

CHAPTER 2

Middle Dutch literature at court (with special reference to the court of Holland–Bavaria)

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The general attitude of students of medieval Dutch literature towards the relationship between Middle Dutch literature and the courts has often been ambivalent at best, and not infrequently downright negative. The fact that Middle Dutch literature at court is regularly seen as a contradiction in terms is related to a deep-rooted view of the medieval Low Countries as a culture which is characterized precisely by its urbanization, and therefore may be called 'bourgeois' to a high degree. Another stumbling block, moreover, is the common notion that those members of the Low Countries aristocracy who aspired to high status must have used French as their language of culture. The court of the counts of Flanders is regarded as a prime example in this connection – and it is indeed striking that for this milieu, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries for instance, a wealth of French literary connections can be collected, whereas the counts' ties with Flemish literature are few and far between.¹ This appears to be a clear-cut case of two separate worlds: a strongly Frenchified nobility with hardly any interest in Middle Dutch literature, on the one hand, and a bourgeoisie with a great thirst for knowledge who were dependent on those very Middle Dutch texts for their cultural self-realization, on the other. This view is somewhat similar to the way in which the English situation (particularly that before 1350) has been regarded; in England, too, there is said to have been a highly sophisticated court which was completely permeated with French literary culture, and a literature in Middle English which is supposed to have been aimed at a mainly bourgeois audience.

This is the spirit in which many scholars have written about Middle Dutch literature, and in which many more have looked at it. And there is no denying that Middle Dutch literature provides some grist for this mill. It can, for instance, be observed that a number of

the texts that are seen as the highlights of medieval (French) court culture have not come down to us in Middle Dutch translations or adaptations. Middle Dutch literature shows no or hardly any traces of any reception of the *Tristan*, has no version of Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrette*, and comparatively few traditional courtly lyrics. In addition, the Middle Dutch chivalric texts that have survived in manuscripts often make a cheap rather than an aristocratic impression – miniatures, for instance, can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

In contrast to this, however, courtly literature appears at times to have been very eagerly taken up in Middle Dutch: two translations of the *Roman de la Rose* have survived, and as many as three of the vast *Lancelot en prose*. Moreover, there is nothing in the way these and comparable Middle Dutch texts were adapted to suggest that they were made more bourgeois than their aristocratic French sources; in spite of all the differences there may be, they are largely in the same feudal–chivalric spirit as their Old French originals.²

In this respect, therefore, the situation appears to be somewhat more complicated and less clear-cut than was initially suggested. The same is true for the crucial and fascinating linguistic circumstances of the time: here too a simple polarization (French equals nobility; Middle Dutch equals other estates) will not do. In actual fact, there seems to have been extensive multilingualism; French indeed often appears to have been superior as a language of culture at the courts, but Middle Dutch literature nevertheless appears to have nestled in its shade. This, for instance, seems to have been the case among the Flemish nobility.³ At times, Middle Dutch and French to a very large extent coexisted at court, with successive shifts in priority; this seems to hold true for the court of Brabant, which appears to have been extensively Frenchified under Duke Henry I and his successors Henry II and Henry III (that is, until the late thirteenth century), but was becoming strongly involved in Middle Dutch literature during the reigns of their immediate successors, John I, John II and John III.⁴

The courts of the medieval Low Countries and Middle Dutch literature thus certainly do appear to have been connected in some way. Following this recent view, quite a number of studies have appeared in the past few years which link Middle Dutch literature and the courts – so many indeed that Prevenier's contribution to this volume can be seen as a reaction to these reactions. In any case, all

this clearly shows that schematic oversimplifications will no longer suffice here, and that *a priori* assumptions will hardly be of any use either. There is no alternative but to evaluate the possible relations between Middle Dutch texts and the culture of the nobility in the Netherlands as accurately as possible in each individual case. This frequently involves studying a fairly complex situation, in which Middle Dutch literature is to be examined in a context which may be called international from both a literary and a political perspective. This is particularly true for the example which will be central in this article: that of the literature at the medieval court of the counts of Holland, more especially during the Bavarian period (the second half of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century).⁵

