use of Latin, French, and Dutch in the administration of court and city. The historians Walter Prevenier and Thérèse de Hemptinne have studied administrative multilingualism in the country of Flanders, and Godfried Croenen has done the same for the duchy of Brabant.5

4 Ludo Missen, Rijkdom en armoede van cultuurcontact: De taalgrens als resultante ([n.p.]: De Orde van den Prince, 1983).

From quantitative analysis of historical data it appears that the nature of diglossia in the Southern Low Countries was never stable. Croenen, for example, found interesting shifts in language choice in Brabantine charters from the thirteenth and fourteenth century, from Latin to the vernacular, and within the vernacular from French to Dutch.6 By the fourteenth century Dutch had grown into an H language, as far as the administration was concerned.

The tendency to change is inherent in diglossia, as Rosita Rindler Schjeiwe and Eva Vetter argue in their excellent methodological discussion of historical sociolinguistics and multilingualism. In their view, diglossia is always a reflection of asymmetrical power relations. Every change in the balance of power — whether in the political, economic, social or cultural sphere — has an impact on the nature of diglossia: the status and function of the languages concerned change immediately.7

My focus here concerns, in the first place, the balance of power as regards literature, although I do not hold the illusion that the literary field is autonomous. Relations within the literary field are strongly intertwined with, and determined by, those in the political, economic, and social areas and by the cultural sphere in general. I will return to this towards the end of this essay, but first I will try to ascertain how medieval Dutch authors reacted to the diglossic situation in the Southern Low Countries. As I have already shown, there was a considerable audience for French literature in this region, but there also existed a vernacular literature in Dutch.8 In particular I will investigate how French literature was regarded within this Dutch literature. In other words, what status was ascribed to French literature in medieval Dutch texts? And are there any attempts by Dutch authors to change the nature of diglossia for their own benefit?

10 For an English introduction to medieval Dutch literature, see Medieval Dutch Literature in its European Context, ed. by Erik Kooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
French in Medieval Dutch Literature

Since 1998, scholars of medieval Dutch literature have had a very useful tool at their disposal, namely the CD-ROM Middelnederlands. This CD-ROM contains in digitized form not only the dictionary of medieval Dutch, edited by Eelco Verwijs and Jakob Verdam (more than 11,000 pages!), but the majority of medieval Dutch literature as well. Many text editions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are to be found in a computerized form and searchable in numerous ways. It contains some 250 verse texts (or fragments of rhymed texts) and ninety texts in prose. This, incidentally, illustrates that verse remained popular in Dutch literature for most of the Middle Ages.

The CD-ROM Middelnederlands permits the consultation of passages where medieval Dutch authors (or the narrators of their texts) comment on French and French literature. I searched for waelsch, françois, and romansch — the three words referring to French in medieval Dutch — with all their spelling variants. This approach led to a great variety of 'hits'. There are passages about characters speaking French, for instance Roland in the Dutch version of Renaut de Montauban. We have references to French-speaking areas like 'Walscher Brabant' (Brabant wallon) and to French toponyms, for example in the Arthurian world: 'datmen in walsche hier Tiere foreine doe' (which was at that time called in French


[12] There is no indication that there is any difference in meaning between these three words. 'Waelsch' is the most often used, then 'françois', then 'romansch' (the latter is only found in texts written by, or related to, Jacob van Maerlant). Apart from these three words, there also exists a word 'fransch', but this is only used for 'French' as related to the territory of France; it has no linguistic meaning.

[13] Renaut van Montauban, v. 1179. Also interesting are bilingual characters such as Godaeverd van Denoy in the Denenage (vv. 297–99) or Margriet in the Roman van Limборch, l. 762, etc. On the linguistic and communicative abilities of Margriet (who also learns Greek after arriving in Athens), see Lieve De Wachter, Interculturele communicatieve competentie in de 'Roman van Limborch', in Maar er is meer: Avontuurlijk lezen in de epiquie van de Lage Landen. Studies voor Josep D. Janse, ed. by Remco Sleiderink, Veele Uyttersproor, and Bart Besamusca (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2005), pp. 415–31.

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Tiere foreine).15 We find explanations of French names, like the name of Charles Martel: 'Marcel in walsch, dat weet wale, | Es een hamer in dietscher tale' (Martel in French, for sure, is a hammer in Dutch).16 There are linguistic comments on the meaning of certain words: 'Cancer es de kervete in walsche | in dietscher de crevete als ende als' (Cancer is évreuve in French, in Dutch it is doubtless called kreeft).17 And we find some references to 'all' written sources:

Alle die ysesten, die nu sijn
In dietsche, in walsche, in latijn,
Die en maken niet cont.

