

Anthonis de Roovere, 'De Roovere's dream about the death of the late Charles of Burgundy'

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Introduction

In January 1477 something happened that shook the world: Charles, Duke of Burgundy, Brabant, Limburg, Count of Flanders, Holland, etc., died on the battlefield near Nancy. Charles the Bold (Karel de Stoute in Dutch and Charles le Téméraire in French) was perhaps the richest man in Europe, and the epitome of fifteenth-century aristocratic values, with a reputation on an international scale. His death caused widespread panic in the streets of Brussels, Bruges and Ghent. Since many of Charles' domains were in fact loans from the French crown, Louis XI of France demanded the return of his territories. On the news of Charles' death, Louis immediately seized Burgundy and Picardy, and dispatched troops to his borders with the Netherlands, to press his claims over the Low Countries. As Charles had left no male heir, Louis' demands were legitimate. However, Charles did have a daughter, Mary, and the ruling league of noblemen arranged to marry her to Maximilien of Austria, son of the German Emperor and heir to his throne. Once Mary and Maximilien were married in the May of 1477, Maximilien provided much-needed military assistance to her embattled domains. Meanwhile, so great was the opposition to France in several European countries that Louis was forced to withdraw his armies, or face conflict on both diplomatic and military fronts. As a result, Louis' only gains were those territories he had already annexed. The crisis was over; the powers of Europe were in balance again; but Burgundy would remain part of France forever.

Charles' death was not only a political issue, it also inspired writers. One of them was Olivier de la Marche, who was himself taken prisoner at Nancy. In 1483 La Marche wrote *Le chevalier délibéré* about the deaths of Charles, his father Philip the Good, and his daughter Mary (who had died that year). *Le chevalier délibéré* was published in the Netherlands and in France; it was translated into Dutch, Spanish, English and Italian.

It can accurately be described as a medieval best-seller. Less well-known is the poem Anthonis de Roovere wrote about the crisis of 1477, 'Den droom van Rouere op die doot van hertoge Kaerle van Borgonnyen saleger gedachten' ('De Roovere's dream about the death of the late Charles of Burgundy'). Our translation of this text is based on Mak's 1955 edition (J. J. Mak, *De gedichten van Anthonis de Roovere – naar alle tot dusver bekende handschriften en oude drukken*, Zwolle, 1955, pp. 351–365).

Anthonis de Roovere (1430–1483) was the official poet of the city of Bruges. His poetry was popular in its day, and a good number of his works have survived. Mak's edition of his works can be found at <<http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/roov002jjma01/>>. He was a rederijker, so most of his poetry was and still is very difficult, making much use of acrostics and elaborate rhyme-schemes. 'De Roovere's dream about the death of the late Charles of Burgundy' is among his simplest pieces stylistically, although its very length makes it harder to read than, say, a sonnet. Olivier de la Marche and Anthonis de Roovere are known to have met on at least one occasion, and there is evidence to suggest that La Marche could read Dutch, so it is probable that De Roovere's poem influenced *Le chevalier délibéré*. However, this is still yet to be proven conclusively. More information about Dutch poetry and De Roovere can be found at <http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/spie010deve01/spie010deve01_001.htm>.

A brief note may be added regarding De Roovere's iconography in the final stanza of the poem. The 'eagle' referred to in line 218 is an allusion to the arms of Philip, later Philip I of Castile, the son of Mary and Maximilien. The 'lily' in the subsequent line refers to the arms of the Valois dynasty, to which Louis of France belonged. This consists of three fleurs-de-lis on an azure background.

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Den droom van Rouere op die doot van hertoge Kaerle van Borgonnyen saleger gedachten

ynt velt van vremder speculerynge
gyn ic met wonderlijker studerynge
daer men den beroerlijken tijt in brochte
verselscapende met scerper ymagenerynge
dat ic by hoger arguwerynge
yn bosch gerochte
dat lanc en breet want soe my dochte
schoonder bosch noyt man verscochte
van hogen boomen en soe groot

gelouert dats elcken helpen mochte -
een water wyt / danc heb diet wrochte
liep daer omtrent
trijbulacije dede mij sulc torment
dat ic mij neder strecte als leuende doot
wan droeue herten hebben rustens noot

