



# Journal of European Periodical Studies

*an online journal by ESPRit, European Society for Periodical Research*

## ‘Vous êtes un fanatique, oui — j’en suis un aussi’: The Position of Flanders within the Context of Internationalization in Post-War Belgium: The Case of *L’Art Libre* (1919–22)

Francis Mus

*Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 3.2 (Winter 2018)

ISSN 2506-6587

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Website: [ojs.ugent.be/jeps](https://ojs.ugent.be/jeps)

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To cite this article: Francis Mus, “‘Vous êtes un fanatique, oui — j’en suis un aussi’:  
The Position of Flanders within the Context of Internationalization  
in Post-War Belgium: The Case of *L’Art Libre* (1919–22)”, *Journal of  
European Periodical Studies*, 3.2 (Winter 2018), 38–51

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# ‘Vous êtes un fanatique, oui — j’en suis un aussi’: The Position of Flanders within the Context of Internationalization in Post-War Belgium: The Case of *L’Art Libre* (1919–22)<sup>1</sup>

FRANCIS MUS

University of Leuven and University of Liège

[francis.mus@uliege.be](mailto:francis.mus@uliege.be)

## ABSTRACT

The shock of the First World War resulted in a range of initiatives that, on the artistic level, radically called into question a number of fundamental concepts. While the function of new art was a topic that was discussed in different European countries, the international orientation of each national art differed from country to country. In Belgium, this was a complex issue. Notions such as ‘literature’ and especially ‘internationalism’ became the subject of a harsh battle for definition that was carried out in several literary and artistic magazines. In this article, I look at how these terms were defined within the artistic group surrounding the Brussels magazine *L’Art libre* (1919–22). I will give a general definition of internationalism in order to then elaborate the extent to which it may come into conflict with a focus on local, Flemish reality. As a social entity, Flanders did indeed fit into the internationalist program to recognize suppressed nations. Yet as an artistic entity, its existence was more problematically situated within a tendency for ever-increasing artistic internationalization. My analysis will show a number of discursive and argumentative strategies used by writers and critics in order to legitimate the idea of ‘Flanders’, both as a literary and as a social entity.

## KEYWORDS

Literary magazines, avant-garde, Paul Colin, *L’Art libre*, Flemish literature, Belgian literature

1 Special thanks to Dirk De Geest, Sjoerd van Faassen, and Erik Spinoy for their valuable comments and suggestions.

## Introduction

‘Our generation is ridiculous and the future historian will be embarrassed to depict the shock that uproots us all’.<sup>2</sup> These are the words of Willy Koninckx, collaborator on the Antwerp avant-garde magazine *Ça Ira!* in 1920. The deep wounds left by the First World War in Belgium led to a material as well as symbolic reconstruction. The role of art was also radically called into question. To what extent should it be committed to social causes? To what extent should it be nationally or internationally oriented? This last question in particular had far-reaching consequences. Indeed, new international (mainly European) relations had great repercussions on (intra)national relations. Since its independence, Belgium had assumed its own (artistic) identity by means of what Jean-Marie Klinkenberg has called the ‘mythe nordique’ [Nordic myth]: a unique hybrid of Germanic and Romance components, used as a strategy by francophone Belgian writers to distinguish themselves from the Parisian literary centre.<sup>3</sup> In literature, this took the shape of a ‘Flemish’ imagination, written in French and including the works of Rodenbach, Maeterlinck, Verhaeren, etc. The First World War dashed this identity to smithereens:

The act of the German invasion itself was perceived as a deep betrayal, coming from a German culture that had long been idealized, and forced this Belgian model to be brutally amputated from its Germanic component, thus provoking a traumatic loss of identity, which no one wanted.<sup>4</sup>

In short, the changing international power relationships had an unwanted but direct repercussion on national representation and identity. What is more, due to its imaginary and real international orientation — the Nordic myth and the editorial network of both Dutch-language and Francophone writers situated abroad — the Belgian literary community was very dependent on foreign contacts. Many avant-garde movements *explicitly* considered the ideal of international openness to be of paramount importance. However, alternative positions were also possible. Paul Aron explains:

From the Francophone side, the entire construct of identity, that of the ‘Flemish’, which was recognized and admired in Paris, was destabilized and this new configuration provoked a series of very different reactions, ranging from a retreat into regionalism to the negation of any national references.<sup>5</sup>

The shock of the First World War resulted in a range of initiatives that, even on the artistic level, radically called into question many fundamental convictions. Whereas the function of new art was a topic discussed in various European countries, the international

2 ‘Notre génération est ridicule et l’historien futur sera embarrassé de dépeindre le choc qui nous dérouté’. Willy Koninckx, ‘En marge du Gradus ad Parnassum’, *Ça Ira!*, no. 1 (1920), 6–10 (p. 8).