[all the histories which now exist in Dutch, French and Latin, none of them relate.]

Passages such as the latter confirm that in the eyes of Dutch authors, Dutch, French, and Latin were the most important languages in their region.18 I will not comment on all the passages where the word French is mentioned, but focus on those places where something is said about French literature to determine whether there are certain tendencies. The most important category here are the references to French sources: for example, 'Dat walsch seget, daer ict ut scrcref' (The French source, on which I base my writings, states ...).19 'Als in dien Walse las' (As I read in French ...);20 'Als int walsche hebbe gehoord' (As I heard in French ...);21 'Mi seit aldus die walsche tale' (The French tale tells me as follows ...).22

[15] Roman van Lancelot (= translation of the French Lancelot en prose), v. 15,006; see also vv. 11,374 and 14,882.

[16] Brabantse ysesten, l. vv. 788–89.


[19] 'Dietsch' or 'Duitsch' seems sometimes to include all Germanic languages, and 'Walisch' all Romance languages; see, for example, Van den derden Edeuwart, vv. 1585–87, where it is said that half of Christianity is 'French-speaking, the other half' Dutch-speaking. Cf. also Korte kronieck van Brabant, 'lange versie', v. 315.

[20] Abridged version of Wrake van Raguel (= translation of Vengeance Raguel), v. 12,773. See also the fragments of the longer version, Aa, v. 264 ('[D]at walsh doet ons versesas').


[23] Loyherin en Maluert (= adaptation of Lobier et Maluert), Antwerpen fragment, v. 103.
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the influence of French literature has indeed been enormous. Most of these texts are translations or adaptations of French texts, and when they are not, they borrow names, motives, and other material from French literature.

Dutch Authors Using the Status of French Literature

It is noteworthy that Dutch authors were quite eager to express their dependence on French literature. Stating that a Dutch text was based on a French source seems to have been a guarantee of quality. This must also be the reason why some authors even overstated their dependence on it. A fascinating case in this respect is the prologue to the Dutch version of *Ogier le Danois*, which has recently been studied by Bart Besamusca.

Of the Dutch version of the *Enfances Ogier*, only some minor fragments have come down to us. The whole text, however, is preserved in the early twelfth-century high German translation, probably dating from the fifteenth century. It is only in this translation that we find the prologue by the anonymous Dutch author. This

24 What I did not examine, however, is whether some authors tried to mask their dependence on a French source. Is it significant that in the *Roman of Fergus*, we do not find a reference to its French source, the *Roman de Fergus*? Or was such a reference present in the (now lost) prologue? Remarkable is also the *Rose* (Bebrant, c. 1300), which is a translation of the *Roman de la Rose*. In this text we find only one reference to the French source (in v. 11,159: 'Alce is int Walsche heebhe gelesen'), and this place is probably corrupt. The reference is wanting in the other extant manuscript, *Het Combrugge handschrift*: Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod. poet. et phil. 22, 22, ed. by Herman Brinkman and Janny Schenkel, 2 vols (Hilversum: Verloren, 1997), p. 377, v. 7,090: 'Daer is haue heebhe gelesen'. The author probably avoided references to the French source in order not to disturb the autobiographical illusion; cf. D.E. van der Poel, *De Vlaamse Rose* en *De Rose van Historie*: Onderzoekingen over twee Middelnederlandse bewerkingen van de *Roman de la Rose* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1989), pp. 148–53.


26 This translation is not included on the CD-ROM Middelnederlandse (there we find only a few Middle Dutch fragments). The full text of the translation became available in 2002: *Ogier van Denemark, nach der Heidelberger Handschrift* CPG 363, ed. by Hilkert Weddige and others (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002). The prologue is edited on pp. 1–2 (vv. 1–30). In point of fact, the medieval Dutch *Ogier* consisted of two parts, written by two authors. The second author, a certain Johan de Clerck, started his continuation with a prologue as well (vv. 4137–4234, pp. 118–21); see Besamusca, *Zingende minstreelen*, pp. 146–51.
author first reveals the literary context in which he was working, beginning "Many adventures about the noble King Arthur are being read". Then he lists the names of several Arthurian heroes, among those 'Lantsloot vander Hagedoche', that is, Lancelot's name in one of the Dutch translations of the Lancelot en prose, probably written in Flanders around 1250. Against this background of interest in Arthurian literature in translation, the author introduces his own topic, the youth of Ogier de Danemarck. According to him, some minstrels sing other parts of Ogier's story in Dutch, but they do not know how it all began, and that is the part he will now translate from the French, word for word: 'uß dem Welsch vorn wort zū wort'.

