

Publication du Centre européen
d'études Bourguignonnes, N° 44
2004

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**VANDEN ,X, ESELS, MECHELEN
AND BURGUNDIAN LITERATURE¹**

Once upon a time there was a man, a genuine ass, who took his wife to a party. They lavished themselves on all kinds of food and beverage. After some time the husband said to his wife that he had to go and settle some affairs. She was to feel free to stay. After her husband had left, the other guests gave her so much to drink that she 'lost the key to her cabinet' and so her cabinet was open to several visitors. Once she had lost her virtue, her husband could take her everywhere in order to put her up for hire. She was even taken to Mechelen where the courtiers diverted themselves with her.

This tale is the tale of the tenth ass, in the booklet *Vanden ,X, esels*, nine asses have already preceded him². Due to the reference of the ass going with his wife to the court of Mechelen, it is possible to put a date to the tale. The court in Mechelen was with Margaretha of Austria until 1530, so the story can not possibly have taken place after that date. It seems superfluous for the author to refer explicitly to ignorance in an allegorical story, but that certainly is not the case here. It fits within the rules of the genre of Burgundian literature, but this makes it necessary to ask the question: what is Burgundian literature? In this article I shall try to answer this question. To this end I shall have to argue that we might be obliged to reconsider the definition of Burgundian literature. With this reconsideration the body of texts will not be decreased but extended. Even several chapbooks will then resort under the denominator of Burgundian literature, thanking the court of Margareta of Austria in Mechelen. But first we will focus our attention on the postmodern mousetrap.

- 1 Here I thank my translator Molly van Diepenbrugge, without her my English would be one of the worst Englishes ever read (as you can see while reading this note).
- 2 *Het volksboek Vanden ,X, esels*, uitgegeven, ingeleid en toegelicht door A. ELSLANDER, Antwerpen, 1946.

Postmodernism

Considering the fringe of higher literature can be very refreshing: stepping out on the verge sometimes yields splendid views³. People, regarding the canon from the sidelines, might catch a glimpse of literature in a different perspective. Those who want to go off the beaten track, should be aware of pitfalls. Sometimes it might be tempting to be intrigued by the sideline to such a degree that it appears to be impossible to escape. But we are on our guards. I do not aim to depart from this verge, the higher form of art is our standard measure, but the higher form of art owes its existence to a lower and low form of art. Higher and lower literature are two sides of the same coin. I do not plead for an independent and limited study of the fringe-arts as part of Burgundian studies. Although studies of folkbooks or chapbooks have made interesting discoveries, Burgundian studies will focus predominantly on nobility and upper middleclasses. It would, however, not do Burgundian culture any justice to ignore folk-art: the very form of art that, after its own manner, made and *imitatio* of the higher form of art. In this article we will travel along the *Boulevard Périphérique* that runs around nobiliary art in order to take a look in the *banlieue*.

We ought to be alert, however, not to become too post-modernistic. Post-modernism indeed does offer us the opportunity to research fringe-art, but has gone beyond its margins: many a postmodernistic debate deconstructs folkart to a higher form of literature – non-canonical literature is canonised in such a manner that it is no longer necessary to acquaint yourself with the canon. Speaking in the terms of my research in this case it means not having read one single letter of Olivier de la Marche and still claiming to know all about Burgundian literature. As a matter of fact I have the impression that postmodernism and the Jacques Derridian poststructuralism have already surpassed their own zenith. It is quite probable that people have discovered that reading the canon might well be more satisfying than reading books of an obvious lower intrinsic quality. What is quality and what is literature will never be defined, but it should be quite clear that literary quality does not exist in the fringes. As if it is all about the tail of the medal, where the heads has a far more beautiful shine to it and determines the honours that are emanated by the medal.

In spite of my criticism toward postmodernism, poststructuralism and the *différance* way of thinking it may be necessary to focus some attention on these phenomena⁴. The founder of this philosophy is Jacques Derrida, a Frenchman, he stands centre of the world upside-down. He and his followers – who, one could say, more or less operate in the fringes of Derrida's ideology – have figured out that a higher form of art is not necessarily higher by its own merits. A higher form of art owes its existence to the presence of a lower form of art. It is more or less a

3 H. PLEY, *Is de laat-middeleeuwse literatuur in de volkstaal vulgair ?*, in J. FONTIJN (ed.), *Populaire literatuur*, Amsterdam, 1974, pp. 34-106.