3 Jean-Marie Klinkenberg, ‘La production littéraire en Belgique francophone: Esquisse d’une sociologie historique’, *Littérature*, no. 44 (1981), 33–50 (p. 43).

4 ‘L’acte de l’invasion allemande lui-même est ressenti comme une trahison profonde, venant d’une culture allemande qu’on a depuis longtemps idéalisée, et fait en sorte que ce modèle belge se retrouve brutalement amputé de sa composante germanique, provoquant par là une perte d’identité traumatisante dont personne ne voulait’. Hubert Roland, ‘La Belgique littéraire et l’expressionnisme: Élément constituant ou agent de transformation?’, in *L’expressionnisme comme phénomène international*, ed. by Cécile Millot and Isabelle Krzykowski (Paris: L’improviste, 2007), pp. 133–48 (p. 134).

5 ‘Du côté francophone [...], c’est toute une construction identitaire, celle des “Flamands” reconnus et admirés à Paris, qui est ébranlée, et cette nouvelle donne provoque une série de réactions en sens divers, qui iront du repli régionaliste à la négation de toute référence nationale’. Paul Aron, ‘Des années folles à la drôle de guerre’, in *Littératures belges de langue française: Histoires et perspectives (1830–2000)*, ed. by Christian Berg and Pierre Halen (Bruxelles: Le Cri, 2000), pp. 113–73 (p. 115).

orientation of each nation’s art varied from country to country. In Belgium, this was a complex issue. In addition to the reasons mentioned above, there were other social changes that had repercussions for this matter: the First World War had painfully revealed the contrast between the French-speaking elite and the Flemish population. Since the end of the war, an image circulated that would never disappear: a Flemish soldier throwing himself into the battle as a martyr without having understood the orders of the French-speaking officers. In *La Drogue*, one of the first magazines appearing after the war, this image is fiercely evoked: ‘Is it fair that the majority of our heroes of Wulpen and Ramscapelle, those who gloriously defied the gunfire of the emperor, did not understand their officers?’<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the range of activity of the Flemish Movement, which had existed since the nineteenth century, broadened from the cultural to the political terrain. The evolution of this social struggle appears, amongst other places, in the quick succession of language laws during the interwar period.<sup>7</sup>

The consequence of all this was that notions such as ‘literature’ and especially ‘internationalism’ became the subject of a harsh battle for definition that was carried out in many literary and artistic magazines. Even the periodicals that wanted to keep their distance from this discussion were compelled to make their neutral position known. *Le Disque Vert*, one of the most influential Belgian magazines from the interwar period, articulated this clearly in its very first issue: ‘we are not a national magazine, nor binational nor even international’.<sup>8</sup> However, it was not always clear what was really at stake in this debate: the term ‘international orientation’ in the arts could signal many things and was often inextricably bound up with an ‘internationalist’ social commitment.

In what follows, I want to look into how these terms were defined within one artistic group: the Brussels magazine *L’Art libre* (1919–22). In 1920, Paul Colin, the editor-in-chief, underscores the importance of the international outlook of the magazine: ‘a staff of collaborators that reunites the most important independent writers from Western Europe has assured this magazine very quickly a widespread and considerable influence’.<sup>9</sup> In the years after the war, many artistic initiatives were launched — most often through magazines led by (very) young artists. Colin held an intermediary position: although he was only twenty-four in 1919, he was known as a prolific writer in domestic and foreign periodicals and asserted his influence through his position. In this regard, Roger Avermaete, the editor-in-chief of *Lumière* (an Antwerp magazine founded at the same time) describes *L’Art libre* as follows:

a critical weekly magazine, with a staff of collaborators with a European outlook. Despite the title, the magazine was much more socially than artistically oriented, and it made a commanding impression on us youngsters [...]. Towards *Lumière*,

6 ‘Est-il équitable que la plupart de nos héros de Wulpen et de Ramscapelle, de ceux qui bravèrent glorieusement la mitraille de l’empereur, ne comprenaient pas leurs officiers?’ Lotharry, ‘La question flamande: Notre point de vue’, *La Drogue* (1919), p. 1.

