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Chants Populaires Flamands (1879):
A Scholarly Field Collection
and an Early Individual Repertoire

Isabelle Peere

The research project introduced here deals with performance and repertoire. While this prominent concern in modern ballad and folk-song research de facto mostly relates to synchronic tradition, personal fieldwork, and knowledge of the singer’s background and personality, the Flemish repertoire described here was transcribed from the lips of a middle-class lady born in 1795 in Bruges, Belgium. Hardly more is known about her apart from the fact that she acquired most of her songs and recitations at an early age from her parents and in lacemaking school.

This rich and diversified material, published as Ad.-R. Lootens’s and J. M. E. Feys’s *Chants Populaires flamands avec les airs notés et poésies populaires diverses recueillis à Bruges* [Flemish Folksongs with Tunes and Other Folk Poems Collected in Bruges], in 1879, is the earliest recorded individual repertoire of Flemish traditional songs, while, as an early published collection, it demonstrates remarkable insight and scholarship. All textual transcriptions of songs are accompanied by their tunes and references to Flemish and other sources, along with occasional comments on editing and performance context or style. Because of this, the *Chants Populaires flamands* provides a rare opportunity for diachronic repertoire study. Taking my lead from David Buchan’s study of “Performance Contexts in Historical Perspectives” (1985) and existing ethnographic sources, I hope in future to throw light on the bygone, centuries-old, singing and lacemaking tradition of Bruges, interpreting these sung testimonies in the light of cultural and individual worldviews. Preliminary to that interpretive analysis, this essay examines the published collection and its background in an attempt to document the material at hand.

Hervé Stalpaert’s devoted work on Adolphe Lootens’s contribution to folklore research (1946) provides us with the only known biographical details on the major collector of *Chants Populaires flamands*. Moreover, critical study is hampered by the loss of all of Lootens’s manuscripts and correspondence (Stalpaert 1946: 8), a fact which only partly accounts for the sparse attention given to his largely unknown work (Stalpaert 1979: 183). Given the lack of all other primary
sources, the ten-page “avant-propos” of *Chants Populaires flamands* is the collectors’ only surviving testimony about their own work. It contains some clues about the genesis of the collection, the singer’s background and profile, the acquisition of her repertoire, the diversified nature of the collected material, the place of singing in lacemaking, as well as some information on the collectors’ editing philosophy and purpose. Yet, amid this careful information, it is surprising to find nothing on their collaboration and respective contributions.

The full title of the book leads one to believe that Lootens and Feys worked as a collecting duo, an assumption that the first-person plural in the avant-propos only reinforces. Stalpaert, however, suggests that the two men contributed in very different ways. Taking a clue from their previous collaboration on an edition of collected narratives, followed by Feys’s essay on the particularities of the local dialect (Lootens [1868] 1939), Stalpaert comments that Feys’s contribution probably focused on giving advice and methodological guidance on accounting, in scholarly fashion, for the linguistic variants in Lootens’s native idiom (Stalpaert 1946: 15). The suggestion sounds logical enough: Feys, a teacher of Latin rhetoric at the Athénée Royal de Bruges, was a Frenchman by birth and hence was hardly apt (even as a philologist) to provide more than general linguistic comments on a language that he understood only with difficulty and hardly spoke at all (Stalpaert 1946: 9). On the same grounds, the critic implies that it was Lootens—mostly if not only—who collected and transcribed the material in the folk-song collection: Not only was he a native of Bruges but his occupation as a land surveyor would have allowed him the opportunity and leisure to devote himself to his collecting hobby (Stalpaert 1946: 5), as his regular contributions to *Rond den Heerd* suggest.³

Recently acquired information tempts me to qualify the basic assumption about Feys’s poor knowledge of the vernacular. His family name not only has a Flemish sound and is known in Bruges but is also connected with a local Beyaert family, possibly related to Lootens’s mother.⁴ If so, Lootens and Feys could even have been cousins. In addition to revealing relevant details of his life and career in Bruges, the philologist’s obituary suggests that his special attachment to the city, its heritage, and traditions could have a deeper basis:

M. Feys était d’origine française. Il était né en Lorraine. Néanmoins, il s’intéressa toujours avec une prédilection marquée à l’histoire de la Flandre, et il ne négligea aucune occasion de rehausser le lustre du pays flamand et même de faire résonner la note patriotique, en célébrant les fastes historiques de notre vieille Flandre. Sous ce
rapport, on pourrait dire qu’il avait conservé une âme française, chaude et vibrante, tout en reportant sur sa patrie d’élection ses élans et ses enthousiasmes, restés presque juvéniles jusque sous les glaces de l’âge.

A la cité de Bruges aussi, il avait voué une affection toute particulière. Il aimait ses monuments, ses traditions, son histoire. N’est-ce pas lui, qui de concert avec M. Adolphe Lootens, a colligé et édité avec un soin pieux les vieilles chansons flamandes, directement recueillies, en grande partie, des dentellières brugeoises?