4 It is actually not possible to give a summary of this philosophy which fills a complete library, let the books of J. DERRIDA and J.-F. LYOTARD speak for themselves.

balance that keeps itself steady. But who is to say that this so-called higher form of art is indeed higher. How can this be proved? Show me the page of the book that might give proof that that book indeed belongs to a higher form of art, for once and for all – you will not succeed. In just the same way you will fail to demonstrate that lower forms of art are indeed inferior. The distinction between higher and lower forms of art is a result of agreements, not of intrinsic qualities. The structuralistic point of view, however, departs from these qualities, anyone that does not share this point of view is subsequently a poststructuralist. The post-structuralist does not believe in distinctions: Derrida marks this with the word *différence*: *différance* – the pronunciation of these two words do not differ from each other, and yet the one word may be considered ‘correct’ and the other ‘incorrect’. But there is no distinction in pronunciation, so how then is this possible? This is a result of agreement as well. Agreements on spelling are not the results of the intrinsic qualities of words, generally speaking any spelling has the same ‘value’ as the next. This also holds good for expressions of culture: there is no fundamental difference between higher and lower culture. *A la recherche du temps perdu* from that point of view has the same value as part 163 from the Jerry Cotton series. So it will show good taste if literary theory would not only examine the acclaimed book Marcel Proust but also the series of the equally famous – if not more so for it is more popular – FBI-agent. And more than that: the whodunnits, the espionagenovel and the dime novels deserve more attention than the canon, if only to make up for the lost time in which they have not been studied. The result was that entire contingents of students of art, culture and literature have never in their lives read anything written by Homer, Shakespeare and Zola whereas they are perfectly capable of telling you all about the look the passive woman received from the active man in James Bond films. I am afraid I am not even exaggerating for irrationality and political correctness reign supreme.

Has postmodernism only brought us bad news? No, it has not. But as every ideology that loses its perspective so have Derrida’s ideas provided us with quite a few failures⁵. The concept, however, is not bad at all: a moderate postmodernist is aware of diverse, if not concentric circles around higher art. Those that only study the highlights will be blinded by the continuous view of beauty and may even be made to believe that life is good and beautiful: but those that only look down the drains will give themselves less than they deserve and will develop bad taste. It is the art to do both. And this is what I want to draw attention to. The Burgundian studies take a close look at the centre of power: literary-, cultural- and political power, but around this centre circles were moving that kept a close eye on that epicentre and that tried to copy it. That is the reason for my plead to consider this as well, but without losing sight of the fact that all moves around this centre.

5 A. SOKAL & J. BRICMONT, *Impostures intellectuelles*, Paris, 1997 / *Intellectual impostures*, London, 1998 / *Intellectueel bedrog*, Antwerpen, 1999 and N. POSTMAN, *Building a bridge to the eighteenth century*, New York, 1999.

Doutrepont and Burgundian literature

What is Burgundian literature? The question 'what is literature' – its essence and its use – can not be answered precisely, many have made an effort to do so and this often provides us with interesting poetics. Unfortunately these poetics are of a temporary nature: anything considered to be literature in the one literary period may no longer be read at all in the next. It is by no means my wish to define literature here and now, literary giants that have attempted to do so before me have not succeeded in providing an exact and everlasting definition either. In no circumstance will I try to do so, even if I were to stand on those giants' shoulders, the enterprise would fail. In my opinion it is possible to define a genre, however, although we will encounter pitfalls here as well. To my knowledge the genre of the romance for instance has never been defined in all its aspects. This explains why the collection of books that need to be defined still must be cut down in size. The more restricted the domain, the better the definition is. There actually are descriptions for genres such as *the romance in antiquity*⁶, *the naturalistic romance in the Netherlands*⁷ and *the Carolingian romance*⁸ that are quite satisfying. It would be unreasonable, however, to expect everlasting definitions such as $e=mc^2$, in literary theory (and in the other arts-studies), we will never be able to be that exact. Generally speaking, in literature there is no question of fine definitions that summarize an entire enclosed world into one single sentence; there will always be something to be argued about or added to it, but on the main issues there will be consensus as far as correctness or completeness of the definition is concerned. There are exceptions: it is very difficult to define the above mentioned genre of the chapbook⁹.

