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**A New Standard in the Footsteps of Maerlant. Frits van Oostrom,
Wereld in woorden. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur,
1300-1400 (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2013)**

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Review

A New Standard in the Footsteps of Maerlant. Frits van Oostrom, *Wereld in woorden. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur, 1300-1400* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2013)

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After the publication of a well-received and impressive first part of the literary history of the Middle Ages in 2006 – *Stemmen op schrift* – scholars and the broader audience alike were eagerly looking forward to the sequel, which continues the story of literature in Dutch from the thirteenth into the fourteenth century. It is testimony to the richness of the literature before 1400, as well as to the style of the author, that Van Oostrom has accomplished his part in the broader *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Letterkunde* series in two volumes, totalling 1291 pages. At this moment, more than five years after publication of *Wereld in woorden*, it is difficult to look at this book without taking into account the critical acclaim it has received among fellow scholars. A book so central to scholarship, while also aiming to reach audiences outside academia, is bound to stir up reaction, not only in the specialised press. The BNTL – another project that should still inspire pride among scholars of Dutch literature – lists a number of reviews in scholarly publications, while responses in the popular media are neatly brought together on the website accompanying the volume.¹ The time span between publication and the present review, allows to combine the opinions of fellow scholars with the wisdom of hindsight. In the following paragraphs, I will therefore not restrict myself to a mere introduction of the work, but will incorporate some of the insights of previous reviewers. I hope that by adding my own perspective to the many reactions, this review can be an interesting new response to *Wereld in woorden*, even five years after its publication.

Readers of *Journal for Dutch Literature* are by now well-informed about the existence of the *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Letterkunde* (GNL) series, through reviews of some of the other volumes in this journal. Suffice it here to say that the initiative for the new literary history was taken by the *Taalunie* in the late 1990s, in an attempt to replace the older history of Dutch literature by G. Knuvelder, which broadly speaking had not been thoroughly updated after the 1960s. For medieval literature specifically, the situation was even more deplorable, as Knuvelder had based most of his discussion of Middle Dutch texts on the work of Jozef Van Mierlo (1939),

¹ See <<http://wereld-in-woorden.nl/recensies>> [accessed 21 January 2019]. The website also includes corrections (last updated May 2015), extra illustrations, and other extras including an interactive map of Europe, making clear how Dutch literature even in the fourteenth century was embedded in a wider network.

himself not being a medievalist.² In the decades following Van Mierlo and Knuvelde, scholarship has of course taken a huge leap, both in terms of the amount of work and in terms of the themes addressed. For Middle Dutch Studies, this includes not only the discovery of new texts and manuscripts that Van Mierlo and Knuvelde simply could not have known or the increased accessibility of material they did know (the Gruuthuse manuscript!), but also new insights that have been developed over the years, in close interaction with international scholarship.³

From the onset of the *GNL*-project, it was the intention to entrust the new comprehensive literary history not to one lone scholar such as Knuvelde, but to a group of period specialists, all of them in turn supported by a board of scholars well versed in separate more specific fields of their respective periods.⁴ This choice has been a fruitful one. With scholarship having expanded – and indeed specialised – heavily in the decades following Knuvelde, one indeed prefers a well-trained guide to wander into the dense wilderness of each period, at times side-tracking off the path that previous literary historians have followed. It is in the lesser-known reaches of literature that not only novice readers, but also experienced scholars, are now introduced to finds that have remained unnoticed both in the common imagination and in scholarship. Such, indeed, is what *Wereld in woorden* offers to readers: beyond the canonical literature that everyone knows, it sketches a vivid image of literature and culture of the fourteenth century, at times drawing centre stage texts that are no gems of literary accomplishment, but that do inform us about the worldview and the cultural development of our ancestors six hundred years ago.⁵ In doing so, it does not exclude canonical texts or authors – which was sometimes the case in the 1993 *Nederlandse literatuur: een geschiedenis* – but it embeds them in a multifaceted landscape of other, lesser-known examples of literature and culture. In past histories of literature, the fourteenth century was looked upon as a time of decline. After the literary splendour of chivalric epic and early mysticism, the authors of this period were easily put aside as mere followers of examples set in the thirteenth century, and bad followers at that. Literature was believed to have lost much of its imaginative power, and was said to lay shackled in the “boeien der didactiek”, in a well-known trope coined by Jozef Van Mierlo in his literary history in 1939. Van Oostrom’s *Wereld in woorden* therefore can be said to be the first overview of this kind to devote positive attention to literature produced in this period, on a scale and in a way that sets the standard of