[M. Feys was of French origin. He was born in Lorraine. Nevertheless, he always showed a keen interest in the history of Flanders and missed no opportunity to pay homage to the Flemish country, or even celebrate the pageantry of our ancient Flanders like a patriot. On this point, one could say that, despite his warm and vibrant French nature, he never abandoned his youthful enthusiasm and affection for his chosen land.

The city of Bruges he held particularly close to his heart. He loved her monuments, traditions, and history. Did he not indeed, together with M. Adolphe Lootens, in the most exact manner, gather and edit the old Flemish songs, taken down, for the most part, from the lips of the Bruges lacemakers?]⁵

The present collection was started more than twenty-five years ago, and with no intention to publicize it. We were merely
concerned to archive family memories, to preserve the tunes and words which had rocked our childhood and delighted our youth. The collection, consisting first of a few loose sheets, grew insensibly. Further on, we set out to gather whatever lay at hand so as to complete it, and then only, the advice of several knowledgeable persons inspired us with the idea of publishing it.

(Lootens and Feys [1879] 1990: iii)

If Lootens was the initial and major collector and transcriber of the contents, Feys at least would have been an ideal editor. In addition to his shared interest in local tradition, the philologist and teacher already had publications to his name and was an effective member of the scholarly Société d’Emulation de Bruges. Incidentally, Feys, because he was fifteen years older, may have acted as a mentor to Lootens and been the first among the “knowledgeable persons” who encouraged him to publish his collected material.

Lootens’s fond childhood memories account for the highly original quality of the collection; its material, practically entirely, originates from a single source:

Les pièces qui composent ce volume nous ont été transmises presque en totalité par une seule personne. Elles forment ce qu’on pourrait appeler le répertoire d’une dame de la bonne bourgeoisie de Bruges. Cette dame d’une intelligence remarquable, douée d’une excellente mémoire, possédant le sentiment de la mélodie et du rythme [sic], avec un goût prononcé pour les chansons, a su retenir à peu près tout ce qu’elle a entendu. Née à Bruges en 1795 de parents brugeois, elle a conservé dans son souvenir tous les morceaux que, dans son enfance, chantaient son père et sa mère, et ceux qui étaient sans cesse répétés dans les écoles dentellières.

[The pieces composing this volume have come to us from almost a single source. They make up what one might call the repertoire of a lady of the well-mannered Bruges middle-class. This lady, gifted with a remarkable intelligence and an outstanding memory, along with a sense of melody and rhythm, and a special taste for songs, managed to remember practically everything she heard. Born of Bruges parents in 1795, she had kept in her memory all the pieces that her father and mother sang to her in her early years, as well as those which were repeated on and on in the lacemakers’ schools.]

(Lootens and Feys [1879] 1990: iii–iv)
Such a bearer of oral songs evokes Anna Gordon, Mrs. Brown of Falkland; like one of the best-known early sources for Scottish balladry, “the lady from Bruges” was not a public performer or recognized singer but someone who, through her own inclination and natural abilities, assimilated songs as part of her life experience as an educated middle-class town resident.\(^7\)

There is likely more to this particular lady, recorded “live,” than what the avant-propos reveals. Stalpaert’s interview with a descendant of Lootens’s convinced him that the unnamed lady, whose songs Lootens lovingly associated with his early years, was his own mother, Catherine Beyaert. As well as the birth year and family origin, Stalpaert found a similarity between the descriptions of Lootens’s mother by her own family and the song source’s portrait. At any rate, we can deduce that the woman was fifty-four when the nineteen-year-old Lootens, the eighth child of his family, started noting down her songs, which nicely fits with Stalpaert’s suggestion of a direct affiliation between them (Stalpaert 1946: 4).\(^8\)

Apart from her identity, the avant-propos at least throws light on the circumstances in which this middle-class lady acquired laceworkers’ songs and recitations. This clue comes linked with valuable information on the working context in which singing accompanied lacemaking:

Suivant des renseignements dignes de foi, on ne connaissait pas à Bruges en 1730, pas plus qu’il y a soixante ans, les écoles gardiennes, kinder, speel ou bewaarscholen. Les jeunes enfants des deux sexes étaient envoyés aux écoles ou ouvroirs de filles. Là, dans les vastes salles, ils occupaient la place laissée libre derrière les travailleuses, d’où on leur donnait le nom caractéristique de achterzitters (assis par derrière). La monotonie des occupations auxquelles se livraient les ouvrières, était rompue par la prière, L’enseignement de la doctrine chrétienne et le chant. Il y avait en outre, soir et matin, une heure de silence pendant laquelle on apprenait aux plus jeunes les prières, l’alphabet et plus ou moins la lecture.