Once again, we have a Dutch author expressing his dependence on a French source. What is remarkable, however, is that the Dutch Ogier is not in fact a verbatim translation of the Enfances Ogier. And there is no evidence supporting the assumption of a closer, now lost, French source. How then can this be accounted for? On the basis of the Dutch Ogier and other similar cases, Gerritsen formulated the hypothesis that some Dutch epic authors were not translating from a written text, but from memory, recalling what they had heard from French performers:

Dans certains cas, par exemple dans celui de l'Ogier le Danois, les divergences entre les textes français et néerlandais sont si profondes. [...] Je me demande si cet état des choses ne pourrait pas s'expliquer par l'hypothèse que le remanieur n'a pas travaillé d'après une copie manuscrite de la chanson française, mais d'après ses souvenirs de la récitation par un jongleur français.

Although this assumption is hard to substantiate, it would explain the numerous divergences between French epics and their Dutch counterparts. But whatever the reason for the discrepancies between the French and the Dutch Enfances Ogier — a lack of memory or a deliberate adaptation — the Dutch author was certainly

31 Ogier de Danemarck, v. 29; see also the detailed discussion by Besamusca, 'Zingende minstrelen', pp. 42–46.
33 Gerritsen, 'Les Relations littéraires', p. 35.
34 For other examples, see Middle Dutch Adaptations of the Matière de France, ed. by Bart Besamusca and Hans van Dijk, special issue, Olifant, n.s., 23 (2004), 1–110, esp. pp. 37–38 (on the Dutch version of Renaut de Montauban); p. 72 (on the Dutch version of Girart de Vannes); pp. 102–04 (on the Dutch version of Maugis d'Algremont); and the edition by Kuiper and Biemans, Joudein van Blaves, esp. p. 219. Also interesting are the fragments of Florent ende Durant, which have a reference to a French source (perhaps an oral source) in v. 85 (cf. P. Gorissen, 'Florent ende Durant', Verzameling en Mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde, n. s. (1972), 349–91).

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not telling the truth when he said he was translating word for word from French. He undoubtedly thought his audience would be pleased to learn that the text was a literal translation.

The high status of French literature is also discernible when Dutch authors explicitly state that the story they are about to tell is very popular in French-speaking milieus. One of the surviving fragments of the Wrake van Ragiel (Flanders or Brabant, c. 1260?), the Dutch translation of the Vengeance Ragusideel, ends with the following statement:

Nu wille u van hem die tale laten bliven ende seggen vort Ene aventure die men hort Gerne lesen in walsehe tale.

[I will not continue the story about them, but will tell you an adventure which people love to hear read in the French language.]

In the prologue to his Trojerman (Brabant or Flanders, c. 1240?), Segher Dient-gogaf explicitly situates his own text in the context of the French text about Troy, known to so many:

Dies is leden menghen dach Dat grote keer voer Troyen lach Een deel van dien dat daer gesciede, Hebben gehoert veel lude, Mer dit Romans maeten ende sreef.

There are more examples of overstating the dependence on French literature. In the Roman van Limborch (Brabant, c. 1320) we find repeated references to a French source (e.g., vv. 1862, 2494, 2749; II, v. 1922; III, v. 1170; IV, v. 1460; V, vv. 1710, 2016, 2168; VI, vv. 271, 1449, 1915, 2105, 2611; VII, v. 1652; VIII, vv. 971, 1173, 1223; see also the prose version, p. 71), but none of them seems to be genuine. The author borrowed a lot from other texts, but these were mainly Dutch sources as shown in the doctoral dissertation by Lieve De Wachter, "Een literair-historisch onderzoek naar de effecten van ontelingen op de compositie en de zingeving van de "Roman von Heinric und Marguerite von Limburch" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit Brussel, 1998). The reference to a French source at the end of Parthoneupeus van Blies (= translation and continuation of Partonopeus), v. 8401, may also be "false", as argued by Anne Reyniers, De Middelderlandsche "Parthoneupeus van Blies" en zijn Oudfranse origineel. Een studie van de vertaal- en bewerkingstechniek (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), pp. 290–95. In this case, however, we should not rule out the existence of a (now lost) French continuation of the Partonopeus (cf. Sleidertink, De stem van de meester, p. 180, n. 58).

Wrake van Ragiel, fragment Bb, vv. 25–28. A passage in one of the fragments of Willem van Oringen (= adaptation of Le moniaige Guillaume), vv. 232–35, should probably be interpreted in the same way.
translation of it. With regard to the *Roman van Walwein*, Bart Besamusca has argued that Penninc’s intended audience was able to deal with very subtle intertextuality between the Dutch romance, the French Lancelot-Grail Cycle, and the continuation of the *Conte du Graal* by Gerbert de Montreuil. This view, however, has caused some controversy. If Penninc had really intended an intertextual play — which is not at all sure — it could have been with a Dutch translation of the Lancelot-Grail Cycle or other translations of French texts. Moreover, if the audience had been so familiar with French literature, why would Penninc consider translating a French tale for them, as suggested in his prologue? 

