

The project *For Our Times Rewritten* explores how stories from the Middle Ages were brought back to life on stage in the Netherlands and Flanders during the first half of the 20th century. These adaptations (plays, operas, and oratorios) are not just retellings of old tales. They are creative reinterpretations, shaped by the concerns, ideologies, and artistic movements of the time. The project investigates how these modern versions of medieval stories reflect the societies in which they were made, what changes were introduced to the original texts, and why.

Many people assume that medieval literature belongs only in dusty books or in academic research. But for centuries, artists and audiences have turned back to these stories, not simply to preserve them, but to make them meaningful again. This was especially true in the 19th century, but persisted still in the 20th century a time of great upheaval, with two world wars, major shifts in politics and religion, and dramatic changes in theatre and music. In this context, the Middle Ages offered a kind of mirror—an imaginative space where contemporary questions about identity, faith, justice, and art could be explored.

The project focuses on a set of at least 34 adaptations of medieval Dutch literature written and performed between 1900 and 1945. These include new versions of well-known stories like *Beatrijs* and *Van den vos Reynaerde* (a satirical tale about a cunning fox), as well as lesser-known works like *Floris ende Blancefloer*, *Sente Servas* or *Elckerlijc*. Some of these adaptations were created for local stages, others as grand national or religious spectacles. What unites them is their use of the medieval past to speak to modern audiences, whether by simplifying religious themes, promoting nationalist ideas, or introducing bold new artistic techniques.

The project involves both detailed literary analysis and historical research. It compares medieval texts with their modern adaptations to understand what was changed, added, or removed. It also examines the life stories of the authors and composers who created these adaptations, the political or religious movements they were involved in, and how their work was received by the public. For example, one adaptation of the miracle play *Mariken van Nieumeghen* in the 1930s was closely linked to Flemish nationalism and the Catholic Church, while an opera based on *The song of Lord Halewijn* emphasised socialist ideals. Another adaptation, written during the First World War, used the story of Saint Servatius to send a message of peace.

One of the key ideas behind this research is that every adaptation is a reflection of its time. Medieval stories become a lens through which artists and audiences explore the present. Some used these stories to reinforce traditional values. Others used them to challenge the status quo or imagine new possibilities. The Middle Ages, in these performances, were not a fixed historical period but a flexible cultural resource, constantly being reshaped, reimagined, and rewritten.

Although a few of these adaptations have been studied before, many remain unknown, even to experts. That's why this project is so important. It recovers a hidden part of cultural history and shows how deeply the Middle Ages are woven into modern life, not just in museums or history books, but in the living arts. It also helps us understand how people in the past used stories to make sense of their world, just as we do today.

The project's results will include academic articles, conference presentations, and a public database of these adaptations, accessible online through a digital library (DLBT). This will make it easier for future researchers, students, and culture lovers to discover and explore this fascinating part of literary history. The project will also shed new light on how literature, music, and theatre interact with politics, religion, and identity – issues that are as relevant now as they were a hundred years ago.