Back to the question put at the beginning of this paragraph: what is Burgundian literature? In 1909 Georges Doutrepont gave a description of the collection of texts later to be known as *Burgundian literature*. Burgundian literature includes texts that came into existence under the patronage of the four Burgundian dukes of the House of Valois Philip the Bold, John the Fearless, Philip the Good and Charles the Bold or their entourages. Burgundian literature is in fact also the body of texts that somehow ended up in the library of the Dukes, passed down to them or given to them as some sort of present. Doutrepont did not quite commit himself by considering the question about the feasibility of defining Burgundian literature differently: that is, by examining if these books emanate the same sentiment, the sentiment of society in those days in particular – a sort of utmost-collective-expression of the utmost-collective-emotion¹⁰. I think Doutrepont uses the word

6 N. HOLZBERG, *De roman in de oudheid*, Amsterdam, 1998.

7 T. ANBEEK, *De naturalistische roman in Nederland*, Amsterdam, 1982.

8 E. VAN DEN BERG & B. BESAMUSCA, *De karelepiek in vogelvucht*, in E. VAN DEN BERG & B. BESAMUSCA (ed.), *De epische wereld*, Muiderberg, 1992, pp. 9-23.

9 E.g. L. DEBAENE, *De Nederlandse volksboeken*, Hulst, 1977, pp. 19-24.

10 G. DOUTREPONT, *La littérature française à la cour des ducs de Bourgogne*, Genève, 1970, pp. V-VI.

society (*société*) to describe the people that belonged to the Burgundian court or its direct surroundings.

This definition of Burgundian literature has been established from the centre, politically as well as culturally. Doutrepoint has restricted himself once more: he discusses French literature at the court of only four Dukes. But whoever wants to examine the relevance between literature and society of one particular region knows that it is difficult to date the span of time. In other words: it is quite clear that Burgundian literature does not end at the death of Charles the Bold in January 1477. It is quite evident that in the fifteenth century the culture of the Burgundian court had permeated into all layers of society in the Burgundian regions, including those layers far away from the centre. When France conquered Burgundy after the death of Charles and the court only possessed the counties of the low lands, the entire region had not been 'rid' of Burgundian literature overnight.

On the contrary. The Burgundian regions were saturated by Burgundian culture, and the court that had been 'passed on' to the Hapsburg dynasty also adopted its philosophy. Burgundian culture became Hapsburg-Burgundian culture. During the sixteenth century the Hapsburgers did what the Burgundians had done before them: giving orders to authors and stimulating cultural life. This is the reason why Jan Smeken's Golden Fleece-poem¹¹ can also be rated among Burgundian literature, even if it deals with the Golden Fleece chapter of Brussels in 1516, several decades after the transition of the Burgundians to the Hapsburgers.

Now let us return to Doutrepoint's definition: a meaningful aspect of it concerns the assignment. Burgundian literature includes books that had been written on orders of the ducal court. This means that some writers had been privileged, they wrote for the court and they were very much round the cultural fire. Even better than that, they participated in establishing the culture at hand. They naturally showed the court their gratitude by not only offering their written word but also their spoken word to the person that had given them this prestigious assignment. In medieval literature this would have been the customary course of events. It is even so common, that the city of Brussels honours the ducal court in the prologue of *Die eerste bliscap van Maria* as if the Burgundian duke himself 'sponsored' the author and the actors (which he did not, all the *Bliscappen* were financed by the city¹²):

[...]Reyn suver kersouwe
Wilt onsen prince ende ooc sijn vrouwe
Ende Charloot, onsen jonge heere,
Met sijnder vrouwe, behueden vor rouwe¹³.

11 J. SMEKEN, *Gedicht op de feesten ter eere van het Gulden Vlies te Brussel in 1516*, met inleiding, aantekeningen en glossarium door G. DEGROOTE, Antwerpen, 1946.

12 D. COIGNEAU, *Van de Bliscappen tot Cammaert – Vier eeuwen toneelliteratuur in Brussel*, in J. JANSSENS & R. SLEIDERINK, *De macht van het schone woord – Literatuur in Brussel van de 14^e tot de 18^e eeuw*, Leuven, 2003, p.213.