Many Dutch texts must have been intended for a monolingual Dutch-speaking audience. A clear example is *Floris ende Blancheflour* (Flanders, c. 1260), the Dutch version of *Flore et Blancheflor*. In his prologue the author, Diederik van Assenede, says:

> Hees worden herde te sure
> Van Assenede Dierderike.
> Dien seldis danken ghemeenlike,
> Dat hijt uten Walsche heeft gedicht
> Ende versandelike in Dietsche bericht
> Den ghemen, diet Walsche niet en connen.

> [This was a difficult task for Diederik van Assenede. Therefore, you should thank him all for translating this from French into Dutch, making it comprehensible to those who do not understand French.]

The situation seems quite clear. On the one hand, we have a Francophile but monolingual Dutch-speaking audience longing for access to French literature. On the other hand, we have Dutch authors functioning as mediators. As long as the audience

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41 *Floris ende Blancheflour*, vv. 22–27 (see also vv. 1356–57); cf. Jozef D. Jansens, *Wereldse literatuur in het derde-edeeuwse Vlaanderen*, in *Van oeder- naar moederstaal*, ed. by Beyers, pp. 119–35; also available online: <http://www.dbn.org/tekst/jans061wete31_01/>. A similar passage is to be found in the prologue to *Sidrac* (Antwerpen, c. 1328), the Dutch prose translation of the *Livre de Sidrac*. Also interesting is the second prologue to the *Opier*, where the author explains that once, after reciting the Dutch version of the *Enfances Opier* to a noble and female audience in Flanders (in the fourteenth century), one of the ladies present begged him to translate the sequel as well. Apparently, the French text itself would not do for these ladies. See Besamusca, *Zingende minstrelen*, pp. 148–50.
does not have a thorough understanding of the French language, Dutch authors are needed to guarantee the entry into a world of magic, adventure, and courtliness. It is therefore not at all surprising that in these chivalric texts, the elevated status of French and French literature is not contested, but rather strengthened.

Discrediting French and French Literature

Not all Dutch authors, however, were so positive about French and French literature. In the prologue to the Boeck van Seden (Flanders, first half of the thirteenth century), the translation of the Latin Faectus 'cum nihil utilius', the author sounds quite Francophobic. He states explicitly that his didactic poem is based neither on French-speaking informants nor on French romances. He gathered his information in the 'scritture', that is, learned texts in Latin:

   Ende wet wel, dat ic hier bediede
   Es niet gherstoken uyt Walshen liden,
   Noch uer Walsher aventuren;
   Soe es gherstrect uer scritture.42

Discrediting French literature, as well as showing a clear preference for Latin sources, is also typical of Jacob van Maerlant, who was born in Flanders and probably received his education in the city of Brugge.43 Around 1259 the poet started to work for patrons in Zeeland and Holland, the principality just north of Flanders, where he wrote some Dutch romances. His debut was Alexander geesten, a translation for a lay audience of Walter of Châtillon's Alexander, the Latin text about Alexander the Great which was frequently used for educational purposes. In the beginning of his career, though, Maerlant did not depend exclusively on Latin sources. The three works he wrote after Alexander geesten were all translations of French texts: the prose Joseph-Merlin by the Pseudo-Robert de Boron, the now lost French romance about Torrez, le chevalier au cercle d'or, and the Roman de Troie


43 The most comprehensive study on Jacob van Maerlant and his work is by Frits van Oostom, Maerlants wereld (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1996).

by Benoît de Sainte-Maure. Maerlant probably translated these French texts because his audience asked him to do so, but he did not do it wholeheartedly, repeatedly stressing how inferior these French sources are. With regard to the prose version of Robert de Boron's Joseph and Merlin, he informs his audience that he considers this history in French very unreliable, using the significant rhyme walisch (unreliable) — walisch (French):

   Ic wille dar gy des zeker sijt,
   Dat ic die historie vele walisch
   Gewonden hebbe in dar Walsh.44

Again and again, Maerlant points at logen (lies) in the French text, often with reference to passages from the Bible contradicting the text by Robert de Boron.45