7 For more information, see Reine Meylaerts, *L’aventure flamande de la Revue Belge: Langues, littératures et cultures dans l’entre-deux-guerres* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2004).

8 ‘nous ne sommes pas une revue nationale, ni binationale, ni même internationale’. *Le Disque Vert*, 1.1 (1921).

9 ‘Een staf van medewerkers, die de belangrijkste onafhankelijke schrijvers van West-Europa vereenigt, heeft aan dit tijdschrift snel een groote verspreiding en aanzienlijken invloed verzekerd.’ Dirk Coster, Paul Colin, Friedrich-Markus Huebner, Douglas Goldring, and Romano Guarnieri, *De Nieuwe Europeesche geest in kunst en letteren* (Arnhem: Van Loghum Slaterus, 1920), p. 84.

he [Colin] took a kind attitude. Something like the protective sympathy of an elder brother.<sup>10</sup>

Colin was an important figure in the interwar period, who is almost entirely forgotten today. Although he was outspoken about his left-wing opinions in the years immediately after the war, he would gravitate more and more towards extreme-right convictions in the 1930s. In 1943, this cost him his life and, in the decades afterwards, also his reputation. The influential cultural figure Robert Poulet depicted him in 1976 as a ‘monster’.<sup>11</sup> Although his impact on Belgian literature should not be overrated, Colin did play an important role for a limited period and was well-recognized by the literary establishment. In 1921, for example, he received the Grand Prix Quinquennal de Littérature. He also developed an extensive international network and intervened frequently in political and artistic debates. He did this through several channels: as the founder of magazines and newspapers — besides *L’Art libre* also *Europe* (editor-in-chief from 1922 until 1924), *Cassandre* (1934–44), *Le nouveau journal* (1940–44), as a collaborator with numerous other magazines, as a speaker (during the period of *L’Art libre*, he frequently travelled to the Netherlands or Germany), and as a novelist and author of a number of monographs.

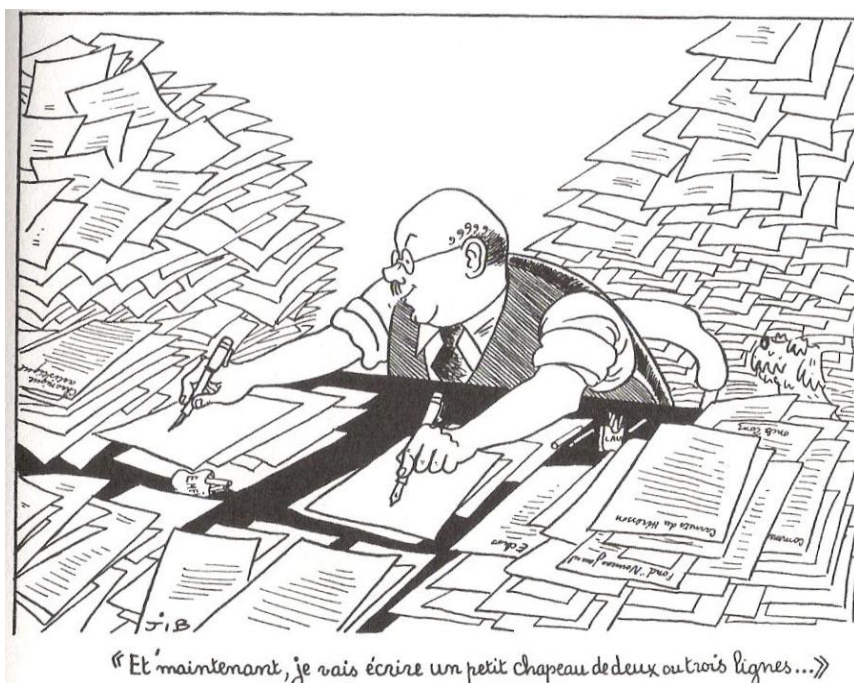


Fig. 1 Cartoon of Paul Colin, *Le nouveau journal* (31 August 1943)

Whether, how, and to what extent the periodical can be considered a ‘European space’ in this post-war context is a very difficult question, complicated by the various initiatives of the time and the wealth of possible interpretations of the notion of ‘European space’. The plea for ‘more Europe’, for instance, is made under other epithets (internationalism, universalism, cosmopolitanism), which sound more ambitious but

10 ‘een kritisch weekblad, met een staf medewerkers van Europees formaat. Ondanks de titel, was het blad veel meer sociaal dan artistiek getint, en het maakte op ons, jongeren, een imponerende indruk [...]. Tegenover *Lumière* nam hij een welwillende houding aan. Zoiets als de beschermende sympathie van een oudere broer’. Roger Avermaete, *Herinneringen uit het kunstleven 1918–1940: Het avontuur van de ‘Lumière’-groep* (Brussels: Manteau, 1952), p. 60.