Indications of an interest in Middle Dutch literature in courtly circles in Holland date back to the thirteenth century. A key role in this was played by Jacob van Maerlant, the great Middle Dutch poet who – as far as we know – wrote the majority of his works by order of the circle of nobles from Holland and Zeeland surrounding the young Count Florens V (for further details, see Gerritsen's contribution). From the many polemical passages in which Maerlant contrasts his chivalric–didactic work with the chivalric epics, which in his view are far too popular (since they are historically unsound and ethically dubious), it can by implication be deduced that at least one generation earlier (that is, from the early thirteenth century), but perhaps somewhat earlier as well, reading or listening to romances of chivalry from the matter of Arthur and of Charlemagne were favourite pastimes of the aristocracy in Holland. However much Maerlant fulminates against these texts, the vehemence with which, even in his last work, the *Spiegel historiael* (*Mirror of History*, dedicated to Count Florens V, c. 1285), he still thinks it is necessary to berate 'die borderes die vraye ystorien vermorden met sconen rime, met scoenre tale' (the jesters who murder true historical accounts with beautiful verses, with beautiful language) suggests that even Maerlant never succeeded in completely supplanting this traditional aristocratic chivalric literature in the favours of the audience at the court of Holland. It is worth mentioning that in both cases – that is, in the case both of Maerlant and of chivalric epics – Middle Dutch is the language of literature (even though French certainly cannot be completely discarded as

far as chivalric literature is concerned): of all the central courts in the thirteenth-century Low Countries, it was the court of Holland in particular that appears to have cultivated the Dutch vernacular, which is also suggested by the fact that it was especially this court which made extensive use of Middle Dutch for administrative purposes.

When at the start of the fourteenth century dominion over Holland passed into the hands of the so-called House of Hainault, the cultural and political constellation appears to have changed quite considerably. In the first place, Holland from then on was ruled from a distance: the Hainault rulers resided in Valenciennes as often as possible, and visited their residence in the northern Netherlands only sporadically. If this acted as a definite brake on the development of a genuine court culture in these parts – for wherever the ruler is, his court is too – an even greater drawback was the fact that the counts of Hainault had no or hardly any rapport with Middle Dutch. Although it is conceivable that they could speak, or at least understand, some Middle Dutch, French was their mother tongue and therefore of course their language of culture too. Literature for the Hainault rulers meant French literature; and indications of any active interest in Middle Dutch literature on their part are limited to the occasional remuneration offered to ‘Willem van Delft die dichter’ (William of Delft, the poet) in 1337.⁶

In view of all this, it need not surprise us that there in fact appears to have been no court literature in the period of Hainault dominance over Holland. In these decades (roughly, the first half of the fourteenth century), anyone with literary aspirations in Middle Dutch found no audience worthy of the name at the court of Holland and had to turn elsewhere. But times changed when the House of Bavaria came to power in Holland around the middle of the fourteenth century. The political circumstances which caused this will not be discussed here for the sake of brevity – but they resulted in a landslide, culturally as well as politically. All this was to lead to the awakening of Middle Dutch from its dormancy as the language of literature at court.

It was of great consequence in this respect that the House of Bavaria, in contrast to the preceding House of Hainault, decided to reside in Holland itself; the Binnenhof (‘Inner Court’) in The Hague once again became the ruler’s residence. This meant that the court regained its soul, and it could begin to function as a true

administrative and cultural centre. What is more, the international connections of the courtly milieu in Holland remained intact. In some respects they would even be extended further; the new rulers – especially Albert of Bavaria, who stayed in power for almost half a century (1358–1404) and who was succeeded by his son, William VI (1404–17) – were clearly considered important in the European aristocratic world of their time. A striking example of this is the very fact that Count Albert succeeded in allying his House with mighty Burgundy by means of a double marriage (contracted on 12 April 1385); knowing the Burgundians, we can be sure that they too must have expected a definite advantage from this double alliance with Holland–Hainault–Bavaria. (In the end, the Burgundian expectations would not be disappointed, for when Countess Jacqueline of Bavaria, William VI's only legitimate child, who was childless herself, was left holding the reins, the county they coveted fell into Philip of Burgundy's lap.) In other areas, too, the Holland–Bavarian rulers appear to have been able to play their part on the international stage. The journeys to Prussia⁷ were actively supported by them (especially by William VI). Count William VI was one of the few continental members of the Order of the Garter, while the Orders founded by him and his father – the Order of the Garden and the Order of St Anthony, in particular – had several distinguished foreign members. One final example that may be given here, out of a whole possible range, is the prominent part played by the House of Bavaria at the extremely elaborate and baroque festival known to scholars as the Parisian Court of Love of 1401: William of Oostervant (the future William VI) was one of the eleven *conservateurs*, and he reputedly was so enthusiastic about this enterprise that he would have liked to have paid the membership fee of 100 golden crowns to the king of France straightaway.

