Political Poems and Subversive Songs. The Circulation of 'Public Poetry' in the Late Medieval Low Countries

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Abstract: This article establishes a link between the flourishing study of Middle Dutch literature as a broad cultural history on the one hand and the increasing attention of political historians to questions of 'communication' and 'political culture' on the other. It studies some 'historical songs' (as they have traditionally been called) or 'political songs' (a better term) with the aim of reflecting on the intense relationship among literature, society and politics in the medieval Low Countries. We argue that these intriguing texts should be classified as what medievalists now generally call 'public poetry', a 'genre' defined by the ideological contents, functions, and audiences of literary texts, to transcend the research that mainly targets on generic distinctions between different types of poems, songs, and tales made by past scholars.

Keywords: Political Song, Historical Songs, Subversive Speech, Orality

A chronicle on the 'wondrous wars' of Maximilian of Austria composed at the end of the fifteenth century recounts the story of Jan de Gheest, leader of the Ghent militia of the 'Groententers', those who sleep in 'green tents', in other words, out in the open field. In 1477, this commoner and his 4,000 strong army of simple folk, also known as the 'Ghelapte Schoen' or 'mended shoes', had inflicted great losses on the French invaders who had taken advantage of the general instability in the Burgundian lands after the death of Duke Charles the Bold. 'Thus, the Mended Shoes were very strong', the text relates, 'and they displayed feats of arms about which songs were sung in the streets'.[2] Likewise, after the 1481 victory of the city of Utrecht in the county of Holland, the mob dragged artillery through the streets singing refrains 'about the lords', songs the chronicler dared not name because, he wrote, 'I am too small a man

to mention them'. The songs were mocking the mayor who had illegitimately appropriated a valuable tabard from the war booty.[3]

Although only a few of these songs composed before the middle of the sixteenth century have survived, this genre of popular songs about both contemporary and past political events must have been omnipresent in the late medieval Low Countries.[4] Like the nearly indistinguishable streams of gossip and political information running from town to town, from inn to inn, and from one artisan's workshop to another, songs were an important way to communicate military and political news and also to incite action. This was true long before the age of the printing press, although the practice perhaps became more frequent afterwards, as printing facilitated production of this ephemeral genre. Especially during times of war, dynastic crises, or civic conflicts – as also happened in England, France and elsewhere[5] – songs, as well as poems, with political messages circulated in and between the towns and cities of the Netherlands.[6]

A primary purpose of this article is to fill a historiographical gap by drawing systematic attention to the ubiquitous circulation of political songs and poems in the urban world of the Low Countries between the fourteenth century and approximately 1540. During the last two decades, historians and literary scholars have paid far more attention to the intersection between politics and literary production in medieval English and German urban societies than have current specialists in Middle Dutch literature.[7] In the scholarly work of Dutch and Flemish specialists of the period – with the notable exceptions cited below – only those works that predate the middle of the twentieth century generally examine the political context of a literary

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[3] B.H. van 't Hooft, *Honderd jaar Geldersche geschiedenis in historieliederen* (Arnhem: Gouda Quint, 1948), pp. 22-3.

[4] C.C. van de Graft, *Middelnederlandsche historieliederen* (Epe: Hooiberg, 1904) identified 49 'historical songs' dated before the sixteenth century but her list is problematic and certainly non-exhaustive. See also L.P. Grijp, 'Zangcultuur', in: *Volkscultuur: een inleiding in de Nederlandse etnologie,* ed. by T. Dekker et al. (Nijmegen: SUN, 2000), pp. 337-80.

[5] L. Martines, *Strong Words: Writing and Social Strain in the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 232-48; T. Cheesman, *The Shocking Ballad Picture Show: German Popular Literature and Cultural History* (Oxford: Berg, 1994); R. Darnton, *Poetry and the Police: Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); R. Salzberg and M. Rospocher, 'Street Singers in Italian Renaissance Urban Culture and Communication', *Cultural and Social History* 9 (2012), 9-26.

[6] J. van der Bom, 'Maarten van Rossum en de publiciteit', *Literatuur* 2 (1985), 11-7.; H. Pleij, *Het gevleugelde woord. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur, 1400-1650* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2007), p. 604-6.

[7] For instance J. Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (London: Blandford, 1971); V. Honemann, 'Politische Lieder und Sprüche im späten Mittelalter und der frühen Neuzeit', *Die Musikforschung* (1997), pp. 399-421; A. Mairey, 'Poésie et politique dans l'Angleterre de la fin du Moyen Âge: le cas du Parlement', *Revue Française d'Histoire des Idées Politiques* 26 (2007), pp. 231-50; W. Scase, *Literature and Complaint in England, 1272-1553* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

text. More recent studies merely note political context in passing or analyse it sporadically in scattered case studies.[8]

As yet, there has been no systematic attempt to establish links between the flourishing study of Middle Dutch literature as a broad cultural history on the one hand and the increasing attention of political historians to questions of 'communication' and 'political culture' on the other.[9] The genre of 'historical songs' (as they have traditionally been called) or 'political songs' (a better term) offers the opportunity to reflect on the intense relationship between literature, society and politics in the medieval Low Countries. These songs could be descriptive, propagandistic or polemic.[10] We argue that these intriguing texts should be classified as what medievalists now generally call 'public poetry', a 'genre' defined by the ideological contents, functions and audiences of literary texts, to transcend the research that mainly targets generic distinctions made by scholars in the past between different types of poems, songs and tales.[11]

Official Political Literature

From the fourteenth century onwards, travelling acrobats, musicians, street and market singers, magicians and illusionists regularly appear in the sources of the medieval Netherlands, but it is likely that political literature, whether recited or sung, began first at court. Heralds would sing the praise of their lords and their feats of arms in panegyric songs.[12] Many 'political' Middle Dutch literary works were clearly composed for a princely or noble audience.

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[8] G. Kalff, *Het lied in de middeleeuwen* (Leiden: Brill, 1884); Te Winkel, *Het middeleeuwsch lierdicht*. See also more general and recent work on medieval Dutch songs: J. Reynaert, *Laet ons voort vroylijc maken zanc. Opstellen over lyriek in het Gruuthuse-handschrift* (Ghent: RUG, 1999); and most of all the many publications by Frank Willaert on Middle Dutch songs, including: F. Willaert (ed.), *Een zoet akkoord: middeleeuwse lyriek in de Lage Landen* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1992); idem (ed.), *Veelderhande liedekens: studies over het Nederlandse lied tot 1600* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997); idem (ed.), *De fiere nachtegaal. Het Nederlandse lied in de middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008).