² The problem is widely known among scholars, but is probably still most aptly demonstrated by a side-by-side comparison in W.P. Gerritsen, ‘Geschiedverhaal of schetskaart’, in *De nieuwe taalgids* 68 (1975), pp. 89-109, here p. 92 <https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/gerr01ogesc01_01/gerr01ogesc01_01_0001.php> [accessed 21 January 2019]. The point was most poignantly raised by reviewer Y. Desplenter, ‘De vloek van Van Mierlo verbroken’, in *Queeste* 20/2 (2013), pp. 134-9, here p. 134.

³ Compare W. Blockmans, ‘Een rijke oogst: de Nederlandse letteren in de woelige veertiende eeuw’, in *Ons erfdeel* 56/3 (2013), pp. 138-40, here p. 140; Desplenter, ‘De vloek’, pp. 137; and D. Johnson, ‘Review of: F.P. van Oostrom, *Wereld in woorden*’, in *The Medieval Low Countries* 1 (2014), pp. 255-60, here pp. 258-9 <<https://doi.org/10.1484/J.MLC.5.103719>> [accessed 21 January 2019].

⁴ For its collaborative nature, the project is applauded by reviewer F. Roolfs, ‘Rundum gelungen’, in *Queeste* 20/2 (2013), pp. 143-5, here p. 143.

⁵ Compare V. Fraeters, ‘Het volle leven vanuit alwetend perspectief’, in *Spiegel der letteren* 56/1 (2014), pp. 85-96, here p. 923; Blockmans, ‘Een rijke oogst’, p. 138; J. Dumolyn, ‘De wereld achter de woorden: Van Oostrom gelezen door een sociaal-historicus’, in *Queeste* 20/2 (2013), pp. 139-42, here p. 140; Roolfs, ‘Rundum gelungen’, p. 143; and Johnson, ‘Review’, p. 255.

scholarly appreciation for decades to come.⁶ In the introduction to this volume, “Profiel van een eeuw”, the stress therefore is on what was “new” in the fourteenth century, in terms of private authorship, genres, new audiences, technologies, and so forth.⁷

The book itself is structured along thematic lines. Three chapters – De wereld (The world), Het heil (Salvation), De verbeelding (The imagination) – present discussions of three broad genres, to be understood in anachronistic terms respectively as ‘non-fiction’, ‘spirituality’, and ‘fiction’. This structure is helpful in breaking up the traditionally chronological approach of literary histories, but at the same time gives an impression of order in a literary system that was more blurred.⁸ Jan van Heelu’s *Slag bij Woeringen* (c. 1290) for instance, a praise of Brabantine chivalry and specifically of Duke John I, is treated among chronicles under ‘De wereld’. While this text most definitely deals with a historical event, it is also very close to epic literature, certainly to the form this genre took in the Duchy of Brabant. In other cases too, there was considerable overlap between the ‘non-fictional’ genre of chronicles, and that of chivalric epic, in terms of audiences, authors, manuscript contexts, and content. Van Oostrom of course is well aware of this, and has provided an epilogue of sorts to the three main chapters, in which he successfully rearranges his material in a different way, so as to draw a comprehensive picture of three circles of reception in which various kinds of texts functioned together, without a distinction of genre that all too often is a choice of today’s scholarship. These “Drie milieus omstreeks 1400” (Three circles c. 1400) in a way mirror the three estates of medieval society in representing a noble, a religious and a civic historical context of fourteenth-century literature, in the Court of Holland, the *Devotio moderna* and the city of Bruges respectively. The three circles do justice to the way in which literature most probably functioned on the ground, aside from any modern attempt at categorisation, and they beautifully show how literature in the fourteenth century was reaching larger audiences than in the thirteenth. Van Oostrom here impressively reflects the socio-cultural turn scholarship in Middle Dutch literature has taken in the past few decades, incorporating his own research on the Court of Holland at The Hague, which is one of the programmatic examples of this approach in Middle Dutch Studies. By reflecting in his book both the traditional genre divides as well as three relatively distinct historical contexts, Van Oostrom successfully solves the problem of structuring this vast amount of material.⁹ He presents not only a history that gives full attention to the literary texts, but also draws a vivid picture of the ways in which literature functioned, not only in terms of readers and production contexts, but also in terms of the complex interaction between ‘bellettrie’ and genres and text types that are now considered of lesser immediate literary value, such as medicinal tracts, astrology books and so forth.¹⁰