daer ic dus lach int gras gespreet
was my invysybele mynen geest ontleet
van eender vrouwen die compassije hiet
sij sprac staet op gaet met mij gereet
du wort van mij om sien geleert
een vremt bediet
doen stondic op en liet dies nyet
gewyllich doende dat sij gebiet
want in haren name was ic verhuegt.
Doer tbosch daermen veel wonders siet
een lange voyagije es ons geschiet
nu druck nu vruegt
en sprac volgt naer / dy werdes duegt
yc deedt want na mijns vorders vysieren
eest wijsheyt den goeden obedieren

soe lange gyngen wy dat wy quamen
daer wy een chierlijke kercke vernamen
met een rync muer daer om gespannen
sij sprack hier muedij wijsheyt ramen
dyt es een kerchhof vrij van blamen
der edelder mannen
alle verraders syn hier wt gebannen
meyneedege vernoyeerders en tyrannen
die eet belofte / noch segel en achten
maer die int velt cloec sonder wannen
bloet stortten voer trecht als mannen
muegen hier vernachten
die worden begrauen dies haer geslachten
vermaertheyt en eewegen lof beclijft
want al sterft die mensche goeden name blijft

als ic dus op kerchhof was staende
wert ic myn oogen omme slaende
daer ic stomben sach sonder getal
costelijker dan noyt scyn vol waende
met veruwen net doer gaende
soe waren sy al
van laysuere van goude groot en smal

gescryfte met letteren na elcx geval
gegrauert en oic dyveerssche ymagyen -
yc wane men in dyt eertssche dal
geen rijckelijker dynck beschouwen sal
van personagijen
sij bleecken wel van hoger coragijen
alstont hem nu metter dootslapene
want men kent die edele aen haer wapene

die stommen waren van dyasperen reene
van prophyrijen en van aelbaesteren steene
yn gouden platen gehouwen
abel lach daer verslagen in weene
nexistorys en nynyas gemeene
en cosdrus in rouwen
alexandere en troylus mochtmer aen schouwen
en yulijus in sbloets bedouwen
oic sagic die tomme van yonathas
huryas die edel rydder vol trouwen
osyas vroom sonder flouwen
leet oic den pas
hector en parijs waer af dat was
tgetal onnomelijc ongetruert
tes recht dat den eerbaren eere gebuert

het es wonder vander rijckelijcheyt
der hooger edelheyt sonder gelijkelijcheyt
die van getrouwycheden daer quamen
maer myds dat lijden met sijnder practijckelijcheyt
mij tonder hielt / soe bleef versijckelijcheyt
yn mijn versamen
yc sach droefheyt / en was in droefheys tranen
want dooden en connen geen blijscap ramen
maer haer edele wercken sijn te prijsenne
yc beclaegde daer de edele van namen
dies begonsten die tranen sonder scamen
yn mij te rijsenne
compassije saegt bij mijnnen wt wijsenne
yc pijnde mij te makene verhuegt
vanden goeden compt altoos die duegt

sij leyde mij verre wech metter hant
al eldere daer ic drie vrouwen vant
yn eenen choor wenende al even seere
doen dachtich dyts cranc onderstant

het es al droeve dat hier es int dlant
 waer ic my keere
 yc riep o god almachtich heere
 doet van ons vlien alle oneere
 my wondert wat dyt weenen bedieden mach
 maer daer priencen wapenen van hooger leere
 en soudic vol prijsen ymmermeere
 die ic daer sach
 die leuende hadden temmeren soe men plach
 maer daer dooden schylden aen riemkens hyngen
 aen bij teeken kent men alle dyngen

daer sach ic datmer een wtvaert dede
 met prelaten van grooter werdicheden
 daer groote priencen ten rouwe stonden
 eenen heraut sach ic daer offeren mede
 een tafereel met droeuer sede
 vol drucx gewonden
 Daer vloyden die tranen bouen condon
 wijt sach was in rouwe vonden
 om datmen daer brochte dat tafereel
 want diens men die wapenne soude vermonden
 was doot gerekent int gras gesonden
 te nyeuten geheel
 nochtans es was geen weerdeger yuweel
 noch die meer prees edelheys vluwen
 maer sceruen sijn die laeste yssuwen