[9] Although the publication of the repertory of Dutch songs before 1600, including classification of genre for each song, now strongly facilitates such studies: M. de Bruin et al. (eds.), *Repertorium van het Nederlandse lied tot 1600* (Ghent: KANTL, 2001).

[10] G.J. van Bork et al., *Algemeen letterkundig Lexicon*, sub lemma 'Historielied'.

[11] A. Middleton, 'The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II', *Speculum* 53 (1978), 94; W. Arens, 'Late Middle English Political Poetry as "Public Poetry"', in: *The Living Middle Ages: Studies in Mediaeval English Literature and its Tradition*, ed. by U. Böker et al. (Stuttgart: Belser, 1989), p. 168.

[12] J. te Winkel, *Het middeleeuwsch lierdicht* (Bruges: Barbiaux, 1884), pp. 4-5; W. van Anrooij, 'Dichter, kroniekschrijver en wapenkundige. Heraut Gelre en zijn werk', *Literatuur* 2 (1985), 244-51.

These political works represent the dominant ideologies and princely politics of the time. The oldest known Dutch text lauding a prince is the *Wapenlied van hertog Jan III van Brabant* ('The Epic of Duke Jan III of Brabant') of 1369 which compares the Duke of Brabant to a boar.[13] *Die claghe van den Grave van Vlaendren* ('The Complaint of the Count of Flanders') and *Die Claghe van den hertoghe Wenselijn van Brabant* ('The Complaint of Duke Wencelin of Brabant), by Jan Knibbe (about 1383-84), are other examples of allegorical poems with similar mentions of heraldry, presumably written for a noble audience.[14]

Among other political texts written from the viewpoint of the political elites is the poem *Een exempel van partyen* ('An Example of Parties'), by the late fourteenth-century Holland storyteller Willem van Hildegaersberch. While it did not directly discuss a specific historical event, the poem clearly referred to the partisan strife in Holland between the Hooks and the Cods in its moralising message promoting unity.[15] From the fifteenth century onwards, panegyrical texts were also produced in urban environments. In 1477, the Bruges rhetorician Anthonis de Roovere wrote one for the deceased Charles the Bold, *Den droom van Roovere op die doot van Kaerle van Borgonnyen saleger gedachten* ('Roovere's Dream of the Death of Charles of Burgundy of Blessed Memory').[16] After her untimely death in 1482, a text praised Charles' daughter Mary. It was written from the perspective of the city of Bruges but recorded in the 1544 *Antwerp Songbook* (a variant is preserved in a Brussels manuscript as well). In

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[13] P. Fredericq, *Onze historische volksliederen van vóór de godsdienstige beroerten der 16de eeuw* (Ghent: Vuylsteke, 1894), pp. 15-6.

[14] C.P. Serrure, 'Kleine gedichten uit de dertiende en veertiende eeuw', in *Vaderlandsch Museum voor Nederduitsche Letterkunde, Oudheid en Geschiedenis* 1 (Ghent: C. Annoot-Braeckman, 1855), pp. 303-8; B.T. Hogenelst, *Sproken en sprekers: inleiding op en repertorium van de Middelnederlandse sproke* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1997), vol. II, pp. 79-80.

[15] Hogenelst, *Sproken en sprekers*, vol. II, p. 140; *Gedichten van Willem Van Hildegaersberch,* ed. by W. Bisschop and E. Verwijs (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1870), pp. 102-3. About Van Hildegaersberch, see T. Meder, *Sprookspreker in Holland: leven en werk van Willem van Hildegaersberch (circa 1400)* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1991). Other examples are *Hoe die yerste partie in Hollant quam* by the same author. It carries a message against hate and slander but situated within the history of the Holland dynasty. In the allegorical text, *Van den sloetel* ('Of the Key'), Hildegaersberch defends the Leiden city council after a failed workers revolt in 1393 (ibidem, 122-3 and 164-9). See also F. van Oostrom, *Wereld in woorden. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2013), pp. 412-9.

[16] *De gedichten van Anthonis de Roovere,* ed. by J.J. Mak (Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink, 1955), pp. 351-9; J. Oosterman, 'Oh Flanders, Weep! Anthonis de Roovere and Charles the Bold', in: *The Growth of Authority in the Medieval West,* ed. by M. Gosman, A. Vanderjagt and J. Veenstra (Groningen: Forsten, 1999), pp. 257-67.

addition to this song, obviously performed in music, Anthonis de Roovere paid written tribute to her in an acrostic inserted into his 'Excellent Chronicle of Flanders'.[17]

Subversive Songs

Besides these rather 'official' works of politically motivated literature, many of the people singing songs and observed by contemporary writers actually belonged to the lower classes. Their songs probably had more 'folk characteristics' than did the lyrical songs with complex forms composed by courtly singers. Common singers were often women, or sometimes groups of children, and a number of them also seem to have been blind or disabled. Some sung occasionally or joined in with crowds; others were professional street singers. After the fifteenth-century shearer François van den Broucke, for instance, was mutilated and could no longer practice his trade, he started 'to roam about the country singing songs and selling them'.[18]

Although the vast majority of these songs dealt with the deeds of epic heroes, or love and life in general, many also contained ideological elements from the 'popular politics' typical of the cities in the late medieval Netherlands. With a moralistic critique on the failings of their political adversaries, these elements condemned urban elites who were guided by elite or factional interests.[19]

For instance, a song chanted during factional conflicts in Leiden and Haarlem in 1478 was called *Brederoede hout dy veste*. This song sympathized with Frans van Brederode, a nobleman who supported the faction that had rebelled against the Count of Holland. Details aside, the song shows that using common idioms, such as the colourful term 'liver eaters' to denote greedy princely officials and looting soldiers, and well-known rhyme and rhythm schemes helped speed oral transmission of political messages.[20] According to sources, the *Brederode* song was sung as a refrain to the Latin hymn *Dies est laetitae.* Apparently, both the rebels who sang *Brederoede hout dy veste* and the informers among the count's supporters who reported the singing to his officials recognized the song and its rhythm scheme (as the sources noted the title of the song to which *Brederoede* referred). Urban dissidents thus adopted older and well-

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[17] Fredericq, *Onze volksliederen*, pp. 43-4; Van de Graft, *Historieliederen*, pp. 96-100; *Het Antwerps Liedboek,* ed. by D.E. van der Poel et al. (Tielt: Lannoo, 2004), vol. I, pp. 288-9; vol. II, pp. 300-2; J. Oosterman, 'O fortuna. Tragiek, troost en vastberadenheid', *Nederlandse Letterkunde*, 10 (2005), pp. 98-105.