In the light of these examples – to which many more could have been added, as I have said – it is not surprising that French continued to play a part as the language of culture at the court of Holland under the Bavarian House. On the occasion of the Burgundian double marriage, Jan van Mechelen (Jean de Malines) wrote an epithalamium in French for which he was remunerated by the court of Holland (was a similar remuneration offered by the Burgundians?), and which may have resulted in his visit to the court in The Hague a year later.⁸ Of course, it is conceivable that Jean de Malines, who was born in the south of Brabant, recited works in

Middle Dutch on his later visits to the Binnenhof – the epithalamium is his only surviving poem – but there is no need to doubt that his works would also have been understood if he had recited them in French. After all, as early as 1372, Cudelier, the *spreker* (speaker) of the French King Charles V, had appeared before the court in The Hague; in 1394 and 1398 this minor tradition was continued in visits by *sprekers* from the court of Charles VI. It has also been attested that members of the Holland–Bavarian court community purchased books in French, especially for Count William VI's (Burgundian!) wife, who, in 1408, paid 15 crowns to 'enen man uut Vrancric die boitscap brochte ende nye gedichte boeken ende anders' (a man from France who brought a message and new books of poems and other things). These may have included a copy of Christine de Pisan's *Cité des dames*; at any rate, this work very emphatically praises Margaret as 'the noble Duchess of Holland and Countess of Hainault' – further proof of the connections of the Holland–Bavarian court milieu with the *beau monde* of its time.

Nevertheless, the evidence for the court's connection with franco-phone culture to some extent pales into insignificance beside its attested cultural contacts eastwards. The explanation for this flow of culture, the scope of which certainly was 'new' to the court of Holland, can easily be found in the antecedents of the Holland–Bavarian rulers. None the less, it is striking to observe how the Binnenhof is beginning to swarm with *sprekers* and artists from German-speaking areas as soon as the Bavarian rulers are in charge – witness the extant accounts of the counts' administration. In his recent research, Theo Meder has traced these artists to regions as diverse as Würtemberg, Nuremberg, Meissen, Cleves, Trier, Heidelberg, Brunswick, Strasburg, Cologne, Holstein – and as far afield as Poland, Austria and Bohemia.

The work these German speakers and poets recited at the court of Holland undoubtedly belonged to the genres of *Sprüche*, *Mären* and *Reden* with which students of German literature are thoroughly familiar, the *epische Kleinformen* which are so characteristic of fourteenth-century literary life. An influx of lyrical *Minnesang* is also very much to be expected; it is certainly very telling in this connection that the Haags Liederhandschrift (The Hague Song Manuscript), which is indirectly linked to this milieu, even contains a poem by Walther von der Vogelweide. In the wake of this cultural influx it

may even be assumed that the members of the court of Holland had some acquaintance with certain great epic Middle High German literary texts. For the ease with which Dirc Potter, an official and man of letters at the court of Holland, around 1412, refers to heroes from the matter of *Parzival* and *Titurel* is striking, and he does so in a way which suggests that he could be sure that these were familiar to those who read and listened to his own work.