[There is trustworthy information to suggest that there were still no nursery schools in Bruges in 1750 or, indeed, until sixty years later. Both male and female infants were sent to schools or girls’ workshops. There, in spacious halls, they would sit in the space left free behind the workers, hence their name as achterzitters (those sitting at the back). The monotony of the workers’ activities was interspersed with prayer, Christian teaching and singing. Every morning]
and evening, there was also an hour of silence set for teaching the younger ones prayers, the alphabet, and some reading.]

(Lootens and Feys [1879] 1990: vi–vii)

This intriguing comment follows: “Les enfants des classes aisées étaient aussi envoyés à ces écoles; à l’époque où nous parlons, les filles en général apprenaient volontairement un métier” [The better-off children were also sent to these schools; at the time we speak of, the girls would mostly and willingly learn a trade] (Lootens and Feys [1879] 1990: vii). We should be grateful for this information because neither historical nor ethnographic research about lacemaking in Flanders has taken any notice of the “social mix” in lacemaking schools in the lady’s early years. The author, unfortunately, only goes on to explain:

Quand à la fille de l’artisan, parvenue à l’âge de six ou sept ans, elle s’engageait à travailler pendant cinq ans, terme nécessaire à l’apprentissage d’un métier, pour le compte de la maîtresse de l’ouvroir. Souvent elle prolongeait son séjour à l’école jusqu’à sa quinzième ou sa seizième année. Après avoir entendu chanter pendant trois ou quatre ans, matin et soir, les mêmes morceaux, elle les chantait elle-même, sous la surveillance jalouse d’ouvrières plus âgées qui n’auraient pas souffert la plus légère altération dans le débit.

[As to the craftsman’s daughter, once aged six or seven, she would commit herself to working for five years, which was the time deemed necessary to learn a trade for the workshop’s mistress. Yet, she would often stay on at school until the age of fifteen or sixteen. After hearing the same pieces, morning and evening, she sang them herself, under the careful supervision of elder workers, who would never have allowed the least alteration to the pace.]

(Lootens and Feys [1879] 1990: vii)

This strict watch imposed on the work, as on the singing or reciting which accompanied it, is the only explanation given by the author for the persistence of certain bizarre rhymed pieces lacking any apparent narrative coherence. Such pieces, in his estimation, went back to 1730 in an uninterrupted tradition without appreciable change. These so-called tellingen, in the specific sense, come close to the English lacemakers’ “tells” and fit Gerald Porter’s description of them as “counting rhymes used in tallying the goldheaded pins used to fasten lace” (1994: 44). 

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The corpus of *Chants Populaires flamands* essentially consists of songs the lady learned in childhood. Given her excellent memory, Lootens and Feys claim to present these songs as they were sung in 1750, before her own time ([1879] 1990: iv). She acquired a few more songs later, but these she also learned in her native town and they are easily recognizable as more recent. To her own repertoire, which constitutes the basis of the collection, a few songs were added. Though collected elsewhere, usually from elderly people, these also belong to the singing tradition of Bruges. *Chants Populaires flamands* thus amounts to a corpus of 161 songs and 21 various recited pieces, presented as “le répertoire d’une dame de la bonne bourgeoisie de Bruges” [the repertoire of an upper middle-class lady from Bruges] (Lootens and Feys [1879] 1990: iii).

While we would have been as happy—if not happier—with an accurate collection of only this lady’s repertoire, one must acknowledge Lootens’s and Feys’s scientific intent to pass on a sociohistorical document that was as complete, representative, and rigorously defined as possible. In his effort to present not just an individual but the typical repertoire of an upper middle-class lady from about 1750 to 1850, the collector clearly was no longer engaging in a mere hobby motivated by nostalgia. He intended nothing less than to record an old and fast-disappearing oral tradition.

The appeal had come from the international authority, Edmond de Coussemaker, a historian and pioneer field collector, who conceived that popular song had particular value as a unique testimony of a people’s ideas and feelings (Top 1995: 319). What he had demonstrated about French Flanders motivated Lootens to contribute the fullest and most reliable evidence about his own prestigious medieval town. Though committed to preserving threatened Flemish culture, like de Coussemaker, Lootens was no more moved by romantic or nationalistic feeling than his contemporary:

La ville de Bruges ne pouvait manquer d’apporter sa pierre à cette reconstitution du passé; elle devait fournir sa part de vieilles poésies et de vieux chants, et tel est le contenu du présent volume. En le publiant, l’intention des éditeurs n’est pas de procurer un passe-temps plus ou moins agréable aux gens désœuvrés, encore moins d’offrir à l’admiration de petits chefs d’œuvre de la vieille muse flamande; leur but est purement scientifique et archéologique, et c’est à ce titre principalement que l’ouvrage a été accepté par la Société d’Emulation de Bruges, toujours disposée à encourager les publications de nature à jeter du jour sur l’histoire nationale.
The city of Bruges could not but contribute her share to this reconstruction of the past; she had to provide her part of ancient poetry and song, hence the contents of the present volume. Its publication intends neither to provide leisure to the idle, nor even less to inspire admiration for the little wonders of the old Flemish muse’s imagination; the editors’ ambition is solely scientific and archeological, which accounts for the work’s acknowledgment by the Société d’Emulation de Bruges, [which is] always willing to encourage publications likely to shed light on national history.