[18] H. Stalpaert, *Oudvlaamse volksliederen op vliegende bladen: historie en folklore* (Kortrijk: UGA, 1959), pp. 12-4 (and other examples).

[19] J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, 'Patterns of Urban Rebellion in Medieval Flanders', *Journal of Medieval History* 31 (2005), 369-93; C. Liddy and J. Haemers, 'Popular Politics in the Late Medieval Town: York and Bruges', English Historical Review 128 (2013), 771-805.

[20] M. van Gent, 'De Hoekse factie in Leiden circa 1445-1490: het verhaal van verliezers', in: *Bloedwraak, partijstrijd en pacificatie in laat-middeleeuws Holland,* ed. by J. Marsilje (Hilversum: Verloren, 1990), p. 132.

known melodies which made taunting songs easy to repeat in order to spread the message rapidly.[21]

These examples can be considered 'rebellious' or 'subversive' songs because they contain critical views of rulers, city governments, and political and moral behaviour of public officials. However, those studying these ephemeral subversive texts of the late medieval period often find it difficult to distinguish among rhyming slogans, leaflets in verse, party songs meant either to forge a common identity or simply to serve as a way to distinguish friend from foe, defamation chants meant to intimidate opponents, poems written years after the events, and actual songs put to music. On 4 October 1451, a broadside posted on the door of the Ghent city hall read 'Gy slapscheten van Ghendt, / die nu hebt 't regiment, / wy en zullen 't hu nyet ghewagen, / maer zullen 't eenen nyeuwen Artevelt claghen' ('Thou feeble farts of Ghent, who art in power now, we won't tell you / but we'll complain to a new Artevelde'). The leaflet called for a 'new Artevelde', referring to the fourteenth-century rebel leader of the city, to take up arms against the Burgundian Duke Philip the Good. In the authors' view, the aldermen had not taken sufficient action against the Duke whom the rebels believed had violated their privileges. Although the chronicler who copied these few lines into his general narrative added that the citizens were clearly agitated after having read the subversive phrases, it is hard to judge whether such slogans in rhyme were later read out loud to groups of bystanders, rhythmically chanted or sung to a melody.[22] At any rate, once the authorities tore down the broadside, the words would only have been further diffused in oral form.

Few of these subversive, or even openly rebellious, texts, whether intended for oral or musical performance or no performance at all, have come down to us in full, although frequent references to them in chronicles, ordinances issued by the urban authorities and judicial records demonstrate that they were common and feared by the social and political elites. For instance, a singer from the town of Kampen was arrested in Ghelders in 1335 for singing songs mocking the county.[23] In the respectable wine tavern 'The Mint' on the main commercial street of medieval Bruges, Thuene de Budt of the nearby small town of Oudenburg sung two 'regretful songs' in 1491, reproaching people with the events of the recently concluded revolt against Maximilian of Austria. To make matters worse, this happened 'in the presence and before the audience of many good and honourable men'.[24] The public character of this speech crime and,

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[21] H. Brinkman, *Dichten uit liefde. Literatuur in Leiden aan het einde van de Middeleeuwen* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1997), p. 57.

[22] 'Int dwelcke de wet ende 't volck eensdeels beroert waren' (V. Fris, *Dagboek van Gent van 1447 tot 1470, met een vervolg van 1477 tot 1515* (Ghent: Annoot-Braeckman, 1901), I, p. 129). See also J. van Leeuwen, 'Over slapscheten en levereters. Pamfletten en strooibriefjes in de laatmiddeleeuwse stad', *Madoc. Tijdschrift over de Middeleeuwen* 18 (2004), pp. 77-85; E. Lecuppre-Desjardin, 'Des portes qui parlent. Placards, feuilles volantes et communication politique dans les villes des Pays-Bas à la fin du Moyen Age', in: *Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Chartes* 168 (2010), pp. 151-72.

[23] Van 't Hooft, *Honderd jaar*, p. 2, p. 22.

[24] For this example, and others, see J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, 'A Bad Chicken Was Brooding. Subversive Speech in Late Medieval Flanders', *Past and Present* 214 (2012), pp. 55-8; and see also L. Th. Maes, *Vijf eeuwen stedelijk*

in this case, its intended audience of respectable people, were aggravating circumstances. The large majority of such cases of drunken political ranting must have gone unnoticed because they took place in much lowlier environments. Yet, sometimes, these songs were performed within the public space. In 1429, Lamin Fabriel from Ypres was exiled for fifty years because he had participated in an uprising during the previous year. Along with other crimes, he had disseminated a song entitled *Ypre, ghi waert een zoet prayel* ('Ypres, you were a sweet garden of delight') referring to the city's glorious economic past. Undoubtedly, the now lost song accused the Ypres authorities of failing to prevent the city's decline. Mary, Charles Van Koyeghem's wife, was banished as well because she had sung 'songs blaming and confusing' the city's aldermen. Significantly, the commission charged with investigating the revolt after it had been repressed, argued that Lamin had composed the song in Tournai, and Mary 'had brought it to Ypres'. Presumably, this referred to leaflets with the text of the song, which Mary had taken with her. According to her verdict, this action and the singing had incited the weavers to take up arms against the city council for encroaching on the weavers' privileges in previous years.[25] Defamatory songs were also used in private conflicts between families, in feuds, partisan strife, and even during a 'walkout' (*uutganc*) in Gouda in 1478-79. In 1544 Leiden, angry textile workers sang songs insulting the merchants because they had not bought wool in Calais. Although most of these songs are only mentioned in other sources, some songs from the Hook – Cod civil war in Holland have also survived.[26]

Of course, performing a rebellious song and disseminating subversive rhymes only led to an uprising if the citizens had political or economic reasons to take action. Yet, these texts did have a mobilizing or accelerating effect, recognized as such by late medieval authorities. Almost everywhere in Europe, repressive measures against 'protest singers' were in place, although these singers must have often been difficult to apprehend, and their performances and flimsy

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strafrecht. Bijdrage tot de rechts- en cultuurgeschiedenis der Nederlanden (Antwerp: De Sikkel, 1947), pp. 249-50, p. 680.

[25] *Ommedat zoe ghezonghen hadde liedekinne ter blame ende confuse van den heere van der wet* (I. Diegerick, 'Les drapiers yprois et la conspiration manquée. Épisode de l'histoire d'Ypres (1428-1429)', in: *Annales de la Société d'Emulation de Bruges*, 14 (1855-1856), p. 310). The report of the commission states: 'Aussi lui a dit le dit Lammin Fabriel en ceste ville de Tournay qu'il avoit fait le canchon vituperable contre ceulx de la loy d'Ippre qui commence Ypre, ghi waert een zoet prayel etc, et lequelle canchon le femme du dit Karle porta de Tournay à Ypre' (ibidem, 305).