als die drie vrouwen dyt poynt aensagen
 en mochten den yammer nyet verdragen
 sij toogden alte druckich gelaet
 haer handen wryngende haer deerlijc clagen
 dat blijft gedynckelijc teewegen dagen
 noyt soe bescaet
 clergye edelhede en gemeynen staet
 al hieten die vrouwen van hoger daet
 die cause haers screyens die es voer ogen
 want die de materije ter herten vaet
 wij sien dat ons weluarens saet
 plats wylle verdrogen
 yn sijn leuen en dorste hem nyemant pogen
 om ons te doene druck noch pijn
 want diemen ontsiet men laet hem tsijne

clergije
 aldus began clergije voren

o kaerle van borgoengijen vercoren
u lieue siele sij god genadich
die geleerde wylde ghij geerne aenhoren
ghij hielt die heylege kercke besworen
yn eeren gestadich
nu sijt ghij verdoeft recht eveldadich
versmeegt versonden pur verradich
en gelaten sonder sercoors oft troost
nu comen die woluen recht feldadich
en maken ons tallen canten bescadich
west en oost
die u te beweenen verroekeloost
es erger dan eenych serpente adere
want goede kynderen beweenen hueren vadere

edelhede
doen sprac edelhede met gewrongen handen
o prience ontsien in allen landen
wat heeft u doot ons drucxs gedaen
al verteerden wij doer u gelt en panden
wij sagen die vronste van allen wijganden
nae u vrientscap staen
die groote edelhede bij u begaen
sal wesen een eewich vermaen
ten es geen noot dat ic al verhale
tgemyssen mij al een traen
u weluaert dede ons vruegt ontfaen
yn onser quale
dierste die laetste te berge te dale
waer ghij / men mocht int velt mercken
edel heren doen edel wercken

gemeynen staet
doen quam gemeynen staet al weenende
o prience hoe es mij dlijden teenende
myts dat ghij steruende sijt ontgeuen
al was ic u somtijts pennyngen leenende
ghij maecte dat wij al waren wijt beenende
syttende bleuen
nu en behouden wij // nauwe goet noch leuen
ons steden dorpen verbeert beseuen
dat noyt nyement bestont in ouwer presencije
cloosters kercken te genyeute gedreuen
dies religijuesen maegden wel muegen beuen
duer die vyolencije

onse sonden sijn cause der penytencie
dwerc es getuyge lancx der strate
die menege beweent sijn scade te late

doen sprac compassije vriendelijc te mij
hier siestu dat dijn behouder sij
op dat verstantesse dij verstercke
dyt es kaerle van borgoengen vrij
versligen alsoe god weet entwij
by nancijs percke
den bosch heetet kerchhof en oic die kercke
die du ierst saegt / bij ogemercke
daer salmen die werelt by versynnen
die tommen gemaect van dieren wercke
es den lof ondelijc vrij van swercke
die sij gewynnen
certeyn kaerle es oic begrauen daer bynnen
alsoe rijckelijc als eenych ander persoon
want goede wercken volgen goeden loon
dander kercke reyn wt gelesen
mach den coor van synte saluatoors wesen
sijn toysoen geoffert daer ten outare
maer maxymyljaen ons prience gepresen
heeft doordene besworen bouen desen
met blijder mare
dies clergije edelhede en gemeyne schare
wel muegen verblijden openbare
want het es om een groot versynnen
en met dien dat ic dus wort geware
ontsprongen mijn oogen troost en ware
en ic gync scrijuen
sijn doot moet mij int therte blijuen
hij gaf mij mijn bij leuen als loon vergolden
lange geborgt en es nyet quijte gescolden

oic ben icx te blijder en te fiere
dat sulc een prience was ons regiere
die heerlijc dorste steruen voor trecht int velt
die heyle geest sij sijn verchiere
hij was een spiegel en een lof toe stiere
der edele gewylt -
dyaer veertienhondert ses en seventich gespelt
dertien auont vijue in louwe gerelt
god verleene sijnder lieuer sielen gracije
en beware den aer onsen yongen helt

tgen die leelije die welcke ons quelt
 met grooter verxacije
 onse priencersse geue god recreacije
 en blijscap ouer haren sone te siene
 waer god werct eest vrij van meschiene

De Roovere's dream about the death of the late Charles of Burgundy

In the field of strange speculations
 I followed the paths of my meditations.
 I was taken there by the passage of time,
 Guided by insights sharp and sublime.
 The abstract discourse of my inquest
 At length took me into a sprawling forest.
 To me it seemed deep and wide and green,
 Yet a more pleasant copse no-one has seen,
 With broad leaves sprouting from all the high trees,
 Creating shade that would any man please.
 A broad stream – blessed be the one who styled
 Its gentle banks – circled it with waters mild.
 Yet I was so troubled, tormented by dread
 That I fell to the earth as though I were dead:
 Sad hearts need rest, as many men say.