(Lootens and Feys [1879] 1990: ii)

They thus explain the diverse makeup and barely edited form of this material and alert us to sometimes rough, frivolous, worn out, fragmented or apparently insignificant pieces. Regardless of any literary, aesthetic, or other concerns about tampering with historical evidence, they claim,

Nous avons accueilli à peu près tout ce qui s’est présenté, de même que dans les musées d’antiquités, on ne recueille pas seulement les œuvres réellement belles, mais encore les figures grimaçantes et les types grotesques.

[We have welcomed practically everything that came our way, just as museums of antiquities do not just exhibit really beautiful pieces but also grimacing figures and grotesque types.]

(Lootens and Feys [1879] 1990: ii)

Certainly, whereas most of the collected material originates from a single person, the songs alone outnumber those which de Coussemaker collected from fishermen and sailors in Sunday schools and lacemaking circles (Top 1995: 320). Furthermore, although Lootens and Feys meant to present their city’s old songs and poems, the international ballad material represents neither the largest nor the most prominent song category. The largest subgenre consists of children’s songs, which make up a good third of this corpus. In second place is a mixed category of comic, satirical, and love songs. A third group brings together noëls et cantiques, “carols and hymns.” The narrative songs, sagas, ballads, and legends are the next largest, and a last group consists of mystical and moral songs.

In a unique feature for their time, Lootens-Feys offers, in addition to songs, various rhymed pieces derived from the choral singing of lacemakers, generically referred to as tellingen, apart from the specific counting recitations already
mentioned. They also tell us that their curious mix of the various song fragments (some including odd references to ancient beliefs and practices) have been appended to the song material at the request of several scholars (Lootens and Feys [1879] 1990: viii).

The book edition of *Chants Populaires flamands*, it appears, enjoyed a unanimously warm reception. One must, however, interpret local Flemish literary reviews of this edition of Flemish songs in the context of Flanders’s despised vernacular culture and language. Thus, it comes as no surprise to find the work acclaimed in *Rond den Heerd*, which was already promoting Flemish language and tradition. The paper first heralded, then praised, the book, as well as proudly reproducing two eminent reviews from Holland (*Rond den Heerd* 1877–78: 161–62, 353–54). In Bruges, the first edition of songs collected from local oral tradition was acclaimed for its relevance to Flemish literary history and ethnology but also the appeal of its original, yet so familiar-sounding contents. *Chants Populaires flamands* thus created an “évènement” [*sic*] in local literary circles, where it was greeted as “a mirror of a period…reflecting the life and struggle of a whole generation…. conjuring up a full range of memories—childhood’s joys and pains, simple religious faith, scenes from Flemish family life and countless other evocations of the past” (de Flou 1879: 19). Adolf Duclos, then editor of the paper, went so far as to call the collection “the most interesting work of Flemish literature to have appeared in a long time” (*Rond der Heerd* 1877–78: 72).13

To assess the local reception of *Chants Populaires flamands* more realistically, it is fair to cite the contemporary French folk-song collector, de Puymaigre, on the significance of Lootens’s and Feys’s achievement. The opening paragraph of his essay devoted to “Chants Flamands” praises their work while regretting overall ignorance of it in France, owing to limited access to Flemish:

> Il a paru à Bruges, en 1879, un recueil de chants populaires qui eût davantage excité l’attention si au texte MM. Adolphe Lootens et E. Feys eussent joint une traduction, comme M. de Coussemaker l’a fait dans un volume du même genre. Le flamand est un dialecte accessible à peu de lecteurs, et il est évident qu’avec notre mince érudition philologique, la publication de MM. Lootens et Feys devait rester en France à peu près inconnue. Elle mérite pourtant de prendre place à côté de nombreux volumes analogues que depuis quelque temps on a édités sur divers points.

[There came out in Bruges, in 1879, a volume of popular songs which would have caught much greater attention, had MM.]
Adolphe Lootens and E. Feys accompanied its contents with a translation, as indeed was the case of a volume of a similar nature by M. de Coussemaker. But few readers will have access to the Flemish dialect, and given our scant philological knowledge, it is no surprise that MM. Lootens and Feys would remain mostly ignored in France. This, nevertheless, deserves to take a place among numerous like volumes now available on a variety of subjects.

(de Puymaigre 1885: 108)

The scholarly editing of Lootens’s and Feys’s authentic materials further recommends their analysis. On the one hand, the genesis of *Chants Populaires flamands* evokes the “domestic and almost pious” origin of the *Barzaz Breiz* (la Villemarqué 1963: iv). As with the Breton pioneer collector, Lootens’s interest in popular tradition sprang from firsthand experience of his native lore. Like him also, Lootens belonged to an educated and bilingual social elite and had been committed since postadolescence to testifying to a native tradition which had been relegated to a folk culture. Yet, apart from these similarities, there is evidence that Lootens and Feys, contrary to la Villemarqué, let no aesthetic or literary influences interfere with either collecting or editing.