11 Robert Poulet, *Ce n’est pas une vie* (Paris: Denoël, 1976), p. 152.

which de facto rarely exceed the European perspective. The best example of such a semantic confusion is probably the leading French periodical *Europe*, in which the terms Europeanism and internationalism were ubiquitous but never univocally defined. *Europe* was founded in 1922 and was described in the last issue of *L'Art libre* (June 1922) as its official successor. The magazine was also the 'emanation'<sup>12</sup> of the left-wing publishing house Rieder, which was established in 1913 and, in order to 'conform to the internationalist ideal of the author of *Au-dessus de la mêlée* [*Above the Battle*; Romain Rolland], created two main collections: *Les prosateurs étrangers modernes* [*Modern Foreign Prose Writers*] and *Les prosateurs français contemporains* [*Contemporary French Prose Writers*].<sup>13</sup> Together with René Arcos, Colin was one of the editors-in-chief.

In *L'Art libre*, a number of structural Belgian tendencies became visible in a magnified way.

- a) The dominant artistic model in the short period of 1919–22 was one of an outspoken social commitment to the arts<sup>14</sup>, both in Francophone and Dutch-speaking Belgium. *L'Art libre* is a clear example of this entanglement between art and politics. This commitment could be both internationally oriented (solidarity with oppressed nations — Ireland, Catalonia, etc.) and nationally oriented (Flanders). The central question is then in what way an (intra)national commitment can be combined with an international artistic orientation in *L'Art libre*. In the numerous Francophone and Dutch-language magazines, many different answers were formulated to this question.
- b) *L'Art libre* was one of the major Belgian representatives of the Clarté movement, which was founded in France during the war by Paul Vaillant Couturier, René Lefebvre, and Henri Barbusse. Within this movement one can clearly notice the semantic vagueness regarding internationalization, given the fact that the general ideal of 'international openness' was constantly connected with a specific (Marxist) 'internationalist' ideal. Although Clarté was founded in France, it had a great international following for a number of years: in Belgium, there were Clarté groups in Brussels, Antwerp, Aalst, Ghent, Mechelen, Ostend, and Liège.
- c) *L'Art libre* was one of the periodicals that reported extensively on foreign art. While this was a tendency shared by many periodicals, *L'Art libre* stood out from the rest. Through its French Clarté connections, the editorial board of *L'Art libre* was in close contact with many other European magazines, although one should add that the interest in international art was real, but rather selective. Many of the writers published in the collection *Les prosateurs étrangers modernes* were also published and discussed in *L'Art libre*.

Below, I will give a general definition of internationalism in order to then elaborate on the extent to which it may come into conflict with a focus on the local, Flemish reality, both literary and social.

12 Jean Muno, 'L'esprit Rieder dans le roman belge de l'entre-deux-guerres', in *Études de Littérature française de Belgique*, ed. by Michel Otten (Brussels: Jacques Antoine), p. 315.

13 'Conformément à l'idéal internationaliste de l'auteur de *Au-dessus de la mêlée*, deux collections principales sont créées: *Les prosateurs étrangers modernes* et *Les prosateurs français contemporains*'. Muno, p. 315

14 Paul Aron, *La littérature prolétarienne en Belgique francophone depuis 1900* (Bruxelles: Éditions Labor, 2006), 41.

## Internationalism in *L'Art libre*: A Preliminary Definition

The collaborators of *L'Art libre* were mainly interested in literature, painting, and politics. Because of the large number of critical articles written by Colin (sometimes under a pseudonym), and his important editorial position as editor-in-chief, he clearly left his mark on the magazine. For all these reasons, the brief survey of the critical discourse of Colin below can be considered representative of the entire magazine.