In his Historie van Troyen Maerlant shows more respect for Benoît's Roman de Troie. Nevertheless he fills out the story with interpolations based on classical authors like Homer (Ilias latina), Vergil, Ovid, and Statius, and on the Vitae Patrum. He also includes Segher Diengotgaf's Troyeroman and a passage from his own Alexander geesten. And in many cases, Maerlant explicitly argues why these interpolations represent an improvement on Benoît's text.46

The Historie van Troyen was the last text Maerlant translated from French; the rest of his oeuvre is deeply rooted in Latin. Around 1270, when Maerlant was back home in Flanders but still working for patrons in the north, he finished his Dutch adaptation of Thomas of Cantimpré's De natura rerum. In the prologue he tells his audience that one of his predecessors once tried to write a Dutch bestiaar but failed because he used a French text as source.47

Maerlant's criticism of French fiction comes to a climax in his Spiegel historiæ, the adaptation of Vincent of Beauvais's Speculum historiale. In his lengthy discussion on Charlemagne, he incorporates a very committed chapter, entitled Tselden jegen die borderers ('the fulmination against storytellers'), in which he openly


45 Historie van den Grafe / Merlijn, vv. 51–641 (words like 'logentliche sake', 'logen', and 'gelogen' in vv. 225, 223, 243, 621).

46 Ludo Jongen, Van Achilles tellen lange: Onderzoekingen over Maerlants bewerking van Statuus's Achilles in de Historie van Troyen (Deventer: Sub Rosa, 1988), esp. pp. 16–21 and p. 38, n. 61 where all explicit references to sources in the Historie van Troyen are listed.

47 Der naturen bloeme, prologue, vv. 101–16.
attacks 'these sweet, French, fake poets, who rhyme more than they know' (‘Die scone Walsche valsche poeten, | Die meer rimen dan si weten’). What angers Maerlant is the way French poets have treated the history of Charlemagne, suggesting that a man like Guillaume d’Orvalange could be more virtuous than the Emperor himself: 'these French books are worthy of great curses'. Maerlant despises French fiction because of its conningling of historical facts and amusing but unreal adventures. He does not aim to diminish the status of French as such, but he is certainly trying to discredit French fiction (and Dutch adaptations of it).

French Literature Dethroned

With his didactic poems — based on Latin but adapted for a lay audience — Jacob van Maerlant acquired a following. Not without reason did the Antwerpen poet and city clerk Jan van Boendale call Maerlant ‘die vader der dietschen dichten aligader’ (the father of all Dutch poets). In the fourteenth century Dutch literature became emancipated: the local vernacular was used for more and more literary genres. At the same time, many people in the Dutch-speaking area seem to have lost interest in French literature, judging by the less frequent references to French literature and the lack of translations of works by authors such as Guillaume de Machaut, Jean Froissart, and Eustache Deschamps. The gap between French and Dutch literature was widening. Inspiration was found within Dutch literature, or in the Latinitas, but much less in French fiction.

Presented as such, it may seem as if the developments within the literary field had a considerable impact on the nature of diglossia in the Low Countries. From the thirteenth to the fourteenth century, the status and function of French really did change, but this was not only to literary developments. In fact, the dynamics in the literary sphere coincided with those in other areas. Of critical importance was the continuing struggle of the Flemish people — the craftsmen in the wealthy cities first and foremost — to become more independent of France. This went hand in hand with a real Francophobia. It is said that in the days before the battle of Kortrijk in 1302 — the Battle of the Golden Spurs — the Flemish insurgents were out for the blood of all French speakers: 'wat Walsch es, valsch es: slaet al doot!' (Whoever speaks French is unreliable: kill them all!). In the duchy of Brabant the atmosphere was less revolutionary, but here the cities demanded more political influence, too. It is striking that Duke John I (the patron of the Puissance d’amour), when he urgently needed money in 1290, obliged his people with a chronicle in their native Dutch as well as the promise that Dutch would be promoted in court life. In the fourteenth century this became a reality, when Dutch became — at the court of Brabant and among the nobility of Brabant — the most important language of culture. But most linguistic and literary innovations in the Southern Low Countries are to be found in the cities. In the duchy of Brabant, Antwerpen (with Jan van Boendale) and Brussels (with Jan van Ruusbroec) became thriving literary centres in Dutch. In Brabant, as well as in Flanders, Dutch had become the standard, an H language as never before. Diglossia had changed fundamentally.

48 Spiegel historiën, Vierde partie, i, Ch. 29, vv. 27–28.
54 Sleiderink, De stem van de meester, chaps 4 and 5, and Remco Sleiderink, ‘Une si belle histoire de nos propres seigneurs’: la noblesse brabançonne et la littérature en néerlandais (première moitié du XIVe siècle), Le Moyen Âge, 113 (2007), 549–67.
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