Lootens had demonstrated scientific rigor in his fieldwork and editing prior to publishing *Chants populaires Flamands*. In his contributions to *Rond den Heerd*, he insisted on reproducing not just the words but the sounds of oral tradition exactly as he had heard them pronounced in local speech, contrary to the views of his folklore-conscious yet literary-minded editor (Stalpaert 1968b: 204). His loyalty to the local idiom found full expression in his *Oude Kinderverstelsels uit den Brugse tongval* [Old Narratives for Children in the Bruges Dialect] (1868), a booklet of nine prose narratives, which, as he writes in the preface, he printed this way: “Wij hebben deze vertelsels doen drukken zoo als eene nauwkeurige overlevering dezelve in verscheidene huisgezinnen heeft bewaard, zonder één woord in den tekst te veranderen, zonder ééne letter bij te voegen of weg te laten” [We had these narratives printed exactly as one precise transmission had preserved them identically in various households, without changing a single word in the text, without either adding or removing a single letter] (Lootens [1868]: 6–7).

Ironically, whereas folklore editing of the time mostly implied filtering “crude” field data, what it meant for this early ethnographer of speech was recapturing the live dimension of oral tradition on the page. The result looks amazing—narratives are transcribed in an original phonetic spelling of his own creation.
The transcripts are accompanied by footnote explanations for the non-Bruges, native Flemish speaker and followed by a separate essay by J. M. E. Feys accounting for all grammatical, phonetic, and lexical variants. This modest-appearing publication resolutely sought to serve folklore study rather than attract fame or gain; its subsequent translation and full publication in the Germania journal the following year speaks for its scholarly quality.\textsuperscript{14}

As Lootens treated the sounds of speech, so also did he respect the tunes of songs. We learn from Stalpaert that his love of song went hand-in-hand with that of music and he also played the cello.\textsuperscript{15} No wonder, then, that we read in the avant-propos,

Les airs ont été notés sous la dictée, et reproduits, comme les paroles, avec la plus rigoureuse fidélité. Rien n’a été ni arrangé, ni refait, d’après d’autres publications.

[The tunes have been noted down from dictation and, like the texts, transcribed with the utmost accuracy. Nothing was either arranged or modified with reference to other publications.]

(Lootens and Feys [1879] 1990: v)

Lootens’s and Feys’s \textit{Chants Populaires flamands} was first published as the \textit{Annales de la Société d’Emulation pour l’Étude de l’Histoire et des Antiquités de la Flandre} (1878) and as a separate book the following year. How, then, did this field collection of popular songs and poems attract the attention of the eminent society devoted to historical research? To start with, the Bruges-based national society kept contacts and exchanged annals with several other scholarly institutions, both at home and abroad (Top 1990: I). One of these was the Comité des Flamands de France [Committee of the Flemish People of France], founded by de Coussemaker in 1853 to research the history and testify to the presence of Flemish language and culture in France (Top 1995: 317–18).

The Société’s minutes and correspondence further reveal that its Comité-Directeur [Executive Committee] prided itself upon the posthumous publication of an important study by that French historian.\textsuperscript{16} Why then would they think any less of his groundbreaking folk-song collection, which attested to the source value of songs for historical study? That gives us reason to think that the Société was pleased with the chance to publish a like collection of songs from native soil (Top 1990: II) and that de Coussemaker’s \textit{Chants Populaires des Flamands de France} provided the model for Lootens’s and Feys’s collection, so much so, apparently, that it loaned the latter book most of its title and song categories.
The records of the Société reveal some persistent though unspecified difficulties, responsible apparently for a significant delay in publishing the Bruges collection. At the same time, this evidence throws some light on the two authors’ respective contributions: Lootens, referred to as “l’auteur,” first submitted his manuscript in 1876. The following record, dated January 1877, reads,

Mr Le chanoine Vandeputte [sic] fait le rapport sur le manuscrit des anciennes chansons populaires flamandes, présentées par Mr Lootens. Après une discussion à laquelle prennent part plusieurs membres, le comité décide d’imprimer ce travail dans ses annales pour l’année 1878: l’auteur sera prié d’enrichir son travail de notes et d’une introduction faisant connaître les publications du même genre faites jusqu’à ce jour, à l’étranger.
[Canon Vandeputte reports on the manuscript containing old Flemish popular songs, presented by Mr. Lootens. Following a discussion between several members, the committee decides to print this work in its 1878 yearbook: The author will be requested to supplement notes and an introduction mentioning like works published abroad.] (Soc. Pro.: 43)

The next meeting unanimously elected Feys a member of the Société and agreed to create “une sous-commission” [a subcommission] in charge of reexamining the manuscript:

Puisque plusieurs membres du Comité-Directeur sont hors d’état d’assister régulièrement aux séances pour cause d’infirmités ou de changement de domicile, il est procédé à l’élection d’un quatorzième membre du Comité: Mr Feys, professeur de Rhétorique latine à l’Athénée de Bruges, est nommé à l’unanimité des membres présents. Sur la proposition de Mr Van de Putte [sic], le comité désigne une sous-commission composée de trois membres, à L’effet d’examiner de nouveau le manuscrit de Mr Lootens relatif aux anciennes chansons populaires flamandes, et de faire rapport de leur examen à la prochaine séance. Cette commission est composée de MM. Van de Putte [sic], Nelis et Verschelde.
[Given that several members of the Executive Committee cannot attend sessions regularly for reasons of health or distance, an election is held for the appointment of a fourteenth committee member: Mr Feys, a professor of Latin rhetoric at Athénée de Bruges, is unanimously elected as the fourteenth member of the committee. At the suggestion of Mr Van de Putte [sic], the committee designates a subcommittee composed of three members, to examine the manuscript of Mr Lootens’ old Flemish popular songs, and to report on their examination at the next meeting. This subcommittee is composed of MM. Van de Putte [sic], Nelis, and Verschelde.]
member: Mr. Feys, professor of Latin rhetoric at the Athénée de Bruges, is unanimously elected by all attending members. On Mr. Van de Putte’s proposition, the committee designates a subcommittee consisting of three members to the effect of reexamining Mr. Lootens’s manuscript relative to old Flemish popular songs and report on their examination at the following session. This commission is composed of MM. Van de Putte, Nelis, and Verschelde.

(Soc. Pro.: 45)

It is now January 1878, the year Lootens’s book is due to come out, and the Comité yet again nominates une sous-commission, this time including Feys among its members:

Le Comité nomme de nouveau une sous-commission composée de MM Feys, Ronde, Nelis et Verschelde, à l’effet avant-propos de revoir encore le manuscript des anciennes chansons populaires flamandes, présenté par Mr. Lootens, et d’en soigner l’impression au mieux des intérêts de la Société, et par les presses de la société de S. Augustin établie à Scheepsdaele.

[The Committee reappoints a subcommission composed of MM Feys, Ronde, Nelis, and Verschelde to revise once again the manuscript of old Flemish popular songs, submitted by Mr Lootens, print it with care to befit the Société’s best interest, and do so on the press of the Société de S. Augustin, established in Scheepsdaele.] (Soc. Pro.: 45)

In July of the same year, Feys’s leading role within this commission at last becomes explicit and effective:

Mr. Feys soumet aux membres quelques feuilles imprimées de l’ouvrage sur les “Chants populaires de Bruges” qui est en cours d’impression dans l’Etablissement de St. Augustin, récemment fondé à Scheepsdale-lez-Bruges. L’impression de ces feuilles est très soignée et l’ensemble de l’ouvrage promet d’être un vrai chef-d’œuvre de typographie.

[Mr. Feys submits a few printed sheets of the “Chants populaires de Bruges,” which is with the printers of the Société de S. Augustin, recently established at Scheepsdale-lez-Bruges. Their printing is of]
the greatest quality and the whole work promises to be a real typographical masterpiece.] (Soc. Pro.: 46)

The recurrent references to “le manuscrit présenté par Mr. Lootens” [the manuscript submitted by Mr. Lootens] up until 1877 (Soc. Pro.: 44), and the absence of any mention of Feys until the publishing stage, support the view that Lootens collected the material. If so, apart from “les instances de plusieurs personnes compétentes” [the advice of several knowledgeable persons] (Lootens and Feys [1879] 1990: ii) who recommended publication, the Société’s consideration of the manuscript is also to Lootens’s credit. Yet what about his manuscript’s successive reexaminations? If, as it appears, its version only consisted of the textual and musical transcripts of the corpus, what did the Comité find unsatisfying, or still lacking, the second and third times? Was it not up to the Société’s editing standards or de Coussemaker’s model?

There are two additional clues, which in light of Lootens’s personality and his conception and editing of folk materials, reveal more. The first is an arresting comment in the “Notes et Additions” appended to the published collection, referring to the “Halewijn” song, considered “the jewel of Middle Dutch literature” (Top 1993: 105). In this note, Lootens expresses regret that neither Willems nor even de Coussemaker printed their collected versions of the well-known song type as obtained from the singers, which might have helped reconstruct his own fragmented text. While reaffirming his uncompromising respect for folk materials as obtained from oral tradition, Lootens’s comment also reveals a critical distance from his predecessors, de Coussemaker included. One even suspects a less-than-innocent parallel between de Coussemaker and J. F. Willems, who saw no harm in rearranging texts (Top 1996: 15):

Il est à regretter que Willems et de Coussemaker n’aient pas jugé à propos de donner cette pièce telle que le peuple l’a conservée; on serait sans aucun doute en possession de variantes remarquables, et les lacunes qui existent dans notre version, n’eussent pas manqué d’être comblées.
[It is to be regretted that Willems and de Coussemaker did not judge it appropriate to give us this piece as the folk had conserved it; we would, no doubt, have had remarkable variants, and the missing parts of our version, would surely have been filled.]

