

Frank Willaert, *Het Nederlandse liefdeslied in de middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2021, 784 pp., ISBN 9789044634693).

In a sense this book has the wrong title. Far beyond merely treating the Middle Dutch love lyric, Frank Willaert's monumental study is really a history of European lyric poetry in the Middle Ages seen from the perspective of the Low Countries. The fruit of a life's study, this book anchors the Middle Dutch tradition at every turn in a context that is far-reaching, both linguistically and geographically, showing convincingly how the Low Countries were a place of critical cultural negotiations between Germanic and Romance influences.

It thus provides a necessary corrective to the short shrift that lyric poetry has often received in histories of Middle Dutch literature. Frits van Oostrom, for example, paid little attention to lyric and song culture in his landmark histories of the literature of the Low Countries *Stemmen op schrift. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur vanaf het begin tot 1300* (2006) and *Wereld in woorden. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1300-1400* (2013). Going so far as to argue that it was only after 1500 that the Dutch-speaking world gave itself fully to monophonic song (Oostrom 2013: 390), he emphasized instead the paucity of what remains. Similarly, the preceding standard history of Medieval Dutch literature by Joseph van Mierlo in 1939-1940 devoted only twenty-five pages to lyric. Against this background, Willaert elaborates in exhaustive detail a lyric history in the wake of cultural connections that bind Middle Dutch material not only to France, England, and the Holy Roman Empire, but also to Occitania, Italy, and, indirectly, the Islamic world. This mobility is present from the very beginnings of lyric in the Low Countries – Willaert adopts an appropriately capacious definition that extends from the Rhine to French Flanders – whether these are located in 'Hebban olla vogala', famously written in late eleventh-century Kent by a Flemish scribe, or in the roughly contemporaneous Romance lyrics written by a Germanic scribe in London, British Library, ms. Harley 2750.

In the light of these inherently multilingual, trans-local origins, the study proceeds chronologically, devoting sizeable chapters to both major landmarks and to aspects of the literary landscape from which they grew. The result is a richly textured account that combines depth with broad horizons. Chapter 1 discusses the contested figure of Hendrik van Veldeke/Heinrich von Veldeke, fought over by Dutch and German literary historians, who is presented as instantiating a position of cultural and linguistic flux. Calling for a more dynamic conception of this figure than allowed in more traditional literary histories, Willaert sketches a portrait of an author native

to an area with a special affinity for the imperial Hohenstaufen dynasty (67), and who deliberately shaped his language to address the entirety of the Holy Roman Empire (59). In the second chapter, Willaert turns to the mysterious Brabantine beguine Hadewijch, building on his own earlier research on her engagement with Francophone song and song forms, while also pleading for an understanding of her work that reads it on its own terms, rather than as the echo of courtly love lyric. Above all, he approaches it as lyric for reading as much as for singing (131). Also standing at the crossroads between Romania and Germania is the subject of Chapter 3: Jan I, duke of Brabant. Author of a small collection of songs known via ‘German’ manuscripts, Jan combined lyric forms popular in contemporary France such as the *virelai* with thematic trends from German *Minnesang* (241).

Among the most striking material in this book is Chapter 4, the ‘Triumph of the *formes fixes*’, which provides an important counter-balance to the notion that there is ‘nothing left’ of Middle Dutch lyric. In it, Willaert surveys twenty-two manuscript witnesses to Dutch song that see it in motion between England and the south of the German empire (262-263). Beyond the, admittedly fragmentary, material evidence, he also examines the literary traces of lyric poetry in the form of quotations of song in narrative texts such as the *Karlmeinet* and *Madelgijs*. Throughout his monograph, Willaert also pays attention to the place of music in relation to all aspects of love lyric, from its composition, performance, and *Sitz im Leben*, to its presentation in manuscripts. This informs in particular the final two chapters, which are devoted to the three major collections of Middle Dutch love songs, the Hague and Berlin songbooks and the Gruuthuse manuscript. Treating the first two, Chapter 5 argues that the ‘Hague songbook’ has, in fact, little to do with the comital court of Holland, but was likely produced for Engelbrecht of Nassau (340-342), and similarly that, despite its name, its contents go far beyond songs to include a broad range of text types centred on courtly love. Just as the Hague manuscript bears witness to the Germans Walther von der Vogelweide and Frauenlob, the codicologically complex Berlin manuscript also records the knowledge of Reinmar and Tannhäuser in the Lower Rhine valley, as well as recording the dissemination of lyric forms like the ‘*da capo strophe*’ (388) from the Upper Rhine. Finally, Chapter 6 turns to the Gruuthuse songbook, embedding it not merely in the urban scene of later-medieval Bruges but also in the rich musical history of the city, a wellspring for Europe’s most distinguished practitioners and composers of polyphonic music. The discussion, however, is no less innovative in more detailed passages: Willaert, for instance, challenges the traditional understanding of the authorship of the songs, arguing that they should be attributed to Jan van Hulst alone, and not Jan Moritoen (440).

*Het Nederlandse liefdeslied* is destined to become a standard in the classroom and library. It is handsomely produced, richly illustrated, and well considered. References at the foot of each page to the precise location of notes

are a welcome compromise between footnotes and endnotes. A signal strength is the careful support the book provides to readers so they can engage in depth with medieval lyric texts: the translations into Modern Dutch provided for the extensive textual quotations are highly readable and open up Willaert's source texts for the wider audiences that this work deserves. Fastidiously researched and documented, this work is written in an engaging manner (Willaert compares the more repetitive songs of the later Middle Ages to contemporary *schlagers*), while never compromising on technical precision. It is to be hoped that an English edition of this important book will appear so as to mark – and fill – the gap in knowledge beyond the Dutch-speaking world of Middle Dutch lyric and its networked place in European literary history.

David Murray, Utrecht University