A clear expansion eastwards of the cultural horizons at the court of Holland can therefore be said to have taken place during the Bavarian period – a conclusion which in retrospect is so obvious that one is almost ashamed to point this out so emphatically. In connection with this, it has frequently been observed that in this period in particular (the late fourteenth century) literary Middle Dutch often has a strong German colouring. This is a very complicated matter, to which it is impossible to do justice within the scope of this contribution – research into the subject, incidentally, has not as yet progressed far enough for scholars to be able to do this. This phenomenon is certainly not confined to texts from the sphere of the Holland–Bavarian court; for example, the lyrics from the famous Gruuthuse Manuscript, originating from the Bruges area are imbued with it too (but perhaps in a different way?). Still, it is attractive to attribute at least part of this German colouring of the late fourteenth-century literary language at the court of Holland to the influence of the House of Bavaria, and the close ties with the (literary) culture upstream along the river Rhine that are associated with this influence. Is this literary amalgam of languages the upshot, or at least the reflection, of a communicative ‘compromise’ that was worked out between east and west within the Germanic language community to help them understand each other? Or, alternatively, should we take the German colouring not to be based on actual speech, and explain it as a literary fashion, which was shaped under the influence of the cultural prestige of Middle High German literature, of *Minnesang* and *Minnereden* in particular? Additional research into the written language of administration used in the Holland–Bavarian milieu may shed more light on this. It is here that the possibility of the mixed language as an actual means of communication can be most easily visualized – certainly since it has been determined that at the arrival of Albert of Bavaria a train of German officials came along to the Binnenhof to mould the administrative infrastructure in the *gründliche* fashion to which the emperor’s court was accustomed.⁹

Even though the problematic linguistic condition of late fourteenth-century Middle Dutch is still to be explored, therefore, it certainly seems safe to assume that there is some causal connection between the change of power at the court of Holland and the revival of Middle Dutch literature there. It is conceivable that under the Hainault rulers the language barrier between Middle Dutch and French had at least impeded a fruitful interaction – and the rather great distance (literally as well as figuratively) from which the Hainault rulers governed Holland concluded the matter. When the House of Bavaria came to power, Holland was ruled by a family whose mother tongue was much closer to the county's vernacular, and who, for that reason, could be expected to take a genuine interest in the literary work of Hollanders. Consequently, the court could again become a focal point of Middle Dutch literature; and the very eagerness with which, for instance, Willem van Hildegaersberch, the most important itinerant author of short, moralizing poems at the time, was welcomed at the table of Count Albert and his son – as is, once again, documented in the accounts – proves that the new rulers at the Binnenhof appreciated Middle Dutch poetry.

As Joachim Bumke has shown, *Residenzbildung*, the creation of a residence, and the formation of a chancery were two of the most important infrastructural conditions if medieval courts were to develop into literary centres.¹⁰ During the reign of the Bavarian House both these conditions were met at the court in The Hague: the Binnenhof was the main residence of the Bavarian rulers, and they had an extensive administrative staff at their disposal there. In this particular case, the linguistic affinity between the rulers, who originally hailed from foreign parts, and their subjects in Holland was one further favourable infrastructural factor. All in all, a court culture of European standing began to flourish under the patronage of these ambitious princes, a culture in which literature clearly had its place.

One of the literary activities at the Holland–Bavarian court was the composition of love lyrics, associated with court musicians such as Martinus Fabri and Hugo Boy (although such lyrics were anonymous in the overwhelming majority of cases). Brief, moralizing poems constituted a more serious variant within the genre of short lyrics, in which field Willem van Hildegaersberch was the uncrowned king. The King of Arms Bavaria Herald wrote a historiographical diptych which grounded the regional history of Holland in universal history. Court chaplain Dirc van Delft, in his majestic

scholastic prose, wrote a comprehensive manual on Christian faith and the Christian way of life. Furthermore, there is the varied *œuvre* of Dirc Potter, a high-ranking court official: a (half-ironic?) didactic poem about love, interspersed with exemplary novellas, an exposition of vices and virtues tailored to the needs of laymen and a treatise on the necessity to curb individual and collective feelings of revenge. Only the most striking, newly written works have been mentioned, and only in so far as they have survived as recognizable witnesses to the literary life at this court. It has now been firmly established that the real palette of literature at the Holland–Bavarian court must have been even more varied: the accounts, for instance, refer to several texts which were written down for the rulers and their retinues, but which must have been lost since. What is more, it is fully conceivable that there are some works among the surviving Middle Dutch texts which were initially composed for the court of Holland–Bavaria, but which have by now been stripped of the characteristics of the milieu in which they originally functioned.¹¹