[26] Interesting examples from Leiden in Brinkman, *Dichten uit liefde*, pp. 48-62; Van Gent, *Pertijelike saken*, pp. 421-4; and similar songs in a German city in G. Roth, 'Leonard Assenheimer und Heinz Dompnig. Zwei "Historische Volkslieder" aus Breslau im Vergleich', in *Lied im deutschen Mittelalter: Überlieferung, Typen, Gebrauch*, ed. by C.W. Edwards, E. Hellgardt and O.H. Norbert (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1996), pp. 257-80, and V. Honemann, '*Herzog Casimir von Pommern* und *Busse von Erxleben*: Zwei politische Lieder des deutschen Spätmittelalters im Vergleich', in: *Literaturlandschaften. Schriften zur deutschprachigen Literatur im Osten des Reiches*, ed. by R. Suntrup et al. (Frankfurt a/M: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 232-3.

pamphlets clearly a challenge to regulate.[27] A 1514 bylaw in Bruges prohibited the singing of ballads about princes and kings accompanied by the display of 'tekenen', which were presumably painted placards adding visual information to the lyrics.[28] However, if a public performance by a singer was too risky, dissidents were able to spread written copies in more covert and anonymous ways. Some years later the city of Antwerp banished rhetoricians who had posted 'famous broadsides, poems and ballads' on church doors and city gates.[29]

In 1539, a man from Hasselt and his wife were publicly humiliated in Mechelen because they had printed and spread 'controversial libels' (*fameuse libellen*) in Mechelen and Dendermonde. It is likely that the authorities took immediate action against the agitators as there had recently been a violent revolt in the city of Ghent. The libels were hung around the man's neck and then publicly burnt. His wife was sent on a forced pilgrimage.[30]

Political Songs

Political songs are an important component of public poetry. The first political song about which we are reasonably well informed is *Van Cort Rozijn* (1377).[31] Cort Rozijn cannot be anyone else than Zeger van Kortrijk, known in French as Sohier le Courtraisin, whose name was literally changed into Flemish to literally mean 'Short Raisin'. The historical facts upon which the song is based must date to 1337, when Zeger, an influential knight and trusted counsellor of count Louis of Nevers who also had close ties to the city of Ghent, was executed by the Count due to his alliance with the King of England at the onset of the Hundred Years War. All this is left out of the story, however, and the reason why Cort Rozijn is beheaded is because he angers the count by refusing his offer to become *ruwaerd* (governor) of Flanders. Another famous song is the 'Song of the Villains' (*Kerelslied*) preserved in the Bruges Gruuthuse manuscript composed around the beginning of the fifteenth century. Along with other codicological

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[27] See examples mentioned in J. Scattergood, 'Remembering Richard II: John Gower's Cronica Tripartita, Richard the Redeles, and Mum and the Sothsegger', in: *The Lost Tradition. Essays on Middle English Alliterative Poetry,* ed. by J. Scattergood (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 200-25; C. Kuhn, 'Urban Laughter as a "Counter-Public" Sphere in Augsburg: the Case of the City Mayor, Jakob Herbrot (1490/95-1564)', *International Review of Social History* 52 (2007), pp. 77-93; L. Martines, 'Poetry as Politics and Memory in Renaissance Florence and Italy', in: G. Ciapelli and P. Rubin (eds.), *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 48-63; R. Salzberg, 'In the Mouths of Charlatans: Street Performers and the Dissemination of Pamphlets in Renaissance Italy', *Renaissance Studies* 24 (2010), pp. 638-53.

[28] Stalpaert, *Oudvlaamse volksliederen*, p. 11

[29] *Famose billetten, dichten, rondeelkens ende balladen* (E. de Bock, 'Waardering van de rederijkers', in: *Spiegel der Letteren* 12 (1969-70), 249).

[30] R. Foncke, 'Verboden liedjes en paskwillen', *Mechlinia. Maandschrift voor Oudheidkunde-Geschiedenis* 7 (1928), p. 82.

[31] Van de Graft, *Middelnederlandsche Historieliederen*, pp. 49-53; nr. 16 in *Het Antwerps Liedboek*.

features, analysis has identified the social and political circle that surrounded the manuscript as an elite circle in Bruges that opposed radical popular groups in the Flemish towns. The *Kerelslied*, probably written at the end of the fourteenth century to deal with the revolt of 1379-1385, portrays Flemish rebels as primitive and dangerous villains. Brinkman thinks that this song belongs to the 'protohistory' of the historical song genre.[32] Fortunately, a systematic study of the manuscript context, transmission and oral features of most political songs will be published soon by Brinkman.

The limited scope of this article allows only a brief discussion of the ways in which versions of political songs have been passed down to the present day, despite the methodological importance of this analysis.[33] There is, however, one outstanding source that reliably and directly transmitted late medieval and early sixteenth-century political songs in Dutch: the *Schoon Liedekensboeck* ('Fine Songbook') printed by Jan Roulans in 1544 in the metropolis of Antwerp.[34] It contains the lyrics of 221 songs, alphabetically ordered but without musical notations or illustrations apart from a woodcut on the title page. In the time of its publication, it was one of the most important collections of secular songs in Europe. The editor, Jan Roulans, probably compiled the *Songbook* from written sources: printed broadsheets, pamphlets, handwritten booklets and bits of paper.[35] Only one complete copy has survived, not only because the songbook was a cheaply printed item of everyday use, not meant to last, but also because the authorities prohibited its circulation, undoubtedly due to its contents (it was put on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* in 1546). Some of the songs were sexually explicit, and approximately thirty were political songs. Many of the lyrics dealt with the recent armed conflict between Charles V and the Duke of Ghelders, known as the third Ghelders Succession War of 1538-1543. The Antwerp 'Songbook' divided most of the lyrics into 'old songs', dating back to the fourteenth century, and more recent ones. Vellekoop's musicological research led him to conclude that Jan Roulans placed songs that had existed before approximately 1510 in the 'old songs' category. The general dividing line between old and new songs was roughly 1510-1525.[36]

The *Antwerp Songbook*, or at least the surviving version, probably from the fourth print run, was hastily updated with twelve 'new songs' about the struggle with Ghelders in order to

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[32] Brinkman, 'Het kerelslied', p. 113.