13 *Die eerste bliscap van Maria*, vv. 7-10, in *Die eerste bliscap van Maria & Die sevenste bliscap van onser vrouwen*, ingeleid en van aantekeningen voorzien door W.H. BEUKEN, Culemborg, 1973, p. 54.

Subsequently the narrator in the prologue begs for a blessing for the counties, towns and villages that reside under ducal law. This shows us that the performance of the play covered a larger region than just the ducal court. The city of Brussels wants to show their respect to the Duke: see how happy we are with you and your court, so please stay in Brussels for ever (that is, by the way, good for our economy...).

It sometimes also occurred that a particular work had not directly been dedicated to the duke. Yet, in that case, we can still speak of Burgundian literature. *Le chevalier délibéré* serves as a clear example of this¹⁴. This text comes straight to the point by sending the narrator on his way. The author Olivier de la Marche was employed as an author by the Burgundian court, so in that respect his writings certainly may be considered to be Burgundian.

Furthermore we may conclude from the narrative of *Le chevalier délibéré* that we have Burgundian literature at hand here. The dukes Philip the Good, Charles the Bold and the duchess Maria the Rich play their parts in the story. Also quite a number of other Burgundian knights are mentioned. In short, the entire text emanates Burgundian literature (and to such a degree that I actually dare declare *Le chevalier délibéré* to be the height of Burgundian literature – this as an aside). Something similar is the case with *Les cent nouvelles nouvelles*. This book is introduced by the dedication

A mon treschier et tresredoubté seigneur monseigneur le duc de Bourgoigne de Brabant, etc.¹⁵.

And in this narrative the duke himself is a character (as well). The author wants to make clear to us that he knows what he is talking about: he knows the court, he knows the people and he knows the customs – and he also wants us to believe that he knows the duke personally. All in all, in formal Burgundian literature the duke is actually mentioned in the prologue, or he is cast as a character, or we find a combination of these two.

A broader definition

The definition of Burgundian literature by Doutrepoint has been extended before. Among others Gilbert Degroote once claimed, that Burgundian literature did not necessarily need to be French, because Dutch was the most widely spoken language in the Burgundian regions. For this reason several Dutch texts belong to this definition as well. The above mentioned play *Die eerste bliscap van Maria* had already made this clear to us by means of the dedication. But Degroote goes beyond this, he also recognizes characteristics that concern content that the Burgundian works of literature have in common (naturally Doutrepoint's book deals

14 O. DE LA MARCHE, *Le chevalier delibéré* (The resolute knight), edited by C.W. CARROLL, translated by L.H. WILSON & C.W. CARROLL, Tempe (Arizona), 1999.

15 *Les cent nouvelles nouvelles*, édition critique par F.P. SWEETSER, Genève, 1966, p. 22.

with content as well, but a discussion about this would go beyond our research at hand). The difficulty is, however, that we will enter the hermeneutic circle: Degroote selects a number of texts that share certain characteristics; he marks these texts as the corpus of Burgundian literature; sums up the characteristics; and then concludes that texts showing these characteristics belong to Burgundian literature. This is an acclaimed problem to reach an accurate analysis but so far there is no definite solution to this problem. We know it is there, but it simplifies communication if we do not keep bothering ourselves referring to it.

Degroote studies the Dutch versions of some French works mentioned by Doutrepoint. He hinges his research specifically on Colijn Caillieu's *Dal sonder wederkeren*¹⁶, Pierre Michault's *Van den drie blinden danssen*¹⁷ and *Doctrinael des tijts*¹⁸ and Jan Pertcheval's *Den camp vander doot*¹⁹. At this point he also includes Jan van den Dale's *De wre vander doot*²⁰, this book is not a translation, but it is unmistakably influenced by the above mentioned works, as Degroote shows us. The courtly ideal and the subsequent quest are very important within Burgundian literature indeed²¹. A knight goes on his way, encounters difficulties and is triumphant on account of his attitude, among other things. These struggles and their solutions provide the knight, and the reader of the book, with wise lessons in life. These lessons generally concern life and death and are often illustrated by means of allegorical characters.