However, even without these unknown quantities the tableau of literary works at the Holland–Bavarian court is interesting enough, in respect of both their quantity and their quality. The international context of court life in those days clearly reverberates in these works. Some of the texts were translated from French, German (cognate to Middle Dutch) and possibly Italian – the latter is a novelty in Middle Dutch literature, which can be credited to Dirc Potter, who, around 1410, had set off on a lengthy visit to Rome as the count's diplomat.¹² English too left its traces; this can be most clearly observed in the library of Jacqueline of Bavaria, the only child of and successor to William VI (and consort of Humphrey of Gloucester, among others), who on her death left some English books, of which it is said: 'so en hadde hier ten lande dair nyemant geen gadinge in; des worden vercoft enen vreemden Engelsschen coipman' (since no one here had any liking for them, they were sold to a foreign English merchant).¹³ And then, of course, there was Latin, which even in the late fourteenth century was still the dominant language in the spheres of the Church and of learning, and which, through standard works such as those by Hugo Ripelin and Martinus Polonus, for example, exerted a seminal influence on scholasticism and historiography at the Holland–Bavarian court. But however deep the literature of the Holland–Bavarian court may

have been rooted in international soil, we would not be giving the texts their due if we did not also stress their individual Middle Dutch character. First of all, this materialized when, as was often the case, they tapped the 'native' tradition for their sources – and in this respect the great influence still exerted by Jacob van Maerlant is particularly striking. Apart from obtaining its native characteristics in this way, however, Holland–Bavarian court literature is more than simply 'the Middle Dutch variant of ...' especially because of its authors' comparative independence from their sources. They compiled, selected and altered in every way they saw fit, thereby creating works which were 'naer 's lants gelegenheyt verduyts' (Dutchified after the fashion of the country), to borrow a phrase of the great seventeenth-century Dutch poet Vondel. Van Buuren's contribution to this volume provides a good example: although there are clear parallels between Dirc Potter and such great contemporaries, or near-contemporaries, as Chaucer, Gower and Boccaccio, he nevertheless has an authorial personality all his own. The same holds true for his fellow court authors, Willem van Hildegarsberch, Dirc van Delft and the Bavaria Herald *vis-à-vis* related writers such as Der Teichner, Ulrich von Pottenstein and Froissart. The Middle Dutch literature of the Holland–Bavarian court is neither an international clearing-house, nor a remote island. Perhaps this literature is best described by the metaphor of a peninsula: it was connected to the great continent of the European court literature of its time, but it formed a promontory of its own in relation to this.

If this contribution had been written in the nineteenth century, it would certainly have attempted to find the traits of an endogenous Dutch national character behind the individual character of Holland–Bavarian court literature. Having become 'sadder and wiser' since the 1930s, we think twice before using such terms: such concepts have become quite suspect. Yet, seen through a European wide-angle lens, what is striking is the dearth of lightheartedness and the pervasive moralism in this literature. There is hardly any trace of frivolity; even the courtly love poems in Holland are characterized by a *Traktatstil* – to use Ingeborg Glier's term;¹⁴ and Hildegarsberch in comparison with the Condés is an even more serious case in point. Even the most lighthearted writer of them all, court official Dirc Potter, still feels obliged to apologize for the frivolity of *Der minnen loep* (*The Course of Love*) by means of later,

serious works. If it had not been the fourteenth century we were characterizing here, the deep-rooted Dutch Calvinist spirit would easily have been held responsible for this. As it is, one is almost tempted to put forward the inverse hypothesis: that Calvinism was to take root so easily here in later centuries because it befitted a country which of old had been prone to moralize. Holland-Bavarian moralism, incidentally, does not appear to have had any real connections with the *Devotio Moderna*, the movement which has sometimes been seen – often too easily – as a precursor of the Reformation. (Although the Modern Devotion was spreading in these parts in the same period, it nevertheless appears to have appealed rather to laymen of a different – more urban? – milieu.)