[33] We deal with this extensively in J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, 'Political Songs and Memories of Conflict in the Later Medieval Netherlands', in: *European Traditions of Revolt. Memories of Social Conflict in Oral Culture,* ed. by D. Hopkin, E. Guillorel and W. Pooley (forthcoming).

[34] This Antwerp songbook was first edited by Hoffman von Fallersleben (*Horae Belgica,* ed. by A.H. Hoffmann von Fallersleben (Vratislaviae: Grass, 1830-1862), II (1833)) but has recently been re-published in a modern edition of high quality: *Het Antwerps Liedboek,* ed. by Van der Poel et al.

[35] Van der Poel, *Liedboek*, p. 23.

[36] C. Vellekoop, 'Hoe oud is "oudt" in het Antwerps liedboek?', in: *Tussentijds. Bundel studies aangeboden aan W.P. Gerritsen ter gelegenheid van zijn vijftigste verjaardag,* ed. by A.M.J. van Buuren et al. (Utrecht: HES, 1985), pp. 272-9.

have more currency.[37] Some of the chivalric ballads, such as a Dutch version of the Song of Hildebrand, must be older than the middle of the fifteenth century. The same is true for many historical songs of Flemish origin.[38] There was a marked increase in the number of historical songs, written by both sides in the conflict, from the second half of the sixteenth century during the revolt of the Netherlands against Spain (1568-1648).[39]
Many attestations to political songs supporting this pattern as well have been lost.

Questions of Genre

Songs were a popular object of study for Romantic historians because they were sources that seemed to represent the so-called 'folk' element, obviously a problematic and essentialist notion, and reflect what the Romantics thought of as the inner soul and spirit of a people. In their collections, German erudites, such as Hoffmann von Fallersleben and Von Lilliencron, sometimes included songs in Middle Dutch, a crucial stimulus for Dutch and Flemish scholars to study them by.[40] At the same time, the Romantic Movement in the historical and philological sciences became influential in Belgium and the Netherlands. However, the collections made by nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century folklorists and erudite scholars, such as De Baecker, Willems and Van Vloten, and the later, more scholarly and systematic collections of Fredericq and Van de Graft, did not have coherent criteria to delineate the corpus and therefore, understandably for their time, they did not analyse the problems of social origin, intended audience and textual tradition sufficiently.[41] Despite the recent publication of several

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[37] P. van Wissing, '"Kinders, ic weet secreet goed en rijkdom". Maarten van Rossem voor Leuven. Anti-Gelderse historieliederen uit het *Antwerps Liedboek* (1544)', in: *Verdrag en Tractaat van Venlo. Herdenkingsbundel, 1543-1993,* ed. by F. Keverling Buisman et al. (Hilversum: Verloren, 1993), pp. 235-6.

[38] Van der Poel, *Liedboek*, pp. 9-14.

[39] Ph. Blommaert (ed.), *Politieke balladen, refereinen, liederen en spotdichten der XVIe eeuw, naar een gelyktydig handschrift* (Ghent: Annoot-Braeckman, 1847) contains mainly pro-Catholic and pro-Spanish songs, while the *Geusen Lietboek* contains songs about the 'Beggars'; see P. Leendertz (ed.), *Het Geuzenliedboek naar de oude drukken,* 2 vols. (Zutphen: Thieme, 1924-5) and W.J.C. Buitendijk, *Nederlandse strijdzangen (1525-1648)* (Culemborg: Tjeenk Willink, 1977).

[40] R. von Lilliencron (ed.), *Die historischen Volkslieder der Deutschen vom 13. bis 16. Jahrhundert* , 4 vols. (Leipzig: Vogel, 1865-69). On the notion of the ‚folk song' in Dutch and Belgian literary history see L.P. Grijp, ‚Zangcultuur' in: *Volkscultuur. Een inleiding in de Nederlandse etnologie,* ibid.

[41] P. Fredericq, *Onze Volksliederen* was the first critical approach, along with J. te Winkel,'s *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde* (Haarlem: De Erven Bohn, 1887), pp. 435-7 and 451-4. L. De Baecker, *Chants historiques de la Flandre (400-1650)* (Lille: Ernest Van Ackere, 1855); J. van Vloten, *Nederlandsche geschiedzangen,* 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Muller, 1864).

important case studies,[42] these late medieval songs have generally received scant attention, in contrast to the significant work on historical and political songs from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly the so-called *Geuzenliederen* ('Beggar's Songs'), which include the *Wilhelmus*, the national anthem of the Kingdom of the Netherlands since 1932. In other European countries, there have been advances in the study of historical songs from the same time period. Recent scholarship on popular political discourses and practices in the later medieval Low Countries also provides useful context for this project.[43]

There are a number of problems associated with establishing a corpus of Middle Dutch political songs and poems. Along with other genres, such as 'battle songs', 'social satires', and 'Beggar's Songs' (named after the rebels in the sixteenth-century revolt of the Low Countries against Spain), the lyrical genre of the 'historical song' is hard to define. An extensive tradition of scholarship uses the terms *Geuzenliederen* and battle songs (*strijdliederen*) to categorise historical songs about the Eighty Years' War.[44] Scholars studying the sixteenth-century Netherlands revolts have given ample scrutiny to the *Geuzenliedboek*[45] and the Protestant martyr songs.[46] However, the 'genres' of the *Geuzenliederen*, martyr or battle songs, contain distinctly different types of messages, registers and influences. The *Gentsch Vader Onze*, for instance, a text defending the Calvinist Republic of 1578-84, was influenced by prayer.[47] However, 'A Song on the Tenth Penny' (*Een lied op den tienden penning*), composed in 1569 to protest against the taxes levied by the Duke of Alva, was written in the same pre-Reformation tradition of complaints against heavy taxation.[48] The genre also includes 'faction songs' (*factieliederen*), short ditties sung at the end of allegorical plays known as the *factiespelen*,

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[42] For instance, Brinkman, 'Het kerelslied'; H. Pleij, 'Een onbekend historielied over het beleg van Poederooijen in 1507', in: *Weerwerk. Opstellen aangeboden aan Garmt Stuiveling,* ed. by G. Huygens et al. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1973), pp. 19-31; W. van Anrooij, 'Het korte lied over de moord op graaf Floris V, een nieuwe versie in het handschrift-Jochems', *Spiegel der letteren*, 44 (2002), 299-321; S. Mareel, *Voor vorst en stad: rederijkersliteratuur en vorstenfeest in Vlaanderen en Brabant 1432-1561* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), p. 72, pp. 132-40.

[43] See the survey in J. Dumolyn et al. (eds.), *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe. Communication and Popular Politics* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).