Colin expresses his poetical and political convictions without systematically constructing his argument on theoretical grounds. The frequent use of superlatives results in a Manichean discourse in which 'good' works are separated from the 'bad' ones. Others notice this too. For instance, a collaborator of the Dutch newspaper *NRC* overtly wonders whether 'one can be more doctrinal than Mr. Colin'?<sup>15</sup> The same goes for Duco Perkens (a pseudonym of Edgar du Perron), who describes Colin in similar terms:

Mr. Paul Colin, who has been completely obsessed with the *groupe unanimiste*, with whom he appears to be good friends, and who, by the way, seems to know two kinds of writers: those writing in favour of and those writing against the war. The first ones do not have any talent, the others do. Apollinaire, he said, had some talent, especially as the author of the *Calligrammes* (as a kind of war, i.e. anti-war literature, I guess); where, in five or six short paragraphs, he briefly discusses the true moderns, the true pioneers of the truly new, he exhibits an insight known in French as: *De la crétinerie, très pure*.<sup>16</sup>

The systematic linking of artistic practice to social (anti-war) commitment considerably determined the significance of the concept of 'internationalism'.

To begin with, Colin often mobilizes the topos of Belgium as 'a crossroads of the Occident' (in 1933 he published a monograph with the same title): 'geography and history have made our country a land predestined to internationalism'.<sup>17</sup> Or: 'Belgium should remain the classic land of internationalism and antimilitarism that it was before the war'.<sup>18</sup> Because of the pacifist discourse of *L'Art libre* — in which Germany had its right to exist, whereas for obvious reasons the image of Germany was much more problematic in the broader social discourse — the Nordic myth construction remains

15 'kan men méér doctrinair zijn dan de heer Colin'. 'Letterkundige kroniek: "De nieuwe Europeesche geest"', *NRC* (29 August 1920). The quote is taken from a review of *De nieuwe Europeesche geest in kunst en letteren* (ed. by Huebner), for which several authors wrote a chapter with a survey of their national literature: French (Colin), German (Huebner), English (Goldring), Italian (Guarnieri), and Dutch (Coster). Sjoerd van Faassen has shown that not only Colin but also other authors, such as Coster, held similar 'doctrinal' ideas. See 'Dirk Coster en *De nieuwe Europeesche geest in kunst en letteren*', *Eigenbouwer*, no. 4 (2015), 26–45.

16 'De heer Paul Colin, die zich volgekomen blind gestaard heeft op de naar 't schijnt met hem bevriende *groupe unanimiste* en overigens twee soorten schrijvers schijnt te kennen: die vóór en tegen de oorlog schrijven. De eersten hebben geen talent, de anderen wel. Apollinaire had, zegt hij, ook wel talent, vooral als dichter der *Calligrammes* (als een soort oorlogs-, d.i. anti-oorlogsliteratuur zeker); waar hij dan, in vijf of zes korte alinea's de werkelijk-modernen, de werkelijke pioniers van het werkelijk-nieuw bespreekt geeft hij blijk van een inzicht, in het Frans aldus te kenmerken: *De la crétinerie, très pure*'. D. P. [Duco Perkens, pseudonym for E. du Perron], 'Boekbespreking: Nieuwe geluiden, bijeengebracht en ingeleid door Dirk Coster (2e vermeerdeerde druk), van Loghum Slaterus, Arnhem; De Sikkel, Antwerpen', *De Drieboek* (September 1925).

17 'La géographie et l'histoire ont fait de notre pays une terre prédestinée d'internationalisme'. Paul Colin, 'Fin d'année', *L'Art libre*, no. 19 (1919), p. 211.

18 '[La Belgique] devrait demeure[r] la terre classique d'internationalisme et d'anti-militarisme qu'elle était avant la guerre'. Paul Colin, 'Appel pour Clarté', *Lumière*, no. 4 (1919), p. 49.

unaltered. Colin, however, does not take for granted the ‘âme belge’ [Belgian soul] — seen as a harmonious fusion — but rather sees it as a juxtaposition of two different ‘races’.<sup>19</sup>

For Colin, the concrete meaning of this international commitment is, first of all, a mentality of openness towards other cultures which manifests itself, on the one hand, in giving regular attention to foreign literature in periodicals and, on the other, in translating foreign writers. At the end of the first working year of his magazine, the editor-in-chief congratulated himself by referring to the ‘numerous, important and international’<sup>20</sup> collaborations that he has managed to achieve.

