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English Printing at Antwerp in the Fifteenth Century

Boies Penrose

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No class of books has been as closely studied for so long a time as those printed before 1501. Incunabulists have attacked and solved many difficult problems: the identification of texts and printers, the classification of types and papers, the dating and localization of editions, and the history of the spread of printing and the distribution of the products of the press. The questions that have been commonly asked and answered are how, who, when, and where. Much less frequently students have inquired *why* a given series of texts appeared at a certain time and place.

George Parker Winship, who is commemorated by a lecture series in the Houghton Library, was among other things a distinguished historian of the early printed book. This particular interest loomed large in his celebrated Harvard course, Fine Arts 5e, where several generations of future collectors were educated and started on their way with a firm grounding in the field of incunabula. One of his students, Boies Penrose '25, now a collector and scholar of considerable eminence, returned to Winship's beloved subject on 5 March 1969, in delivering the second George Parker Winship Lecture.

Everyone knows that English printing was spawned at Bruges in the Low Countries, whence William Caxton took the art back to England. But few people are aware that some years after Caxton's departure a Flemish printer issued a series of English books at Antwerp, books that have survived in very few copies, surprisingly few of which are preserved in the British Isles. Mr. Penrose considers why these books were printed and why their distribution was so limited, and finds that the answer lies in the history of the Wars of the Roses, the conflicts between France and Burgundy, and the decline of Bruges as a merchant seaport. The books fulfilled the demands of an expatriate English colony, whose members remained in exile while their plots to overturn the Lancastrian Tudor dynasty repeatedly failed; no wonder, then, that these editions are rare and local. Winship would have been delighted with his former pupil's conclusions, which further suggest that incunabulists and others may profit from similar investigations of the reasons governing the appearance of titles in publishers' lists at other times and places.

W. H. Bond

ALTHOUGH a curious byway in the history of printing, known chiefly to a few hard-bitten incunabulists, it might come as a surprise to most people to learn that five books were printed in English, in the Low Countries, during the closing years of the fifteenth century, years after Caxton had packed his bags in

Bruges and had departed for the Red Pale at Westminster. The story of these books takes us well back into Burgundian history, and some little way back into English history as well, with a few sidelights on geography, the literature of chivalry, and the orders of knighthood, to say nothing of the prime subject for which these lectures were established — bibliography. In consequence, this address will be a pretty mixed bag.

We will begin a century or more back, when Burgundy was a fief of the French crown, and the dukes of Burgundy were scions of the royal House of Capet; when, in fact, King John the Good of France made his younger son, Philip, Duke of Burgundy in 1363. Two decades later Philip, by this time nicknamed "the Bold," married Margaret, heiress and daughter of Count Louis of Flanders and Artois; and in this wise Burgundy became possessed of what is now Belgium, and what in the later Middle Ages was probably the richest and most prosperous region in the whole of Northern Europe.

Burgundian dukes seem to have run to heroic nicknames, and the son of Philip the Bold was John the Fearless, which comes to pretty much the same thing. John, who ruled until 1419, appears to have been a stormy petrel, but his deeds and misdeeds need hardly concern us. But with his son, Philip the Good, who ruled over Burgundy for nearly fifty years, the plot thickens very considerably. At this point I might say parenthetically that from an early date in the fifteenth century, the dukes of Burgundy came more and more to live in Flanders, and to use the city of Bruges as their unofficial residence (Dijon being the official capital).

During his long life Philip made his mark as a scholarly patron of the arts and sciences; he appears to have been a retiring man of a distinctly intellectual bent, and perhaps therefore may be compared to some of the Italian princelings of the same day. His marriage was an important one, for at Bruges in 1429 he wedded the beautiful Portuguese princess Isabella, the granddaughter of Henry IV of England, daughter of King João of Aviz and his Queen Philippa of Lancaster, and thereby sister of the wonderful brood of Aviz brothers, most famous of whom was Prince Henry the Navigator. Whoever has seen their tombs in the Capella do Fundador at Batalha will never forget that magnificent family.