⁶ Compare Fraeters, ‘Het volle leven’, p. 85; A. Faems, ‘Geleerdheid en genieten’, in *De leeswolf* 19/3 (2013), pp. 180-1; and Desplenter, ‘De vloek’, p. 134;

⁷ Compare Fraeters, ‘Het volle leven’, p. 88; Faems, ‘Geleerdheid en genieten’, p. 180; and Johnson, ‘Review’, pp. 256-8.

⁸ Compare B. Besamusca, ‘De expansie van de Middelnederlandse literatuur in de veertiende eeuw’, in *Vooy* 31/3-4 (2013), pp. 116-9, here p. 116.

⁹ Reviewers commented positively on his choice of structure, see for example Fraeters, ‘Het volle leven’, pp. 88-90; Roofls, ‘Rundum gelungen’, pp. 143-4.

¹⁰ See also Besamusca, ‘De expansie’, p. 117.

In a way, Van Oostrom's double structure echoes a discussion between two approaches to literary history propagated by the author and his tutor, Wim Gerritsen, in 1975 and 1985.¹¹ The choice was one between 'geschiedverhaal' (a story about history) and 'schetskaart' (a map of what remains). Gerritsen, arguing for the latter in 1975, noted that much of our medieval literature has been lost, and that we should approach what remains in a different way than we are used to.¹² Letting go of the traditional chronology, he thought of looking at medieval literature along thematic lines, grouping texts from different genres around what he called their 'stofcomplex', e.g. the figure of Alexander the Great, both in 'fictional' literature and in historical texts. Such an approach would do justice to the blurriness of the medieval worldview, while taking into consideration the little we know, at times, about the authors of texts and the reasons for which, c.q. audiences for whom they were written. It would also take into account the simultaneous existence of older and newer texts in the very same contexts of reception, even in the same manuscripts.¹³ Van Oostrom, by contrast, in a lengthy response to his tutor in 1985, held a plea for a more traditional approach, still rooted in chronology and with a stress on authors and their initial contexts of reception.¹⁴ A storyteller at heart, he did not want to group texts along themes, but wanted to tell the story of the development of literature, closely linked to the regions and precise historical contexts in which it functioned. The gaps in our knowledge, then, would simply have to be filled in with new research. Writing in 1985, Van Oostrom could not have been aware of the scale at which Middle Dutch scholarship would expand in the late 1980s and 1990s, indeed greatly stimulated by his own project *Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur in de Middeleeuwen*.¹⁵ Much of Gerritsen's reserve was based on the fact that some aspects of medieval literature simply had not been studied at all, a statement that has by now lost much of its ground, as scholars are looking at an ever broader range of texts and contexts, and are increasingly stepping across traditional divides (languages, genres, time periods, etc.). While Gerritsen's plea may indeed have made for a decent literary history in the late 1970s, Van Oostrom in 2006 and in 2013 had the luxury of relying on the wealth of scholarship of the past decades.

However, a point where I can still follow Gerritsen, even – maybe especially – in today's state of research, is in his focus on the materiality of the manuscript.¹⁶ While the exact date of texts (and even of known authors) is sometimes difficult to determine, that of manuscripts is not.¹⁷ In what could perhaps be considered as an early uproot of the *Material philology* of the late 1980s,

¹¹ See also Desplenter, 'De vloek', pp. 138-9.

¹² Gerritsen, 'Geschiedverhaal of schetskaart', p. 89.

¹³ Gerritsen, 'Geschiedverhaal of schetskaart', p. 102.

¹⁴ F.P. Van Oostrom, 'Schetskaart of geschiedverhaal? Over methode en praktijk van (een) geschiedschrijving van de Middelnederlandse letterkunde', in A.M.J. van Buuren et al. (eds.), *Tussentijds. Bundel studies aangeboden aan W.P. Gerritsen ter gelegenheid van zijn vijftigste verjaardag*, (Utrecht: HES, 1985), pp. 198-216, here pp. 202-6.