[44] G.J. van Bork et al., *Algemeen letterkundig Lexicon*, sub lemma 'geuzenlied'. M. de Bruin, 'Luik 1578: De driejarige Fransje Vanden Cruycen zingt een lang lied over de martelaren van Gorkum: Geuzen- en anti-geuzenliederen', in: *Een muziekgeschiedenis der Nederlanden,* ed. by L.P. Gr   p (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2001), p. 174-81.

[45] H. Bruch, *Slaat op den trommele. Het Wilhelmus en de Geuzenliederen* (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1971), pp. 14-8.

[46] For instance, 'The History of a Martyr Burned' (1525), in Buitendijk, *Nederlandse strijdzangen*, pp. 29-30; and for singing martyrs in general see L. van Grijp, 'Zingend de dood in', in: *Veelderhande liedekens*, ibid., pp. 118-48.

[47] Fredericq, *Onze volksliederen*, pp. 52-3.

[48] A.D. Loman, *Twaalf geuzenliedjes* (Amsterdam: Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis, 1872), no page numbers.

which were performed on the street. Some scholars also hold that 'street songs', often about current events, which market singers sold in leaflet form, were a separate genre.[49]

Other genres, such as the heroic epic, the romance or *chanson de geste*, story-telling ballads, prophetic texts, and even Christian hymns recounting the lives of saints and martyrs, often have some 'historical value' because they are partly based on historical fact. In addition, all these medieval 'genres' are intertextually related.[50] Distinguishing between a Middle Dutch *sproke* (similar to a French *fabliau*), a lyrical text to be recited (*Sprechspruchdichtung*) and a song that was actually chanted to a melody (*Sangspruchdichtung*) is often a difficult methodological issue.[51]

Leaving aside the problems of subgenre and performance to focus on the content of the texts, the general consensus among scholars is that historical or political songs and poems provide accounts of actual events. According to folklorists, cultural anthropologists and oral history specialists, these songs or poems may have been intended as propaganda or panegyrics, but since they were 'popular', they are comparable to other folk songs.[52] For instance, direct speech, which features in most of the 'historical' or 'political' songs we examine below, added vivacity. Typically, the plot was vague and underdeveloped, perhaps because the composer assumed the intended audience would already be familiar with the political context. This strategy also stimulated fantasy formation and self-engagement in the minds of the listeners.[53]

Vladimir Propp argues that historical songs, even if they were factually incorrect or incoherent, were usually composed by participants in or witnesses to the actual events that form the subject of the songs. Thus, a song about a military operation may have originated among the soldiers, composed by a talented and poetically gifted individual, taken up by the

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[49] T.F. Martin, 'De liedjeszanger als massamedium: straatzangers in de achttiende en negentiende eeuw' *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 97 (1984), 422-6; L.P. Grijp and M. de Bruin (eds.), *De kist van Pierlala: straatliederen uit het geheugen van Nederland* (Brussels: SABAM, 2006); R. Dekker and L. van der Pol, '"Wat hoort men niet al vreemde dingen…"', *Spiegel historiael* 17 (1982), 486-94; L.P. Grijp, 'Gruwelijk geblèr of indringende voordracht? De performance van het straatlied', *Literatuur* 20 (2004), 20-5; A. van den Berg, 'Lopend nieuws. De marktzangers als wandelend journaal', Ibid., 43-9.

[50] S.A.E. van Puffelen, 'Het historielied als dichtsoort', *Wetenschappelijke Tijdingen* 25 (1966), c. 32-8.

[51] Hogenelst, *Sproken*, vol. I, pp. 59-70.

[52] J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (London: Penguin, 1973), pp. 148-50. For other examples, see several good studies of French folkloric songs: P. Joutard, *Ces voix qui nous viennent du passé* (Paris: Hachette, 1983); J.-M. Guilcher, *La chanson folklorique de la langue française. La notion et son histoire* (Paris: ADP, 1989); E. Guillorel, *La complainte et la plainte. Chanson, justice, cultures en Bretagne (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles)* (Rennes: PUR, 2010).

[53] Van 't Hooft, *Honderd jaar*, pp. 15-6.

rest of the group, then diffused and gradually altered.[54] Historical songs aim to transmit the significance of an event rather than to recount it exactly. As Propp put it, the historical value of political songs lies in 'the people's expression of its historical self-awareness and in its attitude towards past events, persons and circumstances' rather than in their correct depiction of events and persons.[55] Composers used insults, metaphors, black-and-white oppositions, and polemical street language to present a colourful image of the past aimed at releasing emotions and distorting the memory of a certain event. The vivid lyrics of many Middle Dutch historical songs, such as those in the *Antwerp Songbook* about the war against Guelders, perfectly illustrate this observation.

The positivist question about the historical 'truth' in these texts is not a consideration; rather these songs are significant in terms of the evidence they contain concerning beliefs and ideas about governance and their change over time. This type of analysis is complex. Political songs deal with the people's past and present political lives; they not only describe the events but also evaluate them. Songs about revolts, for instance, may reflect class struggle, but their later transformations are determined by subsequent social developments. The significance of the text lies in its relationship to the moment of performance, rather than to a putative but improved tradition.[56] Songs and chants about past events were composed for present needs. From this perspective, every version of a song is an 'original' version with a special function for the community in which it circulated, as it served to maintain the 'social memories' that a group needed to define itself.[57] For instance, songs about rebel heroes gave members of craft guilds exemplary stories about the mobilisation of rebels, along with historical arguments to justify an uprising.

Authorship, Intended Audience and Circulation

The terms 'historical song' and 'political song' are actually hybridised, and perhaps should be abandoned altogether, because the texts packed together under these labels belong to diverse types, were produced for many objectives in different environments, and were preserved and

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[54] V. Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, ed. by A Liberman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 35-6.

[55] Ibidem, p. 51.

[56] D. Hopkin, *Voices of the People in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), p. 256.