In honor of his wedding, Philip decided to found an order of knighthood, but the pundits at his court wrangled nearly half a year about

what to call it; from July to November, to be exact. Then some inventive soul suggested that the order should be called by the initials of the months of discussion. This spelled JASON. And that is how the most distinguished order of chivalry on the continent of Europe, rivalled only by the Garter in England, was created: the Order of the Golden Fleece. It is entirely probable that the inventive soul, mentioned above, was one Raoul Lefevre, the Duke's chaplain and secretary; a distinguished man of letters who wrote a book on the siege of Troy, based on the romance by the thirteenth century author Guido Colonna, of which and of whom, more later. But further to the point, Lefevre also wrote a book about Jason and the Argonauts, and the quest for the Golden Fleece, adapted from the original epic by Apollonius of Rhodes, a popular romance of the later Middle Ages; probably deriving from a Greek text brought back by the Crusaders from the sack of Constantinople in 1204.

It is worth emphasizing, therefore, that the Order of the Golden Fleece, so long associated with Imperial Spain and Habsburg Austria, was primarily Burgundian; that Philip the Good was its creator; and that his chancellor, Raoul Lefevre, was its official mythologist. Let us all weep a ceremonial tear, therefore, for the Order's demise after the abdication of King Alfonso of Spain in 1931, since that meant the passing of a grand chivalric tradition. Now the emblem exists only in the trade-mark of Brooks Brothers.

Be that as it may, Philip and Isabella had a son, who was destined to bring the fortunes of Burgundy to the dust. Charles the Bold, another duke with an heroic nickname, was born in Dijon in 1433, and succeeded his father in 1467. From the first he suffered from *folie de grandeur*, and thought of himself as a Burgundian Alexander the Great. But he had the misfortune to be up against his distant cousin, King Louis XI of France, who was probably the slyest old fox in the history of a country that has produced more than its share of sly old foxes.

However, a word first about Charles's marriages. When he was but eleven, he had a child wedding to Catherine, daughter of Charles VII of France, but she soon died; then he married Isabella, daughter of the Duke of Bourbon (another cadet branch of the French royal house); she died young, too, but not before she had produced a daughter Mary, born in 1457, who grew up to become a much sought-after heiress, because of her fabulously rich Burgundian inheritance.

Charles's third and final marriage was to Princess Margaret of York, the sister of King Edward IV of England. This took place in Damme, just outside Bruges, in 1468, amid the most extravagant pageantry that the later Middle Ages were capable of. The whole affair must have resembled a combination of the Lord Mayor's Show in London, and the Mummers' Parade in Philadelphia, with the Pasadena Tournament of Roses thrown in. Absolutely no vulgarity was spared; and a good time, presumably, was had by all.

After that, for the next six years — until he went to the wars in 1474 — Charles and Margaret lived in apparent connubial bliss in the Cour des Princes, the old Burgundian palace in Bruges.

Margaret of York has come down to us as a cultivated blue-stocking, interested in art and literature, and a patroness of Hans Memling and William Caxton. The former painted her portrait, along with that of her step-daughter Mary, in the beautiful "Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine," for the Hospital of Saint Jean in Bruges, where the picture still is. Margaret appears as the seated figure on the right: a handsome, aristocratic-looking woman, with clear-cut features and a very intelligent face. The painting was presented to the Hospital in 1479 by Brother Jan Floreins, and was therefore executed when Margaret was perhaps thirty-two, a year or so after the tragedy of Nancy, where her husband lost his life. This doubtless accounts for her sad and pensive expression; but even then she may have started to become the vindictive and embittered woman who was to be such a thorn in the side of the first Tudor.

It is important to remember that the great importance of Bruges as a weaving center in those days brought a considerable number of English woolen merchants there; so many, in fact, that they had their own boss — the Governor of the English Nation in the Low Countries, otherwise known as the Company of Merchant Adventurers resident at Bruges. At this time the Governor was a Man of Kent, a liveryman of the Mercers' Company in the City of London, a man of literary tastes, and a person of an inventive bent: William Caxton. He soon came to the notice of Charles the Bold, doubtless through his acumen in negotiating several commercial treaties between the English merchants and Burgundy. And happily, since his term of office expired just about the time of Charles's marriage to the English princess, Caxton was asked to join Margaret's retinue and to look after her financial affairs. This secretarial job gave him a good deal of spare time,

which he profitably employed in translating Raoul Lefevre's Troy Book into English. When the numerous English attendants in Margaret's entourage learned of this, they all expressed the desire to own a copy of the translation; and this probably set Caxton's mind working on a more practical method of book-production than the age-old drudgery of the scriptorium. This was, let us say, about 1469, at which time there was no printing press nearer than Cologne, where one had been started by Ulrich Zell in 1465.