There on the grass, stretched out, I lay.
 A lady for my eternal spirit came.
 She led it away. Compassion was her name.
 She said: 'Get up, and come along with me.
 I will take you to a place where you may see
 Events of the strangest imaginable sort.'
 I rose without pause or further thought,
 Willingly doing all she asked of me:
 Because of her name I did it gladly.
 Through that forest of the miraculous
 A lengthy journey awaited us,
 At first one of sorrow; but joy would come next.
 She said: 'Follow me. It is in your interests.'
 I did as my fathers intended I should:
 It is always wise to obey the good.

I followed her far, as I was instructed.

We came to a church, smoothly constructed,
And surrounded by a defensive wall.
She said: 'Here you will at last learn all.
This is a graveyard, the finest and best,
Where many noble men are laid to rest.
No traitor may hope to gain admission,
Nor any cheat, tyrant, sower of schism,
None who ignore true oaths and good seals.
But those brave fighters, bearing wounds and weals,
Who shed their blood for the rights of their birth:
These men are allowed to lie in this earth.
They are enclosed in this holy ground,
So their families will be always renowned,
For the good name remains, though the man dies.

As I stood there in that graveyard, my eyes,
Wherever I cast them, saw many a vault,
More than may be counted. None showed a fault:
Each was more lovely than any stone seen before,
With colours so vivid, so bright and so pure.
Every last one was fashioned in this way:
In blue and gold letters each did portray
The triumphs of the man buried inside,
With many fine reliefs carved beside.
I thought that I had never before seen
In this earthly vale a thing more serene
Than these tombs, each housing a grand figure.
They were all men of courage and vigour
Yet now they are sleeping death's endless rest.
Their high birth was shown by each family crest.

The tombs were built from purest jasper,
And porphyry trimmed with alabaster,
Every surface shone with bright gold plate.
Abel lies there, by his brother slain in hate.
Nestor and Aeneas one grave occupy,
With Codrus the king buried nearby.
Troilus can be seen there, with Alexander,
And Julius, Rome's blood-rinsed commander.
I also saw the tomb of Jonathan,
Along with Hosea, so strong and stubborn,
And Uriah, a knight of faith and guile,
Had also undergone death's rueful trial.

Hector and Paris were there, marble-adorned.
They were beyond number: none went unmourned.
To honourable men honour is due.

It was all a wondrous monument to
The excellence of the high nobility,
Which surpasses all things in its quality.
But suffering kept me under its spell,
And my sorrow I could not crush nor quell
As it gathered within me its baleful cries.
I saw the pity: pity dampened my eyes.
The dead know no joy; their mood cannot be raised:
They have but their deeds, which ought to be praised.
There I mourned the noblemen of great name;
And the sad tears started – without any shame –
Welling up within me. I then tried
To make myself joyful. Compassion spied
This: evidently I gave myself away.

Goodness to virtue always gives way.
She took my hand, and led me elsewhere.
I discovered three ladies standing there,
In a choir, weeping, quite without cheer.
I thought: 'The answer to my troubles is here.
Wherever I am, wherever I go
I find only sadness, anguish and woe.'
I cried: 'O God, O all-mighty Lord
May all our honour soon be restored.'
I wondered what their weeping could mean.
Nearby many coats of arms could be seen:
To praise all the standards I saw on display
Would take much time, so numerous were they.
The living sport them on their armour: instead
Wall-brackets wear the shields of the dead.
By such signs every man's name is told.

I examined the scene. I watched them hold
A funeral, with priests of high dignity,
And mourners of the highest degree.
Joining the service I saw a herald:
A sadder scene no man has yet beheld,
Filled with so much sorrow, woe and grief.
Bitter tears flowed there with no relief.