[57] P. Burke, 'History as Social Memory', in: *Memory, History, Culture and the Mind,* ed. by T. Butler (Oxford: OUP, 1989), p. 98; J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: OUP, 1992), p. ix; G. Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: MUP, 2007), p. 7. For individual case studies of the functionality of literature and 'social memories' in a political context, see A. Wood, *The Memory of the People. Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013); J. Haemers, 'Social Memory and Rebellion in Fifteenth-Century Ghent', *Social History* 36 (2011), 443-63; E. Kuijpers and J. Pollmann, 'Why Remember Terror? Memories of Violence in the Dutch Revolt', in: *Ireland 1641. Contexts and Reactions, ed. by* J. Ohlmeyer and M. O'Siochrú (Manchester: MUP, 2013), pp. 176-96.

transmitted in many forms through multiple methods. The songs under scrutiny here circulated in the towns and countryside, but this did not necessarily make them 'popular'.[58] For some time historians have been aware of the danger of making a hard and fast distinction between 'popular' and 'elite' literature. Songs could easily cross social boundaries, especially in medieval towns. The urban landscape was an arena of cultural dissemination in which literate culture came into contact with 'illiterate' culture.[59]

As a consequence, precise information about the social context is a crucial part of understanding a song's contents. The context not only affected the creation and adaptation of a song, but also its function. However, information about the authors and the audiences of political songs is scarce. When a source mentions the author and singers, we usually do not have the lyrics; conversely, for most surviving complete song texts, there is no indication of the author's name. This even holds true for songs from the late sixteenth century, although there are generally more authorial details. One example is the Amsterdam merchant Laurens Jacobsz Reael, who wrote 'Beggar Songs'.[60] Songs that praised the revolt against Spain were often composed by rhetoricians, such as Laurens Reael, G.H. van Breughel, D.V. Coornhert and Lucas d'Heere.[61] Earlier in the century, the rhetorician Mathijs de Castelein wrote six political songs.[62] And the famous sixteenth-century female poet Anna Bijns from Antwerp also referred to contemporary problems in some refrains.[63]

All these well-known rhetorician authors belonged to the urban middle and upper classes and had much to lose if their city was punished for a rebellion. Although rhetoricians did write about the political and social problems of their times, they usually did not call for social or political revolt, but encouraged passive resistance instead.[64] Their relative wealth depended on the advantageous privileges held by the craft guilds in prosperous cities, such as Bruges and Ghent. However, other songs arose in urban public space, the streets and the inns, places for hearing and chanting songs, as recorded in the judicial and historiographical sources.

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[58] Reynaert, *Laet ons voort*, pp. 90-100. About the urban embedding of literary activities, see amongst others H. Brinkman, 'De Gentse dichter Everaert Taybaert en het stadsdichterschap in de late Middeleeuwen', *Spiegel der Letteren* 53 (2011), 419-42; E. Doudet, 'Contraintes, concurrences et écriture personnelle chez les rhétoriqueurs francophones', *Jaarboek De Fonteine* 58 (2008-9), 69-86; S. Mareel, *Voor vorst en stad*.

[59] F. Bouza, *Communication, Knowledge, and Memory in Early Modern Spain* (Philadelphia: UPenn, 1999); D. Bellingradt, 'The Early Modern City as a Resonating Box: Media, Public Opinion, and the Urban Space of the Holy Roman Empire, Cologne and Hamburg ca. 1700', *Journal of Early Modern History* 16 (2012), 201-40.

[60] Leendertz, *Het Geuzenliedboek*, pp. XVIII-XIX.

[61] G.J. van Bork et al., *Algemeen letterkundig Lexicon*, sub lemma 'geuzenlied'.

[62] Van de Graft, *Middelnederlandsche Historieliederen*, p. 31.

[63] H. Pleij, *Anna Bijns, van Antwerpen* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2011).

[64] J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, 'Let Each Man Carry on and Remain Silent. Middle-Class Ideology in the Urban Literature of the Late Medieval Low Countries', *Cultural and Social History* 10 (2013), 169-89.

Rhetorician authors, members of official literary guilds, explicitly condemned unorganised street and pub singers from the lower classes. A sixteenth-century ballad, for instance, described them pejoratively as *cluijtenaers*, those 'who make songs for small pieces of money'.[65]

The 'popular' or 'public' character of some political songs is also indicated by their widespread diffusion throughout the military forces around 1500, when the new professional armies recruited and hired soldiers from the lower social groups in the town and countryside. In the songs of the *Antwerp Songbook*, soldiers often drink cool wine and admire the beauty of fair girls with white arms and brown eyes. In one song, a soldier addresses a frivolous girl named Margret, asking her to come with him to Thérouanne, the site of a battle. This city and its hinterland were the site of hostilities involving the Habsburgs, the French and the English during the early sixteenth-century wars, particularly in 1513.[66] The song *Van Keyser Maximiliaen*, about the failed marriage project between Maximilian and the daughter of the Duke of Brittany in 1490, claimed to have been first sung, according to the final stanza, by three penniless soldiers in Cologne.[67]

Philologists of earlier generations distinguished a specific genre for songs performed in a military context, usually dealing with exploits of war, the so-called 'landsknechtliederen' or 'ruiterliederen' (literally, songs of 'routiers' or professional soldiers). Most date from the period after 1450, and their number increases after Maximilian's reign. These songs were written by or for soldiers, or at least they present themselves as belonging to the military environment in order to claim authenticity. This pattern applies throughout fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe. One of many contemporary examples from the same region is a French poem about the capture of Saint-Omer by the Lord of Esquerdes in 1487.[68] By 1544 this genre was well represented in the *Antwerp Songbook*.[69] After the sixteenth-century war against Guelders, the number of surviving songs increased sharply (which does not necessarily mean that more were produced during that time, but rather that more songs from that period survived). According to Pleij, the events of 1542-43 provoked the 'first media-hype in the Low Countries', about Martin Luther and Maarten van Rossum. While the widespread increase in printing, often in the form

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[65] 'Om liedekens te maken om sgelts vertieren', in: *Jan Van Stijevoorts Refereinenbundel anno MDXXIV*, ed. by F. Lyna and W. van Eeghem (Antwerpen: De Sikkel, 1930), p. 134. See S. Mareel, 'You Serve Me Well. Representations of Gossip, Newsmongering and Public Opinion in the Plays of Cornelis Everaert', in: *Literary Cultures and Public Opinion in the Low Countries, 1450-1650,* ed. by J. Bloemendal et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 40-3.

[66] Van der Poel, *Antwerps Liedboek*, vol. I, pp. 270-1, and vol. II, pp. 285-7.

[67] Ibidem, vol. I, pp. 262-3, and vol. II, pp. 276-9. This song clearly had a German origin.

[68] G. Paris (ed.), *Chansons du XVe siècle publiées d'après le manuscrit de la bibliothèque nationale de Paris* (Paris: SATF, 1935), pp. 96-7. Many war poems have been attested as well for fifteenth-century England: Arens, 'Late Middle English Political Poetry', p. 176; also an extensive Franco-Burgundian tradition exists in Middle French, see most recently A. Marchandisse and B. Schnerb, 'La bataille de Liège', in: *Cris, jurons et chansons. Entendre les »paysages sonores du Moyen-Âge et de la Renaissance«*, ed. by L. Hablot and L. Vissière (forthcoming), with references to older literature. For German war songs: D.-R. Moser, 'Sozialkritische Volkslieder vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart', in: *Jahrbuch des Oesterreichischen Volkliedwerkes*, 55 (2006), pp. 17-8.