¹⁵ In a reprint of his 1985 article, Van Oostrom included a *Naschrift* which shows that he realised, seven years onwards, the immense potential of recent and upcoming scholarship: F.P. Van Oostrom, 'Schetskaart of geschiedverhaal? Over methode en praktijk van (een) geschiedschrijving van de Middelnederlandse letterkunde', in F.P. van Oostrom, *Aanvaard dit werk*, (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1992), pp. 117-135, here pp. 134-5 <https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/oost033sche01_01/oost033sche01_01_0001.php> [accessed 21 January 2019].

¹⁶ Compare Besamusca, 'De expansie', p. 119, who also stresses the importance of secondary reception.

¹⁷ Gerritsen, 'Geschiedverhaal of schetskaart', p. 104.

Gerritsen argued for a literary history based on material evidence, making the important point that a fourteenth-century manuscript of a twelfth-century text, testifies to a continued interest for older text material.¹⁸ Rather than placing the author centre stage, one could therefore arrange our literary history along the lines of what remains in terms of manuscripts, so as to write a history of readers rather than authors.

If we bring this approach to Van Oostrom's literary history, one could ask the question why the author chose to deal with most of the chivalric epic texts in *Stemmen op schrift*, placing the heydays of the genre in the thirteenth century, while the bulk of the manuscript material dates to the fourteenth.¹⁹ Following Gerritsen, these manuscripts testify to the synchronous existence of both older texts in new manuscripts and new developments of the epic genre.²⁰ It is illustrative in this respect that the *Lancelotcompilatie*, a fourteenth-century manuscript containing the bulk of the preserved Arthurian material in Dutch, is treated as 'late-Arthurian' in *Stemmen op schrift*, not in *Wereld in woorden*, while it is perhaps a good example of the 'new' ways in which epic literature was being read. A reader of the second volume, being introduced to how the genre of chivalric epic evolved in the course of the fourteenth century, is entirely unaware of the fact that the readers of newly written epic texts most likely also read much older texts in newly made manuscripts. This coexistence poses interesting questions as to the development of the genre as a whole, the possibility of expanded audiences, or fragmented reception among different audiences with differing tastes, questions for which there is little room in a literary history driven by authors, patrons and primary intended audiences.

Another example from Van Oostrom's fourteenth century is the relentless Antwerp council clerk Jan van Boendale (died c. 1351), who is the principal protagonist in no less than 33 pages of *Wereld in woorden*. Boendale certainly was a prolific author, and the manuscript situation seems to confirm this image, as Van Oostrom states (p. 173-174). If, however, we look only at his *magnum opus*, the Brabantine rhymed chronicle *Brabantsche yeesten*, it is interesting to note that most of the manuscripts – and all complete ones – with this text date to the middle of the fifteenth century, with only one or two fragments testifying to a reception in Boendale's own time. Looking at this specific text from Gerritsen's viewpoint would banish it to *Het geveugelde woord*, the *GNL* volume in which Herman Pleij dealt with the fifteenth century. Van Oostrom, looking at Boendale as an author and restricting himself to the fourteenth century, of course does not deal with the fifteenth-century reception of Boendale's *Brabantsche yeesten*, but at the same time does include an illustration of the beautifully illustrated codex Brussels, Royal Library, IV 684, which is dated 1442-1444.²¹ Readers who ask themselves why almost a century after

¹⁸ Gerritsen, 'Geschiedverhaal of schetskaart', pp. 104-5.

¹⁹ See J.W. Klein, "'Het getal zijner jaren is onnaspeurlijk': een herijking van de dateringen van de handschriften en fragmenten met Middelnederlandse ridderepiek", in *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse taal- en letterkunde* 111 (1995), pp. 1-23 <https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/kleio21geta01_01/> [accessed 21 January 2019]; and compare B. Caers, 'Een "buchelin inn flemische": over ontstaan en verspreiding van de ridderepiek in de Nederlanden (ca. 1150-1450)', in *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse taal- en letterkunde* 127/3 (2011), pp. 223-251 <<https://www.tntl.nl/index.php/tntl/article/view/225>> [accessed 21 January 2019].

²⁰ Gerritsen, 'Geschiedverhaal of schetskaart', p. 102: "Op elk moment van de ontwikkeling bestaan 'oude' en 'nieuwe' werken naast elkaar, zoals 'ouderwetse' en 'moderne' werken naast elkaar ontstaan". His example, the well-known *Walewein* manuscript, fits well within the point I raise here, see p. 105. Compare also Besamusca, 'De expansie', p. 118.