Therefore to Cologne Caxton went, not only to finish the Troy Book, but to learn printing as well. So it was that about 1471 he appears to have been affiliated with the eponymous press of the Flores Sancti Augustini, in the printing of an encyclopaedic work by an English schoolman: Bartholomew Anglicus's *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, a popular reference book of the Middle Ages. Sometime in 1472 Caxton was back in Bruges, with the Troy Book completed, and well on the way with another translation, Jacopo de Cessolis' *Game and Play of Chesse Moralised*; and full of ideas about producing them. It was then that he struck up a friendship with one Colard Mansion, a local bookseller in Bruges who was the principal purveyor of manuscripts to the Burgundian court; and soon thereafter, quite fortuitously, printing was introduced into Flanders, with the press of Johann Veldener at Louvain. Mansion was able to go thither, in order to secure presses, type, and printers as well; somehow the two men got a printing-press going; and at an indeterminate date about 1475 the first printed book in the English language was produced.

Caxton states in his preface that the *Recuyell of the Histories of Troy* was translated at the command of Princess Margaret, and those who have visited the Huntington Library will recall the engraving bound in the Chatsworth-Huntington copy, showing Caxton on his knees, presenting the Troy Book to his patroness. In any event, for an improvised first attempt by a couple of tyros, to print a volume of seven hundred pages, and to do a thoroughly good job of it, at that, is by all counts a very respectable achievement. In truth it shows great ability bordering on genius.

Caxton printed two more books at Bruges in partnership with Mansion: *The Game and Play of Chesse*, and (in French) the *Cordiale*, the latter a rather grim religious work of the type popular in the world of the fifteenth century, but of no appeal whatsoever to the reading public of today. Shortly thereafter, probably sometime in

September 1476, Caxton removed to England, where he set up his press in the purlieus of Westminster Abbey. Whatever his reasons for leaving Bruges, he did not forget the Burgundian Court, for in Westminster he printed Lefevre's *History of Jason*, the *Cordiale* (in English), and the Burgundian romance of Paris and Vienne; he also completed the text, and printed the *Chronicles of England*, which gave the Burgundians good news coverage, and had a strong Yorkist slant when Edward IV came into the picture.

Mansion for his part continued to print in Bruges for eight more years, turning out twenty-five books (nearly all in French), which included the Troy Book, Boccaccio's *Fall of Princes* (with copper-plate engravings), and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (with woodcuts), all of great rarity.

We must now turn from bibliography to history, since Charles the Bold was beginning to display the signs of megalomania that were to be his ruin. In his fantasies he dreamed of re-creating the Kingdom of Arles, which, in the early Middle Ages, extended along the east bank of the Rhone from the French Riviera to Lorraine, incidentally including Burgundy. Such ambitions were warmly resented by Louis XI, who incited and supported all of Charles's enemies, and effectively bought off Charles's only ally, his brother-in-law, Edward IV of England. Nothing daunted, however, Charles launched his campaign against the Lorrainers in 1475, seizing Nancy. Thence he turned against the Swiss, who had been heavily subsidized by Louis, but in several pitched battles he was severely defeated. Then finally, in January 1477, he met the invincible Swiss pikemen for the last time before the walls of Nancy. The result was inevitable: Charles's army was destroyed, and he was slain. Duchess Mary was now an orphan, and Duchess Margaret a widow. Louis of France thereupon moved into Burgundy and took it over without a fight, and the Burgundian heritage was restricted to the Low Countries. At this juncture (actually in the summer of 1477) Mary married the Habsburg Emperor Maximilian, which explains how Holland and Flanders became Habsburg appendages. Mary thereupon moved with her new husband to Innsbruck, leaving her widowed step-mother, Margaret, in Bruges.

Meanwhile, through no fault of the House of Burgundy, the city of Bruges was itself beginning to decline. The Zwyn, the navigable river connecting Bruges with the North Sea, was silting up, while the new port of Antwerp was already showing signs of the prosperity that