These themes and motives on themselves were used all through the Middle Ages, but Degroote claims that there was some sort of culmination in fifteenth-century Burgundian regions²². All in all, Burgundian literature has gained in colour with the aid of the definitions provided by Doutrepoint and Degroote. And yet it is not complete for the definition only applies to the elite. The next paragraph has been written in order to include the popular element (after all, Doutrepoint does speak of an 'expression d'une société').

Burgundian literature and the common folk

Anthonis de Roovere was the town-poet of Bruges and it could very well have

16 C. CAILLIEU, *Dal sonder wederkeeren of Pas der doot*, door P. DE KEYSER, Antwerpen / Paris / 's Gravenhage, 1936.

17 P. MICHAULT, *Van den drie blinden danssen*, ingeleid en toegelicht door W.J. SCHUIJT, Amsterdam / Antwerpen, 1955.

18 P. MICHAULT, *Doctrinael des tijts*, W.J. SCHUIJT's dissertatie, Wageningen, 1946.

19 J. PERTCHEVAL, *Den camp vander doot*, met inleiding, aantekeningen en glossarium door G. DEGROOTE, Antwerpen, 1948.

20 J. VAN DEN DALE, *Gekende werken*, met inleiding, bronnenstudie, aantekeningen en glossarium door G. DEGROOTE, Antwerpen, 1944 (*De wre vander doot*, pp. 73-131).

21 S. SUTCH, *Dichters van de stad – De Brusselse rederijkers en hun verhouding tot de Franstalige hofliteratuur en het geleerde humanisme (1475-1522)*, in J. JANSSENS & R. SLEIDERINK, *De macht van het schone woord – Literatuur in Brussel van de 14^e tot de 18^e eeuw*, Leuven, 2003, pp. 141-159.

22 J. PERTCHEVAL, *Den camp vander doot*, met inleiding, aantekeningen en glossarium door G. DEGROOTE, Antwerpen, 1948, pp. XII-XIV.

been the case that at some point he received a financial contribution or some other sort of token of gratitude from Charles the Bold. That in itself makes him a Burgundian writer. However, he is not a writer that belonged to the Burgundian nucleus, for this he should have been closer to Brussels. So we could say that he was not included in the most inner circle, but rather the one next to it. We can shepherd him to the top of Burgundian literature as a result of the commissions given to him by the towns and the duke, but – secondly – his work, as regards to contents, is also proof of the fact that he belonged there. For instance, let us consider his poem *Den droom van Roovere op die doot van hertoge Kaerle van Borgonnyen saleger gedachten*²³. This poem deals with the death of Charles the Bold, as it does in *Le chevalier délibéré*. De Roovere does what was commonplace in the official Burgundian literature: the Duke becomes a character in a work of literature. Nobody will ever doubt Anthonis de Roovere's place in Burgundian literature.

Notwithstanding the fact that Anthonis de Roovere belongs to those circles that had admission to the (close surroundings of the) Duke, there were also authors that found themselves at a far distance of it. And yet they were in the habit of referring to the ducal court. We must look a little further afield, but in the end this appears to be an *imitatio* of courtly literature. After all, just imagine you are a writer or a publisher, and you have no contacts at the ducal court, you are a lesser author, or a folk-writer, a writer that does not write for the elite, but for the lower-placed echelons. How will you deal with the custom within the higher ranking literature to dedicate books to the Duke or to produce the Duke as a character such as to give evidence of the fact that you are the Duke's personal acquaintance. After all, it is of no use to dedicate the book to him, for you do not owe him anything. Neither is there any need for you to make him into a character in your book: there is no old-boys-network-relationship with the Duke. The solution in folk-literature to this question, is to refer to Burgundian hot-spots, people or politics. When reading a book with the Duke as a conversing character, you know where and when the story takes place. We need not doubt this. So, apparently it was customary within the elite-culture to write and read stories that were clearly defined in terms of place and time. This seems to be in contrast with the popular allegorical genre. Sometimes this is the case, there are allegories where time and place are rather vague, but there are also allegories that can be defined: when the author in *Le chevalier délibéré* describes his witnessing Charles the Bold's death agonies, the place as well as the action is vague. (Charles died on the battlefield of Nancy, not on the tournament field against Accident), but the time is clear: 1477.