²¹ The manuscript has been digitised by the Royal Library in Brussels, see <<http://uurl.kbr.be/1065581>> [accessed 21 January 2019]. See B. Caers & M. Visscher, The illuminated *Brabantsche yeesten* manuscripts IV 684 and IV 685 in the

Boendale's death, someone ordered a lavishly illustrated copy of this chronicle, including a lengthy continuation made in the 1430s which Van Oostrom mentions too, find their questions unanswered. I can therefore only agree with Van Oostrom that research of the reception of Boendale would yield a 'boeiend beeld [...] van het rijke leven van toonaangevende Nederlandse teksten in de veertiende eeuw' (p. 174-5).

While secondary stages of reception do not get the attention they sometimes deserve, I cannot say that the author has no attention for manuscript evidence at all: more than ever before, the reader's curiosity as to what these codices and fragments looked like is satisfied by abundant images, both in black and white and in full colour; and the 'flagship' codices – Hulthem, Gruuthuse – of our literature feature prominently in *Wereld in woorden*. But in the case of Hulthem for example, a manuscript which contains old and new text material side by side, Van Oostrom quickly passes over the older texts to stress the weight of new material, without really pondering the question why they are found together in the same manuscript (pp. 10-3). Like elsewhere, the later reception stages of older texts are more or less in the background. The evident place where simultaneous reception of old and new texts could come into play, the 'Three circles c. 1400', is not as rewarding as one would hope. Only when Van Oostrom deals with the book culture of the *Devotio moderna* does the reader get a glimpse of the continued reception of older text material in new manuscript contexts, and in new translations (e.g. Thomas Cantimpratensis). In Bruges and The Hague, however, the stress is again on new authors and new texts.

While I cannot underline enough the masterful integration of (cultural) history and literature in these impressive sketches, I would have appreciated more attention for the fact that in between all that was new, people also read and listened to texts that were decades, if not centuries, old. While there is no doubt that looking for what is new in a certain age is essential to sketch an evolution in literary history, the tension between contexts of production and (secondary) reception leaves the reader uneasy. It may well be possible that a chronology which gives more weight to manuscript evidence changes the way we think about the overall evolution of vernacular literature, and the synchronicity not only of texts from different genres, but also texts from different times that were read in the same historical context. The diachronic instability and changeability of text material – one could call it *mouvance*, with Zumthor²² – is largely obscured in a literary history that looks principally at authors, where they are known, and at manuscripts only when they are important as text collections, when they provide interesting illustrations or when there is nothing that leads to any identifiable auctorial context.

Reviewers in past years have unanimously applauded Van Oostrom's sweeping style, while sometimes dotting the i's and crossing the t's on specific aspects that from a specialist perspective might seem imprecise.²³ While mistakes are to be avoided of course, I can see that in a sweeping argument that is accessible for a broad audience, nuance will sometimes be in the scale. It is

Royal Library of Belgium: an unfinished project of Brabantine historiography', in *In Monte Artium* 11 (2018), pp. 7-35, here p. 10-11 <<https://doi.org/10.1484/J.IMA.5.116486>> [accessed 21 January 2019].

²² P. Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972).

²³ E.g. G. De Baere, 'Enkele beschouwingen bij "Meester in het midden": Ruusbroec en Groenendaal', in *Ons geestelijk erf* 84/4 (2013), pp. 377-83, who nuances Van Oostrom's reading of the Brabantine mystic Jan van Ruusbroec; L. Jongen, 'Op schouders van reuzen', in *Madoc* 27/4 (2013), pp. 250-2; Desplenter, 'De vloek', p. 136, on the Bible Translator of 1360 and on Jan van Leeuwen; or Roelfs, 'Rundum gelungen', pp. 144-5