However, we should not lose ourselves in rash generalizations. For if one thing becomes clear on reviewing the literature of the Holland-Bavarian court, it must be how exceptionally diverse the literary panorama is, in terms of genre, form and content. The counts' patronage in the background should be seen as something which created the conditions for literary life, rather than as something which left a direct mark on the contents of the texts. Although all the authors involved appear to have realized who it was they were writing for, and in places certainly will have kept their (intended) princely readers particularly in mind, all of them had and took plenty of licence to write their work in their own spirit. In a sense, each author is championing his own cause: while the Bavaria Herald in his works calls for war against the Frisians, court chaplain Dirc van Delft urges his readers to have close relations with their confessor, the itinerant poet Hildegarsberch calls on his audience to give art its due and the careerist court official Dirc Potter argues that one should be rewarded on the basis of one's own merits, and not on the grounds of descent.

This appears to be typical of the open literary climate characterized by so much late fourteenth-century court literature. In contrast to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when romances of chivalry and court lyrics set the pace, there later appears to have been a proliferation of genres and authors at court, which makes it virtually impossible to detect a dominant spirit. This does not make life any easier for present-day scholars, and some may tend to interpret this literary abundance as a sign of decadence and disintegration. But there appear to be equally good reasons for considering this phenomenon as the chief characteristic of the dynamism and

vitality of court culture at the time, which was sufficiently open to provide opportunities for self-realization to authors of very different kinds. And finally it is conceivable that we have fallen victim to an optical illusion: the fact that so much more material from the fourteenth century has survived in writing than has come down to us from earlier periods is certainly partly responsible for our impression of the pluriformity of the court culture of the time.

At any rate, this pluriformity is a reality, throughout Europe and also as far as literature at the Holland–Bavarian court is concerned. This can even be observed within the *oeuvre* of a single author, as is illustrated by not only Dirc Potter's work but also by the court lyrics, which at first sight seem so very traditional.¹⁵ Works by the court musicians (and lyricists?) Martinus Fabri and Hugo Boy have survived which range from elevated courtly poems to street cries set to music. With respect to language, too, Fabri and Boy and their companions commanded several registers: their songs are both in French and in Middle Dutch. The musical techniques used are equally varied, ranging from *ars subtilior* to downright popular music. And we should keep in mind that the much-mutilated work of these two Holland–Bavarian composers that has survived is probably only the tip of the iceberg. All this indicates the extent to which (literary) culture in Holland around this time was part of a European network of cultural relations, within which Holland took more than it gave, to be sure, but it certainly did not just take: the melody of one of the songs mentioned just now appears to have influenced Oswald von Wolkenstein!

The most impressive example of the position of the Holland–Bavarian court in the interplay of cultural give-and-take can be found in the art of illumination.¹⁶ During the reigns of the Holland–Bavarian counts this art was flourishing spectacularly in the northern Netherlands, and there is every reason to think that the patronage of the court of Holland was partly responsible for this. The style of the miniatures is related to the tradition of the European court style, which was shaped at the courts of the French kings from Saint Louis to Charles VI, and which at the time appeared in a very similar fashion in the miniatures produced for the court of Bohemia. In this respect, the miniaturists (from Utrecht, Haarlem or Delft?) working for Albert of Bavaria and his family were evidently trained within an international school; but the best artists among them, in their turn, were to make an active contribution to the formation of

an international school. The most famous example in this connection links the art of illumination with the more monumental art of painting: Jan van Eyck is known to have worked at the court in The Hague in his early years, as a painter in the service of John of Bavaria. Through him the patronage of the Holland–Bavarian court contributed directly to the cream of medieval court culture.

Of course, it is no coincidence that such an example is available in the case of painting, but not in the case of literature. Images are a universal language, whereas Middle Dutch was not. If only because of this, Middle Dutch literature, including therefore that of the Holland–Bavarian court, *a priori* had a limited impact across the language barriers – even though this should not lead to hasty conclusions about Middle Dutch literature being *per se* behind other literatures or about its influence being completely absent elsewhere.¹⁷ Usually, however, such an impact will have depended on special circumstances. In any case, this appears to hold true for Holland–Bavarian court literature.