Consequently there is a category of texts within Burgundian literature where it is important for the reader to have a reasonably clear picture of the wheres and whens of the story. When the elite-authors apply this tradition of mentioning time and place, the folk-writer will copy them. This is the reason why the story of the tenth ass takes place at the Habsburgian-Burgundian court of Margareta of Austria

23 *De gedichten van ANTHONIS DE ROOVERE*, naar alle dusver bekende handschriften en oude drukken, uitgegeven door J.J. MAK, Zwolle, 1955, pp. 351-359.

in Mechelen in 1530. When we also take into consideration that *Vanden ,X, esels* is an allegory (about stupidity), we may conclude that *Vanden ,X, esels* fits within the Burgundian literary tradition. And again if we consider that the printer of *Vanden ,X, esels*, Jan van Doesborch, also happened to be the printer of Colijn Caillieu's *Dal sonder wederkeeren* and that the printersmark of Van Doesborch was Vrouwe Fortuna from Pierre Michault's *Van den drie blinde danssen*²⁴, it then is obvious that *Vanden ,X, esels* is by no means a marginal and peripheral bit of writing, but that it ostentatiously rubs itself against the Burgundian cultural centre.

Otgier Nachtegaele was, apart from being the printer of *Le chevalier délibéré*, and *Den camp vander doot*, Jan Pertcheval's translation, also the printer of *Tleven van Liedwy die maghet van sciedam*²⁵. This is a *vita*, a saint's life, also marked as a folk-book. But it does fit within Burgundian literature. First of all, it has links with Olivier de la Marche, by means of the printer Nachtegaele, so as far as this is concerned things are moving into the right direction. And the story takes place in a Burgundian department: in Schiedam, in the department of Holland. In the days of Liedewy, Burgundising had only just begun; the fact that in the story itself several historical characters appear, points to active Burgundian politics. Margareta of Burgundy (the wife of the Dutch count William VI), Govaart Sonderdanc (the physician at the Dutch court), Matthias of Bethuania (the suffragan bishop of Utrecht) and the soldiers of Philip the Good. They are all references to Burgundian places, people and politics.

Inden tijde dat hertoghe Arent van Gheldre te Grave ghevangen wert gheset van sijnen sone hertoghe Olof ende sijnen medepleghers, so woende op dri milen na Nieuweghen een devoet priester geheeten heer Ghijsbrecht ende met hem woende een schoon ionghe maecht gheheeten Mariken, zijnder suster dochter, wiens moeder doot was.

This is one of the most widely known first lines of Dutch literature: *Die waerachtige ende een seer wonderlijcke historie van Mariken van Nieuweghen die meer dan seven iaren metten duvel woende ende verkeerde*²⁶. This work is not only one of the best-known writings but also one of the works of Dutch literature that has been studied most frequently. But in order to achieve a clear understanding of *Mariken van Nieuweghen* it is necessary to study this book from a Burgundian literary point of view. The setting of the story is important: apart from Nijmegen, we also find 's Hertogenbosch and Antwerp – Burgundian towns. But apart from a geographical setting the story also takes place in a clearly defined time-setting: in the night of January 9 and 10, 1465. Adolf imprisoned his father

24 P.J.A. FRANSSEN, *Tussen tekst en publiek*, Amsterdam, 1990, pp. 138-140.

25 *Het leven van Liedewij, de maagd van Schiedam*, uitgegeven, vertaald en van commentaar voorzien door L. JONGEN & C. SCHOTEL, Hilversum, 1994.

26 There are a lot of editions of this book, one of them is: *Mariken van Nieuweghen*, ingeleid en toegelicht door D. COIGNEAU, Hilversum, 1996.

Arnold, the duke of Gelre. As this caused quite a stir, Charles the Bold interfered and by this turning it into a Burgundian question. In this historical setting a girl sets out to run some errands, with due consequences. The story is not allegorical, but it does teach an important lesson in life, and Mariken experiences some sort of quest, where she encounters problems which she conquers because of the 'courtly' attitude to life of her uncle Ghijsbrecht. Besides this we should bear in mind that the first version of *Mariken van Nieuweghen* was printed by the same printer that printed *Vanden ,X, esels*, Jan van Doesborch²⁷ (and who also did the English translation²⁸), which means that this text reaches closer to the Burgundian fire than could be said at first sight. All in all, writings such as *Vanden ,X, esels*, *Het leven van Liedewij* and *Mariken van Nieuweghen* were books that swam around within the not very clear definition of the concept of folk-books. Let us incorporate these magnificent narratives into the sturdier bastion of Burgundian literature, giving them a solid position and enabling them to be studied in their right and proper context.