What does such an openness mean for one’s own identity? Two options seem possible, with intermediate variants: on the one hand, a solidarity between several nations without modifying one’s own national culture; on the other hand, a dissolution of national borders, leading to internationalism or even to supranationalism. In *L’Art libre*, the two interpretations coexist. Colin appeals to a pre-war tradition of pacifism and antimilitarism in which the idea of the ‘nation’ was replaced by the supranational idea of ‘humanity’. The ‘Déclaration de l’indépendance de l’esprit’, formulated in 1919 by Romain Rolland and co-signed by several collaborators of *L’Art libre*, best summarizes this position: ‘We don’t know the peoples. We know the People — unique, universal — the People who suffer, who struggle, who fall and rise [...]’.<sup>21</sup> In contradiction to this, Colin (along with several editors) often makes use of an essentialist terminology (soul, spirit, essence, genius, race, etc.) to indicate the singularity of each national literature.

Is it possible to reconcile these two perspectives — internationalist openness and national-essentialist closedness? A possible answer would be that they continue to exist, but in a hierarchic relationship. This was the conclusion of Jules Romains, a prominent figure of the *groupe unanimiste* whom Colin expressed admiration for in his magazine. For Romains, the European homogeneity eclipses the national heterogeneity:

Any man who has travelled in Europe, who has crossed its interior borders many times, has only to ask himself, to evoke his impressions. Hasn’t he deeply felt the unity of Europe? Hasn’t he felt that the various countries that compose Europe are nothing but provinces, each of them rich and proud, without a doubt, proud of their traditions, of their habits, of their historical past and longing to safeguard their adornment, but, nevertheless, they are still provinces, which is to say, fragments of a motherland.<sup>22</sup>

19 Although the notion of ‘race’ did not have the negative connotation that it has today, the essentialist nature of this notion did provoke some criticism by other authors. Clément Pansaers, for instance, expressed his disdain even during the war. He considered himself to be a ‘a fellow citizen of anything living in the big hotel of the Universe’ [‘concitoyen de tout ce qui habite le grand hôtel de L’Univers’] and concludes: ‘we dismiss the word “race” because we join Nicolai in saying that this word makes no sense for Europe’ [‘Nous excluons le vocable “race” puisque nous nous rallions à Nicolai, en disant que ce mot n’a pas de sens pour l’Europe’]. In Dutch-speaking circles too, different responses can be heard: in his *Kritiek der Vlaamsche Beweging* — from 1896! — August Vermeylen was very sceptical: ‘I will not enjoy myself until I have freed myself from any belief in abstractions’ [‘Ik zal niet vroeger in vreugde genieten dan als ik mij van alle geloof in abstracties bevrijd’].

20 Colin, ‘Fin d’année’, p. 211.

21 ‘Nous ne connaissons pas les peuples. Nous connaissons le Peuple, — unique, universel, — le Peuple qui souffre, qui lutte, qui tombe et qui se relève [...]’.

22 ‘Tout homme qui a voyagé en Europe, qui en a franchi maintes fois les frontières intérieures, n’a qu’à s’interroger, qu’à évoquer ses impressions. N’a-t-il pas senti profondément l’unité de l’Europe ? N’a-t-il pas senti que les divers pays qui la composent ne sont désormais que des provinces, chacune riche et fière, sans doute, de ses traditions, de ses coutumes, de son passé historique, et désireuse à bon droit d’en garder la parure, mais des provinces, néanmoins, c’est-à-dire des fragments d’une Patrie’. Jules Romains, quoted in Koenraad Geldof, *Kritische profielen: Opstellen over politieke filosofie, esthetiek en (Franse) literatuur* (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), p. 221.



The (im)possibility of reconciling the two perspectives arises clearly in the discussion of Flemish literature. To what extent can the Flemish identity — both from a social and an artistic viewpoint — be combined with the international ideal?

### **The Problematic Relationship between Internationalism and the Emphasis on Flanders in *L'Art libre***

The attention to foreign literatures in *L'Art libre* is extensive but selective. France is ubiquitous and Francophone literature from Belgium, largely dependent on the French (Parisian) editorial institutions, is also frequently featured.<sup>23</sup> Other foreign literatures are covered too: when it comes to separate submissions, *L'Art libre* pays much attention to English (36 articles) and German (25) literature, and to a lesser extent, to Belgian (1), Flemish (11), Italian (2), Dutch (9), Russian (7), Swiss (3) and Czech (2) literature.