At a very early stage, for instance, the *Tafel vanden kersten ghelove* (*Table of the Christian Faith*), the encyclopedia of Christian doctrine which court chaplain Dirc van Delft had dedicated to Albert of Bavaria (when the count was on his deathbed), was rendered into German.¹⁸ The explanation for the quite remarkable fact that a German version was made of Dirc van Delft's work probably lies in the author's personal connections: for besides being court chaplain at the court in The Hague, Dirc was a *regent* (professor) at the university of Erfurt. He must have travelled to and fro between Holland and Thuringia, especially during the years when he was working on the *Tafel*; and this must have been the reason for the early reception of his work in eastern parts. However, Dirc's work was also welcomed in the south: around 1480, the library catalogue of the Burgundian court mentions a manuscript 'intitulé La table de la foy chrétienne, en thyois'. In this case, one may well ask, without being unduly cynical, whether Dirc's text mattered all that much: for there is every reason to doubt whether members of the Burgundian court ever bothered to read Middle Dutch literature – even if one assumes that they had a sufficient command of the language to do so. It is more likely that the miniatures which accompanied the text were the reason for the *Tafel* ending up in Burgundy; for a large number of the early, aristocratic manuscripts containing the work were illuminated in the court style discussed earlier, the qualities of

which will not have escaped the attention of the Burgundian connoisseurs.

The 'success' of the authors at the Holland-Bavarian court, therefore, is first and foremost a regional affair, within the confines of Middle Dutch. And in this respect, too, its impact should not be exaggerated: quite a few of these texts appear to have functioned only within the elite communities for which they had been primarily intended. However, at times the borders with other circles were crossed. Although Willem van Hildegarsberch is known to have aimed principally at the court in The Hague, for instance, it is also known that as an itinerant *sprookspreker* (reciter of short poems) he was welcomed by urban authorities and private individuals, and occasionally even by the clergy.¹⁹ This is a valuable reminder that we should not regard court literature, and the literature of the Holland-Bavarian court in particular, as being too confined and too exclusive. This is even clearer in the case of Dirc van Delft. Originally his work was eagerly received in the noble circles for which it was primarily written, and it was illuminated accordingly, but after a while it had a much wider reception, especially in convents. Apparently, while in monasteries the Latin sources were studied, this vernacular exposition of the scholastic world view was very much in place here too. And finally, around 1480, the *Tafel* was even printed, albeit in a form which was very different from that in which the text had originally appeared. It was strongly abridged, and all sorts of asides which had been so functional for the earlier court audience were removed. The dedication in the prologue was left out as well, which meant that the names of both the author and the patron vanished too. That is why at first sight the text looks like the umpteenth example of the anonymous devotional works that were churned out when printing had just been invented. Only when it is examined with a certain amount of background knowledge does it become clear that this is a bridge, albeit a rickety one, between two different medieval worlds which are often considered to be completely separate: those of the printing press and the court. In this special case, the active patronage of the Holland-Bavarian counts was not just the pivot of a literature for the courtly inner circle, but also contributed to the literary culture of a reading public a long way from this centre.