Conclusion and discussion

What is Burgundian literature? This question can be answered, to a certain degree. I am not much in favour of committing myself, for in literary theory it is difficult to give precise answers that seal off the issue for a full 100 %; arts-studies may not be as exact, meticulous and accurate as science-studies, but in spite of this they are subjected to the rules of logic and statements must be examined. In my opinion the definition must be focused on Doutrepoint's idea of what society expresses: Burgundian literature reflects the ideas, philosophies and the mentality of the society of that particular region that was ruled by the dukes of the dynasty of Valois. This means that a number of characteristics are applicable.

First of all the formal rules that can be audited, apply: Burgundian literature consists of a body of texts that were written under commission of the duke of Burgundy (or his direct environment); and of texts that somehow have become included in the ducal library. We can also rate texts among Burgundian literature as far as contents are concerned: the main character goes on a quest, on his way he encounters problems which he is able to solve as a direct result of his courtly qualities. Parts of these problems are caused by allegorical characters; the result is a wise lesson about life and death. The third and last point that reflects the time-setting, are the references to Burgundian people, places and politics. The way people thought in the Burgundian departments and Burgundian days, is expressed very explicitly in literature: including the way people lived in those departments and those days. They were involved with Burgundian politics, in the same way everybody was involved with Burgundian politics. This is why we now range books that we first labelled marginal and peripheral, and which we considered as 'folk-

27 P.J.A. FRANSSEN, *Tussen tekst en publiek*, Amsterdam, 1990, p. 61.

28 *Mary of Nemmegen*, edited with introduction, notes and commentary by M.M. RAFTERY, Leiden etc., 1991.

books' under Burgundian literature, and enabling them to be valued accordingly and to be studied in their proper context.

We need further research to explore the boundaries of Burgundian literature. There are various narratives featuring a certain Duke of Burgundy. The best-known stories are *La chatelaine de Vergi* and *Robert le Diable*. We can not range these books under Burgundian literature, because the above-mentioned dukes are not from Valois. The title of 'Duke of Burgundy' is after all a great deal older than the first Valois-duke (Philip the Bold) and always seems to have inspired writers to characterize him – that is: the duke – in stories.

This changes in the days of the printing-press, when these stories are printed in the Burgundian-Habsburgian departments (which, after 1477, for the larger part consists of regions where Dutch is spoken). This applies to *Robrecht de duyvel*, which is brought to the printing press by Michiel van Hoochstraten in 1516²⁹. The readers of this story certainly had their own ideas about the phenomenon of the 'Duke of Burgundy'; it is impossible to salvage their exact thoughts about the glorious dynasty of Valois, but it might be well worth the effort to consider this. The same applies to the sixteenth-century translation of *La chatelaine de Vergi: Een schone historie vander borchgravinne van Vergi*³⁰. This story takes place at the court of the Duke of Burgundy, but which duke it is all about remains unknown. It certainly was a long time ago – this indicates that he must have been the predecessor of Philip the Bold. The reader does not receive any straight directions to the House of Valois, but in spite of this the term of 'Duke of Burgundy' will have been known to quite a number of people. Do *Robrecht de duyvel* and *Vander Borchgravinne van Vergi* belong to Burgundian literature, as opposed to their French and previous Dutch predecessors (*De burggravin van Vergi* has come down in several versions in Dutch³¹)? They might and yet they might not, I hope this issue will raise discussion for a long time to come.

29 *Robrecht de duyvel*, uitgegeven en van commentaar voorzien door R. RESOORT, Muiderberg, 1980.

30 R.J. RESOORT, *Een schoone historie vander borchgravinne van Vergi – Onderzoek naar de intentie en gebruikssfeer van een zestiende-eeuwse prozaroman*, Hilversum, 1988.

31 *De burggravin van Vergi – een Middeleeuwse novelle*, vertaald door W. WILMINK, ingeleid door W.P. GERRITSEN, met een uitgave van de Middelnederlandse tekst door R. JANSEN-SIEBEN, Amsterdam, 1997.