(Lootens and Feys [1879] 1990: 295)
Even if this comment only agrees with the statements in the avant-propos about the exact reproduction of texts and music, *Chants Populaires flamands* nevertheless clearly differs from *Oude Kindervertelsels*. The song transcripts in the latter hardly reflect the sounds of local speech, and all accompanying notes to the songs and poems are in French. This leads to the second clue: The same critic who so enthusiastically commended the special appeal of the Lootens-Feys collection regretted the suppression of all dialect variants. He even referred to an instance where the substitution of the standard spelling clearly destroyed the original end rhyme (de Flou 1879: 20). This example reveals that Lootens’s original (unfortunately lost) transcripts underwent some “purifying” editing yet unaccounted for.

From all of these arguments, the following hypotheses emerge. First, I suspect that Lootens’s own views on the editing of his manuscript did not agree with the Société’s. The diverging views of the field collector and scientific folklorist on the one hand and his “distinguished,” scholarly, yet also less folklore-aware, publisher on the other may have been the cause of the successive reexaminations. Would not the unyielding ethnographer of speech have insisted on the faithful rendering of the local dialect in song as in his narrative transcripts? Or did the earlier contributor to the Flemish culture-conscious *Rond den Heerd*, here as in his previous publications, use Flemish through and through?

Another hypothesis: If Lootens’s firsthand experience of folk tradition and fine musical ear produced the best understanding and notation of songs, was the land surveyor as much a scholarly annotator, apt editor and French writer? In either case, Feys eventually joining the sous-commission provided a welcome mediator between Lootens’s and the Société’s concerns about the manuscript. Would not Feys, a French native speaker, an “expert” on the Bruges dialect, and now also an executive member of the Société, have come to the aid of his collaborator and friend (or relative) to see the collection through publication?

While this exploration leaves us with more questions than answers, it is a fact that Lootens’s and Feys’s *Chants Populaires flamands* includes data which is both remarkable and rarely available for diachronic singing tradition. Within Flemish song scholarship, the collection offers an early and unique source on individual repertoire and local oral tradition. In addition, Lootens and Feys’s sizeable corpus of work songs and rhymes, recorded with valuable contextual information, should also be relevant to other regional and less-well-documented traditions, such as those of the English lacemakers. As a nineteenth-century
work, the collection presents a rare combination of fieldwork and scientific folklore research. Lootens’s holistic attention to song derives from his early, first-hand experience within his family; both his folk-song and narrative books connect with his childhood, his mother, and his hometown and its immediate surroundings as the three dimensions of his folklore activity.

At the same time, if both his folklore contributions display unwavering scholarship (Stalpaert 1972), it is certainly thanks to Feys, whose collaboration and guidance (at least closer than de Coussemaker’s) allowed Lootens’s interests and initiatives to reach scientific excellence. Had Lootens been allowed to follow his avant-garde concept of folklore editing in this “distinguished” publication as in his “less-distinguished” booklet of narratives, we might have had a testimony truer still to life, as well as a thoroughly modern folklore edition. In spite of this, credit must be given to the Société d’Emulation de Bruges, which, in publishing the Lootens-Feys collection, played a pioneering role in Flemish folklore study (Stalpaert 1972: 265).

Strikingly, Lootens’s and Feys’s scholarly edition of an extensive individual repertoire transcribed from oral and rigorously defined local tradition comes closer to our modern concept of folklore study than la Villemarqué’s and even de Coussemaker’s collections. So one wonders why, to this day, their names remain obscure in the scholarship, if they are remembered at all. If Feys’s excellence was recognized in his own field of expertise, Lootens did not receive any official recognition at all. This was perhaps partly because he was not a formally educated scholar attached to an institution. For the rest, we must agree with de Puymaigre that the “veil of modesty” covering the duo from Bruges and their achievement must largely be due to the fact that their material was published without French translations. Should this be the reason for the limited recognition of the pioneering Flemish field collection, it is almost ironic to see its counterpart for Brittany, the *Barzaz-Breiz*, honored on the 150th anniversary of its first publication with a monolingual edition in the regional vernacular, pruned from la Villemarqué’s original French translations (see Kervarker 1988).

From these introductory findings, I am confident that Ad.-R. Lootens’s and J. M. E. Feys’s unique record of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century repertoire of “an upper middle-class lady from Bruges” can rewardingly be analyzed and interpreted.
Notes
I dedicate this paper with thanks to Stefaan Top, who encouraged my study of this collection. I also thank Dr. A. Vandewalle, director of the Stadsarchief of Bruges, who kindly helped access archive sources.