NOTES

- 1 Cf. M. D. Stanger, 'Literary Patronage at the Medieval Court of Flanders', *French Studies* 11 (1957), 214-29; but see also the publications mentioned in n. 3.
- 2 Cf. W. P. Gerritsen: 'Vertalingen van Oudfranse literaire teksten in het Middelnederlands', in R. E. V. Stuip, ed., *Franse literatuur van de Middeleeuwen* (Muiderberg: Coutinho, 1988), pp. 184-207; F. P. van Oostrom, *Reinaert primair. Over het oorspronkelijke publiek en de geïntendeerde functie van Van den vos Reinaerde* (Utrecht: HES, 1983). This is not to say that the differences cannot be considerable; see, for instance, R. Zemel, *Op zoek naar Galiene. Over de Oudfranse Fergus en de Middelnederlandse Ferguut* (Amsterdam: Schiphouwer and Brinkman, 1991), and A. Th. Bouwman, *Reinaert en Renart. Het dierenepos Van den vos Reynaerde vergeleken met de Oudfranse Roman de Renart* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1991).
- 3 Cf. A. Th. Bouwman, 'Na den Walschen boucken. Neerlandistiek en romanistiek', in F. P. van Oostrom et al., eds., *Misselike tonghe. De Middelnederlandse letterkunde in interdisciplinair verband* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1991), pp. 45-56, and J. D. Janssens, 'De "Vlaamse" achtergronden van de *Lancelotcompilatie*', in B. Besamusca and F. Brandsma, eds., *De ongevalliche Lanceloet* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1992), pp. 21-43.
- 4 Cf. *inter alia* F. P. van Oostrom, 'Maecenaat en Middelnederlandse letterkunde', in J. D. Janssens, ed., *Hoofsheid en devotie in de middeleeuwse maatschappij* (Brussels: s.n., 1982), pp. 22-40. It appears likely that, among the factors which promoted the shift to Middle Dutch, the cultural exchange between court and bourgeoisie was significant.
- 5 Unless indicated otherwise, the details of what follows are taken from F. P. van Oostrom, *Het woord van eer. Literatuur aan het Hollandse hof omstreeks 1400* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1987); the book is also available in an English translation: *Court and Culture: Dutch Literature, 1350-1450*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
- 6 At the University of Leiden, Janet van der Meulen is preparing a study of the Hainault literary milieu.
- 7 See Wim van Anrooij's contribution to this book.
- 8 Cf. T. Meder, *Sprookspreker in Holland. Leven en werken van Willem van Hildegaersberch (ca. 1400)* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1991), pp. 450-3. The details of what follows which do not occur in *Het woord van eer* have also been taken from this book.
- 9 See, besides *Het woord van eer*, especially D. E. H. de Boer, 'Een vorst trekt noordwaarts', in D. E. H. de Boer and J. W. Marsilje, eds., *De Nederlanden in de late middeleeuwen* (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1987), pp. 283-309.
- 10 Cf. J. Bumke, *Mäzene im Mittelalter* (Munich: Beck, 1979), pp. 58-65.
- 11 For all this, see *Het woord van eer*, and for an example of a text which was originally intended for the court of Holland but which has since lost the

characteristics of this milieu, see Geert Warnar, 'Het *Nuttelijc boec* en het Hollandse hof', *Spektator* 18 (1989), 290–304.

- 12 See A. M. J. van Buuren's contribution to this volume.
- 13 Cf. *Het woord van eer*, p. 35. Jacqueline's will was published in *Codex diplomaticus neerlandicus*, 2nd series, vol. 1 (Utrecht, 1852), pp. 176, 182, 186. Manly and Rickert argue that one of them was a Chaucer manuscript: Cambridge University Library Gg.4.27; see John M. Manly and Edith Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales Studied on the Basis of All Known Manuscripts*, vol. 1: *Descriptions of the Manuscripts* (University of Chicago Press, 1940), pp. 181–2.
- 14 Cf. I. Glier, *Artes amandi* (Munich: Artemis, 1971), p. 278.
- 15 For what follows, see especially J. van Biezen and J. P. Gumbert, eds., *Two Chansonniers from the Low Countries* (Amsterdam: Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis, 1985).
- 16 For this, see especially James Marrow's forthcoming work and its promising forerunners in *The Golden Age of Dutch Manuscript Painting* (Stuttgart: Belser, 1989), and F. P. van Oostrom, 'An Outsider's View', in Koert van der Horst and Johann-Christian Klamt, eds., *Masters and Miniatures. Proceedings of the Congress on Medieval Manuscript Illumination in the Northern Netherlands (Utrecht, 10–13 December 1989)*. *Studies and Facsimiles of Netherlandish Illuminated Manuscripts*, 3 (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1992), pp. 39–49.
- 17 It is striking, for instance, that in Middle Dutch the tradition of medieval New Year poetry began 'erstaunlich früh', according to A. Holtorf (*Neujahrswünsche im Liebesliede des ausgehenden Mittelalters* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1973), p. 16). The so-called *abele spelen* are a *cause célèbre*, too, and this holds good even more for the old hypothesis – which merits renewed research – that Germany came into contact with French courtly culture through the mediation of the Low Countries (cf. Bumke, *Mäzene*, p. 351, n. 275).
- 18 The history of the reception of the *Tafel* is discussed in F. P. van Oostrom, 'Dirck van Delft en zijn lezers', in W. van den Berg and J. Stouten, eds., *Het woord aan de lezer* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1987), pp. 49–71.
- 19 See especially Meder, *Sprookspreker in Holland*, and Meder's contribution to H. Pleij *et al.*, eds., *Op belofte van profijt. Stadsliteratuur en burgermoraal in de Nederlandse letterkunde van de middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1991), pp. 151–65.