

Aline Smeesters. *Aux rives de la lumière. La poésie de la naissance chez les auteurs néo-latins des anciens Pays-Bas entre la fin du XV^e siècle et le milieu du XVII^e siècle.*

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In this hefty volume Neo-Latin poems written on the occasion of birth from the late fifteenth- until the seventeenth-century Low Countries are discussed. The research for this work, originally a doctoral dissertation, is based on a corpus of almost a hundred poems. An edition of the poems is found at the back of the work

(except those that are discussed earlier in the book), while the analysis of a selection of these poems is carried out in four thematically organized case studies (each consisting of three chapters), in which the social and cultural context of the poems is reconstructed. These four studies are preceded by an introduction into the specifics of Neo-Latin occasional poetry and its relation to the rhetorical and poetical tradition, and by a preamble in which a group of verses celebrating the birth of Philip the Handsome (1478) are discussed. Having been written at the important transition of rule over the Low Countries from the Dukes of Burgundy to the house of Habsburg, the analysis of these poems serves as a background for the humanist poetry that is discussed in the subsequent four thematic case studies.

The first case study focuses on poetry written in the academic setting of the universities of Louvain and Leiden, two key institutions for humanism in the Low Countries. Three subsets of poems are discussed: first, those that had been written by scholars connected to the *Collegium Trilingue*; second, those from the circle around Janus Dousa (e.g., Hadrianus Junius, Justus Lipsius), one of the founders of Leiden University; and finally, those written by the generation of humanists who studied at Leiden at the beginning of the seventeenth century (e.g., Petrus Scriverius, Daniel Heinsius, Hugo Grotius).

The second case study discusses poetry from the same period (sixteenth–early seventeenth century) but from a different context, namely that of the collegiate church of Notre-Dame in Courtrai, and therewith discusses birth poetry in the context of chapter houses. The third case study focuses on the Golden Age in the Northern Netherlands by discussing the poetry of Caspar Barlaeus and his circle (esp. Constantine Huygens). The fourth study focuses on the theme of religion and power by discussing birth poetry in the Catholic Southern Netherlands, where the influence of religious orders like that of the Jesuits was clearly felt.

An advantage of the way in which this work is organized is that through its four case studies it not only offers an intricate analysis of several Neo-Latin occasional poems from the early modern Low Countries, but also presents much insight into various social and intellectual milieus of the time. The discussion of the social and intellectual context of authors and poems in the four case studies is thorough. The discussion of the birth poetry follows a set and more or less conventional pattern: first the social milieu in which it came into being is discussed, then contextual information directly related to the poem is provided (e.g., information on the poet), after which follow the Latin text and French translation of the poem(s).

In view of the almost hundred poems of the corpus that underlies this study and of which Latin editions are provided in the back, a work like this runs the risk of losing sight of the broader perspective. This is addressed in the conclusion to the work, where the author gives a synthesis of her findings by discussing the poems as social objects, literary objects, and testimonials of mentality. This indeed offers some important insights into the complicated genre of occasional birth poetry. Perhaps this kind of approach could have been applied more prominently to the case studies as well to bring these and other theoretical issues more to the fore throughout the book. All the same, this work offers an excellent contribution to the

study of humanist poetry in the early modern Low Countries. Just on the basis of its thoroughness in discussing the social and intellectual context of the literary works, it will be of interest not only to specialists in the field, but also to those who are not yet intimately acquainted with early modern humanist poetry from the Low Countries.

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