2. Stefaan Top expresses regret at the absence of any personal appreciation of Lootens and Feys in either Florimond Van Duyse’s comprehensive canon of old Dutch and Flemish songs or Mauritius Sabbe’s monograph on the old West Flemish song repertoire (Top 1990: VIII). This essay is a humble, but enthusiastic, attempt to compensate for this neglect.
3. *Rond den Heerd: een leer-en leesblad voor alle lieden met prenten* [Around the Hearth: An Educational Reader for All with Illustrations] was founded by the Bruges-born poet/priest Guido Gezelle and the art historian James Weale in 1865. The paper is discussed further in this article. A detailed account of Lootens’s contributions to it and critical reviews of both his folk-song and narrative editions is appended to Stalpaert 1946: 20–21.
4. See Maes 1987; the article describes the printer and publisher Georges Beyaert, son of Eugène Beyaert (b. Roeselare 1810, d. Kortrijk 1879) and grandson of Louis Beyaert (b. Brugge 1784, d. Kortrijk 1851) and Sofía Joanna Feys. Ongoing research is investigating the connection, if any, with Lootens’s mother, Catherine Beyaert (b. Brugge 1795, d. Brugge 1879); since she belonged to “a well-respected middle-class Bruges family” (Stalpaert 1946: 4), she could be Eugène Beyaert’s sister.
5. From Feys’s obituary published in *Annales*. From this, and the entry under his name in *Bibliographie Nationale*, we gather that he was born in Rambervillers, France, in 1819 and naturalized in 1853. He must have come to Bruges at the start of his career, if not earlier, for he taught at the Athénaie de Bruges for thirty years. He was appointed an effective member of the Société d’Emulation de Bruges in 1873 and elected vice-president in 1882, a position which he kept until 1902. He died in Bruges in 1906. Appended to these sources is a list of his publications.
6. The Société d’Emulation was founded in 1839; it is Belgium’s earliest historical society and still exists under the name of Het Brugse Genootschap voor Geschiedenis [The Bruges History Association].
7. The allusion is to Mrs. Anna Brown of Falkland (1747–1810), a most important contributor in Anglo-Scottish balladry, whose songs were highly esteemed by F.J. Child.
8. Official records reveal that Catherine Beyaert died, aged eighty-four, in 1879, the year of the collection’s first publication, another likely reason for withholding her identity.
9. The same word, *tellingen* in Flemish, is used both in a specific and generic sense, the former referring to a lacemaker’s counting rhyme and the latter to all songs accompanying lacemaking.
10. The *tellingen* were similarly delivered in a monotonous tone, which supports Porter’s suggestion of the Flemish origin of tells, along with English lacemaking itself (1994: 38).
11. The crucial influence of de Coussemaker’s *Chants Populaires des Flamands de France* (1856) on Flemish folk-song collecting, editing, and study was previously examined by Stefaan Top (1995).
12. Flanders’s mostly rural population spoke Flemish, a language which orally consisted essentially of a group of local dialects. The social and educated elite, on the other hand, was mostly bilingual, using Flemish in the private context of family and friends but French in the official circumstances of public life. Incidentally, *Chants Populaires flamands*, which uses French for its title, preface, and notes, in accordance with the standard practice of its distinguished editor, the Société d’Emulation de Bruges, is illustrative of this ambiguous rapport between the “high” and “low” cultures.
13. The two quotes are my own translation from Dutch. All translations, where not attributed, are mine.


15. Most biographical details on Lootens come from a relative then living in Bruges. Thus, we learn that music ran in Lootens’s family—aside from his mother’s fondness and talent for it, a brother wrote a study on Gregorian chant, and still another was an organ maker. While he also mentions that Lootens’s father was a shipbuilder (Stalpaert 1946: 4–5), in a population census, he is registered as a facteur, which at the time would most likely refer to a facteur d’orgues (“organ maker”). (Bevolkingsregister 1830–46: A6, 135).

16. Soc. Reg.: 81; the work is de Cousseemaker 1876.

17. Frans Jans Willems (1793–1846) is responsible for Oude Vlaamsche Liederen (1848), which is the first edition of Flemish folk songs collected (largely from written sources) by a native folklorist.

18. The narratives of Oude Kinderverontels were accompanied with lexical notes but no scholarly annotations. These have since been provided by Stalpaert (1968a: 275).

19. Whether Lootens pursued any folklore activity at all is generally ignored. He emigrated to London in 1884, married an Englishwoman, and still made yearly visits to his hometown (between health treatments in Germany) until his death in 1902.


References


F.] Reprint, Brugge: De Reyghere. (The reprint has illustrations by René Depauw but lacks the appended linguistic essay. Page references are to original edition.)


Société d’Émulation: *Procès verbaux de ses séances*. Vol. 2 (1868 to 1886) (cited in the text as *Soc. Pro*.).


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