was to make it supreme in Europe a century later. So it was that about 1480, Margaret moved from Bruges to Malines, a small town only ten miles south of Antwerp, but about fifty miles east of Bruges. Here she built a substantial residence, which the Habsburgs later called the Keizershof, destined to be the boyhood home of the Emperor Charles V. Margaret spent the remaining twenty-three years of her life in this house, nursing her hatreds and receiving Yorkist refugees with open arms — sometimes all too uncritically. For Margaret's hatreds were numerous, and tended to increase with time. Among them was King Louis of France, who had conspired against her husband, had brought about his death, and had then stolen his lands. Then there was her younger brother, Richard III, who usurped the English throne after the death of her favorite brother, Edward IV, and then murdered Edward's young sons (the little princes in the Tower). But the supreme target of all her hatred was the Welsh impostor, Henry Tudor, who liquidated all Yorkist rule, and then had the temerity to marry her own niece. The divers plots that enlivened the reign of Henry VII all emanated from Margaret's headquarters in Malines: the most celebrated being those of Lambert Simnel, Perkin Warbeck, the Scotch invasion of 1497, and the Cornish rising of the same time; Malines became a veritable hive of Yorkist conspirators. This state of affairs lasted until 1498, when Simnel was cooking Simnel cakes in the palace kitchen, when Warbeck was safely in the Tower of London, when the Cornish were defeated at Blackheath, and when the Scotch were turned back; then Margaret, with surprising humility and magnanimity, apologized to Henry. So she showed herself a lady, after all.

It was therefore because of Margaret's residence at Malines from 1480 onwards that English books, printed in the Low Countries towards the end of the fifteenth century, were published at Antwerp, and not at Bruges (there being no fifteenth century press at Malines). All this preamble may seem like the tail wagging the dog; but we can now get on with the central theme of the lecture: the five English incunabula printed in Flanders in the late 1480's and early 1490's.

To be brief: the books were printed by Gerard Leeu (or Leew, as his name is sometimes rendered), the proto-typographer of Gouda, between the years 1486 and 1493.

Gerard Leeu was presumably a Dutchman, who printed at Gouda from 1477 until 1484, during which time he produced sixty-five books. They were of all sorts and conditions: service books, religious texts,

fables, romances of chivalry, moral dialogues, and even law books. Two of Leeu's Gouda books merit special mention: they are Mandeville's Travels and Marco Polo's Wonders of the East; both of the same type and format, undated but probably issued as companions about 1483. These books were owned by Christopher Columbus, and are now still together in the Biblioteca Colombina in Seville. The edition of Marco Polo, in particular, has many interesting postils in Columbus' hand, so it is tempting to think that Leeu may have had some influence on the discovery of America.

In 1484 Leeu migrated to Antwerp; he was doubtless alive to the possibilities of this fast-growing seaport. Until his death in 1493 he was the leading printer in Antwerp, printing over a hundred and fifty books in hardly more than eight years. That is nearly twenty books a year, and a lot of them were big books, too; not a bad record for production in the days of manual technology. There were nine other printers in Antwerp during the last two decades of the fifteenth century, but Leeu was by all odds much the largest entrepreneur. As at Gouda, Leeu did a bit of everything, probably where the business was; but a number of his publications betray a certain nostalgic Burgundian feeling, no doubt due to the proximity of Duchess Margaret and her court at Malines. Thus our old friend Jason, with the Golden Fleece, appeared soon after Leeu was established in Antwerp, in a French edition; while the romance of Paris and Vienne was printed in no less than one French and three Flemish editions. It might be observed also that Leeu in these years put out two works of English interest, although in Latin: a Sarum Horae, and an edition of the *Directorium Sacerdotum*, a book of church feasts and commemorations, written by an early fifteenth century Bridgettine monk named Clement Maydeston. Since, however, neither of these books was in English, we need not concern ourselves further with them. Leeu also printed a book, the title of which suggests modern fashions for the fair sex: *Een geestelijke Mimebrief*. There is certainly no correlation between this letter of spiritual admonition and the tent-like skirts worn by Margaret and Mary in Memling's picture.

Leeu's five English books date from December 1486 to 1493, but a gap of four or five years intervenes. This suggests that one or more books in English of which no trace remains may have appeared during the interim. In any event, all the surviving volumes are of excessive rarity; four of the editions being known in a total of only six copies.

Curiously enough, Trinity College, Dublin, owns three of the books, all bound together in an early binding; possibly from Archbishop Ussher's Library. The extreme rarity of these Antwerp books might imply that no attempt was made to export the books into England; had Leeu played up the English market, the survival rate in British libraries (especially Oxford and Cambridge colleges) would most certainly have been much greater. It would appear, therefore, that Leeu printed mostly for the Yorkist refugees and hangers-on at Margaret's court, as well as for the numerous colony of English merchants in Flanders. In short, the books were expendable.