Whoever saw this, their distress would be great.
 In their hands they bore a striking portrait
 Of a man whose deeds of arms were profound.
 He was beaten to death, thrown to the ground,
 Completely routed, by foes keen and cruel.
 Never was there yet a more noble jewel
 That brought so much praise to the elite;
 But dying must always be our final feat.

As the three ladies grasped this, the heartache
 Overwhelmed them utterly. For his sake
 Their faces took on a pitiful taint.
 They wrung their hands; their mournful complaint
 Will be remembered for all time to come.
 Never was there so much damage done
 To the clergy, nobles and the third estate.
 The women were all highborn and great.
 The cause of their melancholy was plain:
 When one considers the case again
 One sees that the seed of prosperity
 Has turned now to dry sterility.
 During his life not one man would dare
 To cause him or us torment or care,
 For men always avoid the ones they dread.

Clergy:

It was Clergy who spoke first. She sadly said:
 'Charles of Burgundy, the good, the blessed:
 May God grant your sweet soul its due rest!
 You willingly sought advice from the wise,
 And were among God's greatest allies,
 Always held in high regard, true to your vow.
 But yet, with utmost shame, you are now
 Dead. Killed. It is a treacherous act!
 From every direction we are attacked,
 From west and east, from every side.
 Whoever did not sob when you died
 Is lower than any snake-hearted creep:
 For his father every good son should weep.'

Nobility:

Then Nobility spoke, wringing her hands:

'O prince, lauded throughout all known lands,
Your death has caused us grief without end.
Although you often made us overspend,
We always admired and worshipped you
When standing amongst your proud retinue.
The great honours that you won in your days
Will forever serve to astound and amaze.
It is not shameful, nor embarrassing
To say that I wept sore at your passing.
But your wealth beyond all human measure
In spite of our pain, has brought us pleasure.
You were first, last. On mountains, in the moor,
The boldest. Often in times of war
We see noble hearts perform noble deeds.'

Third estate:

Next came Third Estate, weeping in her weeds:
'O prince, so much fearful agony
Knowledge of your death has brought to me!
Although our cash we often loaned to you
You ensured that our pains would be few,
And that our positions remained secure.
Our goods and lives they are safe no more:
Our cities and towns, now they do burn.
While you were alive, no man would dare turn
His weapon against any holy place.
But now each nun shivers, with pallid face,
Fearing for her precious maidenhead.
Our sins have brought us to all this dread.
Every street now the shameful truth relates:
The crowd weeps, repentant, but all too late!

Then Compassion spoke warmly to me:

'Who your protector is you may now see
So that through insight you are able to claim
Strength. Charles of Burgundy was his name,
Defeated – God only knows what for -
Near Nancy in the theatre of war.
The forest was his grave; but also the church
That you witnessed earlier in your search.
This is the meaning of the world you see.
The tombs are crafted exquisitely,

And the praise is eternal, without respite,
A ceaseless harmony through day and night.
Here you will find Charles the Bold interred,
Arrayed as splendidly as he deserved:
Good deeds are always answered with good.'

The church was empty. I then understood
That it was the church of Saint Salvatore
In Bruges. His sign, the Golden Fleece, I saw
Above the altar. Maximilien swore
His vow on this. Never has a more
Glorious message in public been heard,
A message to make every class cheered,
Clergy, Nobility, and Third Estate.
Its importance is immeasurably great.
And as soon as I beheld the fleece, my eyes
Sprang open, to banish all worry and lies,
And with pen in hand this verse I did start.
Always must his death stay lodged in my heart.
He gave me a wage, a stipend bestowing:
It was always honoured, never left owing.

I have felt blissful pride ever since,
Knowing that we were ruled by this prince.
He that for justice his sweet life lost,
He that was prized by the Holy Ghost,
He that was a fine example when he stood
Behind the League of the Public Good.
In the year fourteen hundred and seventy six,
Thirteen days after Christmas, on the fifth
Of January God gave his good soul grace.
May the eagle, a youth without disgrace,
Hold against the lily, which seeks to oppress
Us now. May God relieve our princess,
By conferring his blessings upon her son.
Where God works, nothing evil may be done.