[69] H. Brinkman, 'Het kerelslied', pp. 111-2.

of leaflets, must have enhanced the impact and circulation of these songs, Pleij emphasises the continued importance of orality and aurality.[70]

Sometimes in these texts a kind of proto-nationalist feeling comes to the surface as well. The common identity of the soldiers is 'Burgundian', but there is also a sense of pride in the Flemish language. *Een Liedeken van den Slach van Blangijs* commemorates the Battle of Guinegatte on 7 August 1479, as it describes the Flemings united behind their prince Maximilian defeating the French army. The battle cry 'Vlander de leeu!' ('Flanders, the Lion!'), expressed 'Met Vlaemscher tonghen' ('in the Flemish language') is repeated at the end of each stanza.[71] Anthonis Ghyseleers, or perhaps an anonymous editor who collected Ghyseleers' works into the manuscript now attributed to him, may have been a 'ruter' in the service of Maximilian, who 'from a young age had learnt nothing except rhyming and singing'[72]. The author described himself as 'a horseman from Brabant born in Landen', although this might also be a topos.[73]

It is also likely that at least some of these soldiers – or literary pseudo-soldiers – either belonged or were connected to the urban militias that fought together with the armies of regional lords or in conflicts between different towns. For instance, the *Song of the Hardiness of the Men of Mechelen* seems to be linked to the city militia fighting against Brussels, as it reflects the frequently vicious economic and military conflicts between towns in the Netherlands.[74] Many literary historians think that the authors and performers of these songs were not themselves soldiers, but rather that the authors adopted a stereotyped soldier's voice to make frequent references to military matters. Others suggest that the songs about the military events were first composed for the armies themselves and later diffused among the general population.[75] Another theory is that popular poets actually joined the armies, even though there were certainly soldiers who could read and write and would have been capable of

[70] H. Pleij, 'Anna Bijns als pamflettiste? Het refrein over de beide Maartens', *Spiegel der Letteren*, 42 (2000), 187-225.

[71] Van de Graft, *Middelnederlandsche historieliederen*, pp. 91-5; J.F. Verbruggen, *De slag bij Guinegate, 7 augustus 1479. De verdediging van het graafschap Vlaanderen tegen de koning van Frankrijk, 1477-1480* (Brussels: Koninklijk Legermuseum, 1993), pp. 137-8.

[72] Te Winkel, *Ontwikkelingsgang*, vol. II, pp. 240-1. Van de Graft, *Middelnederlandsche historieliederen*, pp. 74-5.

[73] Fredericq, *Onze volksliederen*, p. 56; Van de Graft, *Middelnederlandsche historieliederen*, p. 137 (who presents a strong argument that Ghyseleers was not the poet himself). Further codicological research would be necessary to prove this. 'Ruters' were hired soldiers who could serve on horse or on foot, rather than 'horsemen' in the strict sense, like 'routiers' in French (cf. H. Brinkman, 'Een lied van hoon en weerwraak. "Ruters" contra "kerels" in het Gruuthuse-handschrift', *Queeste* 11 (2004), pp. 5-9.

[74] Willems, *Oude Vlaamse liederen*, pp. 53-5.

[75] Van 't Hooft, *Honderd jaar Geldersche geschiedenis*, p. 9.

composing songs.[76] Even if the anonymous authors only styled themselves as 'men of the people' with military or artisan professions as a literary trope to convey a moral and political message to the community, there is sufficient evidence to prove the circulation and reception of songs about military events and political struggles, past and present, among the 'popular layers' of society, urban and rural, small merchants, artisans and professional soldiers.[77]

A Part of a General European Tradition of Public Poetry

We have seen that several scholars have argued that 'historical songs' should be classified as 'political songs'.[78] Katarina Kellerman proposes 'historisch-politische Ereignisdichtung' (literally: a historico-political event literature) as a genre with specific functions, aesthetic principles and significant public impact.[79] As mentioned previously, a more accepted term is Anne Middleton's concept of 'public poetry', literature meant to be a 'common voice' to serve the 'common good', which addressed its audience directly as an ideal community on issues of politics, justice and morality. In addition, Wendy Scase has identified a wider 'literature of clamour' in late medieval England. She shows that social and political complaints were expressed in a variety of modes and genres, which were vehicles of expression relevant to different layers of society.[80] The circulation and impact of this 'genre' of public poetry were considerable. Scholars are beginning to consider such texts among the more widely circulated genres rather than as occasional pieces to be analysed as curiosities or mined for historical information. This contribution emphasises that public poetry in the late medieval Low Countries also transmitted critical ideas about the social and political order and thus deserves more systematic study. This was fundamentally a literature of public performance, sometimes bringing about important effects, such as protests, riots or even rebellion. These 'voices of the people' used spoken language to call for action and, in doing so, created something new.[81] They

[76] Van de Graft, *Middelnederlandsche historieliederen*, p. 36; M. Sabbe, *De muziek in Vlaanderen* (Antwerpen: Opdebeek, 1928), pp. 80-5.

[77] Similar remarks by V. Honemann, 'Politische Lieder', pp. 412-14. See also E. Strassner, 'Politische Relevanz "Historischer Volkslieder"', in: *Formen mittelalterlicher Literatur,* ed. by O. Werner and B. Nauman (Göppingen: Verlag Alfred Kümmerle, 1970), pp. 230-1.

[78] D. Sauermann, 'Das Historisch-Politischen Lied', in: *Handbuch des Volksliedes,* ed. by R. Brednich et al. (Munich: Fink, 1975), vol. I, pp. 293-322.

[79] K. Kellermann, *Abschied vom 'historischen Volkslied'. Studien zu Funktion, Ästhetik und Publizität der Gattung historisch-politische Ereignisdichtung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000).

[80] Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, p. 135.

[81] See the theoretical reflexions of P. Strohm, *Politique. Languages of Statecraft between Chaucer and Shakespeare* (Notre Dame: NDUP, 2005), p. 8; J. Pocock, 'The Concept of a Language and the *Métier d'Historien*', in: *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe,* ed. by A. Pagden (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), pp. 19-38; and, more generally, P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Oxford: OUP, 1991).

had the capacity to underwrite or undermine, to inspire or disable political initiatives and social relations.

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