Leeu's first English work was Terence's *Vulgaria* (actually in both English and Latin): a small book of twenty leaves, printed in December 1486; now known from a unique copy in the University Library, Cambridge. The text is a collection of aphorisms for schoolboys, and appears to have been a reprint of the edition published by Machlinia in London in 1485. As such the book is not of any great importance, although the text was doubtless the forerunner of the more celebrated *Vulgaria*, written by William Horman, Provost of Eton, and printed by Pynson in 1519.

The second book, a small quarto of eighteen leaves known from a unique copy in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, was the *Dialogue of Solomon and Marcolphus*, printed about 1491, and containing several crude woodcuts. As the title implies, the text is a moral dialogue between King Solomon and a stooge. Although ten or a dozen editions of this work were printed on the Continent during the fifteenth century, this was the only edition in English. It is therefore an original translation; certainly the translator's command of the English language seems quite bizarre, even by early Tudor standards, whereas Leeu's other English books are letter-perfect.

Leeu's third book really amounted to something. It is the old familiar Lefevre *Jason*, he of the Golden Fleece, closely reprinted from Caxton's edition of 1477: a very respectable tome of ninety-eight leaves, dated June 1492. Three copies survive: Chatsworth (now British Museum); University Library, Cambridge; and Trinity College, Dublin. It was obviously printed with a view towards the Yorkist-Burgundian court at Malines.

The next book, also dated June 1492 (Leeu must have been a pretty sharp operator), was the *Romance of Paris and Vienne*. This sounds like a Tale of Two Cities, but it is in effect a love story that goes back

to the Kingdom of Arles in the early Middle Ages, when the daughter of the ruler of Dauphiny had an affair with a young Frenchman named Paris. After divers misadventures, the pair eventually got married, and presumably lived happily ever after. Since Burgundy was at one time associated with Dauphiny, this was another of these nostalgic Burgundian romances. The heroine's name still survives in the town of Vienne, known to gourmets for the famous restaurant, the Hotel des Pyramides, and for the equally famous wine, Chateau Grillet, so rare that it is not sold elsewhere. The book is a pleasant volume of forty leaves, reprinted from Caxton's edition of 1485: a single copy is known, in Trinity College, Dublin. Not much research has been done on the text, but an eighteenth century Jesuit gave the book his benediction in no uncertain terms, when he wrote "As for children, it would be impossible to find a work more fitted to imbue the mind with correct taste and elegance of style; to influence their characters by the wisdom of its reflections; or to forearm their hearts against the assaults of passion, which blindly precipitate the young into the abysses of misery." How smug and self-righteous can you be?

This brings us to the last of Leeu's English books: *The Chronicles of England*. This was a very substantial volume of a hundred and eighty leaves, based on Caxton's Chronicle (printed in 1480, and again in 1482), having quite a Yorkist slant for recent history — all in keeping with the Court of Duchess Margaret. It was Leeu's last book, printed sometime in 1493; and it was during the printing that a quarrel arose between Leeu and one of his workmen, leading to the untimely death of the master, which is lamented in the colophon. This is the only book of the series that might be called common; there are perhaps ten copies known: British Museum; Cambridge; Rylands in Manchester; Peterborough Cathedral; Ripon Cathedral; the ubiquitous Trinity, Dublin; and strangely a copy in the Magliabeccian Library in Florence. That leaves three copies for America: Pierpont Morgan, Newberry in Chicago (the Silver copy), and the copy shown herewith. This last was purchased from Bernard Quaritch a century ago by Lord Peckover, and was inherited by Lord Peckover's grandson, my distant English kinsman Alec Penrose (d. 1950), Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, Squire of Bradenham Hall, High Sheriff of Norfolk, restorer of the fifteenth-century Guildhall at King's Lynn, creator of the King's Lynn Festival, and a distinguished man-of-letters, withal.

So perhaps it is fitting to end my talk by reading the colophon of

Leeu's edition of *The Chronicles of England* from the original in the Penrose-Penrose copy: "Here ben endyd the Cronycles of the Reame of Englond with their apperteignaunces. Enprẽtyd In the Duchye of Braband in the towne of Andewarpe In the yere of owr lord MCCCCXCIII. By maistir Gerard de leew, a man of grete wysedom in all maner of kũnyng: whych nowe is come from lyfe unto the deth, whych is grete harme for many a poure man. On whos sowle god almyghty for hys hygh grace haue mercy. AMEN."