difficult to consistently write in a near-literary style, while incorporating the same amount of detail that individual scholars reach in specific publications read mainly among circles of fellow specialists. I can agree with some of the critics that the attempt to draw the present-day reader into the past at certain points becomes a little artificial.²⁴ I will restrict myself here to expanding on just one example that was hinted upon by reviewer Jan Dumolyn: Van Oostrom's reference to the 'poldermodel' (p. 151). By describing Jan van Boendale's understanding of *gemeyn oerboer* with a trope used exclusively for the political culture of the Netherlands, Van Oostrom not only fails to do justice to the medieval setting, as Dumolyn has shown, but also excludes his readers in the south of the Low Countries and elsewhere, who cannot associate with the term 'poldermodel', even if they live in countries where political consensus is as highly valued – and direly needed – as it is in the Netherlands. The same uneasy feeling springs up when Van Oostrom places Boendale in the context of 'het tegenwoordige Binnenhof', with its tensions between 'Ridderzaal en Trèveszaal' (p. 166). While even an uninformed reader may be able to associate the passage with the division of power in a modern democracy – the tension between government and parliament – the reference to the infrastructure of present-day Dutch politics in The Hague seems to be aimed exclusively at an audience in the modern Netherlands, and unnecessarily estranges the part of the intended audience of *Wereld in woorden* that is less familiar with modern-day Dutch politics. I will easily forgive excessive tropes if they help bringing the Middle Ages closer to an audience of today, but if the tropes work for only part of the audience, they lose much of their power, certainly in the context of a *Taalunie*-project that has the intention of being the literary history of the speakers of Dutch, and not of the Dutch alone.

The question of audience is one that can be raised in more general terms as well. While the impressive literary style invites and I believe successfully captures uninformed readers, the content may at times be over their heads. At the same time, scholars will be used to a higher level of nuance, as is evidenced by some of the responses in reviews. An aspect of *Wereld in woorden* that illustrates this tension is the inclusion of informative tables listing works attributed to authors (e.g. Jan van Boendale, Jan van Ruusbroec), or extensive tables of contents for longer medieval texts (e.g. Boendale's *Lekenspiegel*). This approach, however useful, is not consistent throughout the volume, and this inconsistency in a way illustrates the tension between a sweeping literary history for the broader public on the one hand, and an encyclopaedic work of reference for the scholar on the other. However informative Van Oostrom's literary history is – and the indices included in the volume are a great help – I believe there is still room for a reference work that lists only the bare necessities in the way of a *Verfasserlexikon* or a *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises: le Moyen Age*, standard works in neighbouring philologies that we can only look at with envy. I would gladly call upon the scholarly critics who have found fault at some of the details in Van Oostrom's narrative on their respective fields of interest, to join hands in producing a reference work for Middle Dutch literature that is equally impressive and complete as Van Oostrom's narrative. As the author himself stated in 1985, there is ample room for a literary history in the true sense of the word and an encyclopaedic reference work to exist side by side.²⁵ In the time being, it would certainly have been useful to see more short lists and factsheets pop up throughout Van Oostrom's literary history.

²⁴ Compare Fraeters, 'Het volle leven', pp. 90-3; and Desplenter, 'De vloek', p. 138

²⁵ Van Oostrom, 'Schetskaart of geschiedverhaal', p. 215-6. The call for a reference work pops up every now and then in scholarship, see for instance B. Besamusca, "'The portal to middle Dutch literature": pleidooi voor een Engelstalig

The points of criticism raised above only scratch the surface of the impressive monument to Middle Dutch literature that is *Wereld in woorden* – alongside its companion volume *Stemmen op schrift*. There could have been no better scholar than Van Oostrom to write these syntheses. His sweeping style, with its minor digressions, works miracles in drawing in both scholars looking for broad introductions outside of their every-day specialisms, and interested readers that are compelled by the *geschiedverhaal* of medieval literature and culture. By wrapping a vast amount of knowledge in a pleasant read, Van Oostrom inadvertently follows in the footsteps of one of his old research topics: over seven hundred years ago, Jacob van Maerlant, writing for the comital court of Holland in the late thirteenth century, set the example of combining *nutschap ende waer*, or in Van Oostrom's words, *lering en vermaak*. I can only hope that Van Oostrom's work will be as influential as Maerlant's was in his time.

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About the author

Bram Caers is a literary historian of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. He graduated at the University of Antwerp on the genre of epic literature in Middle Dutch. In his PhD, he focused on urban historiography in the city of Mechelen, with special attention for manuscript variation and early modern manuscript culture. He is interested in how Medieval literature transformed in the Early Modern period, both in terms of its materiality (print or manuscript) and its function. After having taught several Middle Dutch courses at the University of Utrecht, he now works as an NWO-Veni postdoc scholar at Leiden University. His current research deals with memory culture of the Dutch Revolt in the southern Low Countries, and specifically with subversive texts (songs, poems, chronicles) and iconography (cityscapes, battle scenes, drawings) preserved in early modern manuscripts.