Regarding Dutch-language literature, a distinction is systematically made, in terms of titles and sections, between Flemish and Dutch literature. This is the case for three different series: a short diptych about the 'dynamisme flamand' [Flemish dynamism] (published in 1919), a second group of articles (eight contributions, published between August 1921 and May 1922) about Flemish literature and a third, smaller series (three contributions, published between July and December 1919) in which the Dutch movement *De Stijl* is discussed. Below I will deal with the first two series, in which Flanders is the main subject and both authors are Flemings.

#### *Victor Brunclair*

It was likely no coincidence that Brunclair produced the first truly Flemish reports in *L'Art libre*: not only was he an active player in the literary field (he debuted in the magazine *De Goedendag* in 1915 and became cofounder of the magazine *Ruimte* [*Space*] in 1919), but he also acted as secretary of the Antwerp Clarté group. In this capacity, he wrote several contributions for smaller, Flemish (Dutch language) Clarté magazines, such as *Opstanding*. This magazine can be seen as the Flemish counterpart of *L'Art libre*: written in Dutch, published in Brussels and recognized as the official 'Orgaan der Vlaamsche Clarté-groepen' [Organ of the Flemish Clarté groups]. Brunclair here opens the discussion of internationalism and maintains the Clarté definition of internationalism by opposing it to narrow nationalism. At the same time, he distinguishes it from cosmopolitanism, in which, according to Brunclair, all national particularisms are undeservedly denied:

Clarté, now, limits its functioning by the establishment of a supra-state, an international league of the spirit, which aims to embrace all ethnic unities and makes room for the greatest cultural multiformity. This latter guarantee can only lead to the unlimited development of every national cultural potential, and at once all cosmopolites will be eliminated, who, being averse to every nationalism, indicate the process this way: man-world. World citizenship can only be achieved through

23 The privileged relation with France is so ubiquitous that Colin is presented as a Frenchman by the Dutch critic Coster in *De Nieuwe Europeesche geest in kunst en letteren*, p. 5. The error is repeated in Frits Boterman and Marianne Vogel, *Nederland en Duitsland in het interbellum* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2003), p. 40, whereas in the September 1925 issue of the magazine *De Driehoek*, D. P. removes the source of misunderstanding. He calls Colin 'een voor Fransman doorgaande Belg' [a Belgian who passes as a Frenchman].

national cultural action. Where this real foundation is lacking, independence from property is lost and the psychic form of the people is disfigured.<sup>24</sup>

With this, Brunclair formulates an opinion that is characteristic for many Flemish writers of that time and which can be read as an implicit answer to a proposition formulated by August Vermeylen in two influential essays about the Flemish (and European) Movement, published respectively in 1895 (*Kritiek der Vlaamsche Beweging*) and 1900 (*Vlaamsche en Europeesche Beweging*). Regarding this, Matthijs De Ridder notes:

[t]he idea of becoming something that superseded the Flemish identity was revolutionary enough to provoke furious reactions. [...] And ever since, they [Vermeylen and his colleagues] have been known as posh cosmopolitans with no apparent bond with Flanders<sup>25</sup>.

In *L'Art libre*, Brunclair tones down this Flemish dimension and adopts Colin's typical binary discourse, in which the 'good' works are distinguished from the 'bad' ones. He puts the humanitarian interpretation of expressionism first, and contrasts it with both the hermetic individualism of impressionism and with the obscure experiments of the avant-garde. Paul Van Ostaijen, author of *Music-Hall* (1916) and *Het Sienjaal* (1918), is cited as an example. At that time Van Ostaijen was in Berlin, where in November 1918 he wrote his *Bezette Stad* (published in 1921). Although the first two works bear the hallmarks of expressionism, the Dadaist influence becomes very clear in *Bezette Stad*. This influence, which seemed to obscure the visible social commitment of the writer, misses the mark with Brunclair: 'the effort towards synthesis and condensation is sometimes carried too far'<sup>26</sup>, he writes about *Het Sienjaal*. Later on, a review appears of *Bezette Stad* in which a similar judgement is passed: 'I give up understanding either its rhythm or its spirit'.<sup>27</sup> According to Vandenbroucke, Brunclair introduced Van Ostaijen for the very first time to a Belgian francophone readership.<sup>28</sup>

The ambiguous meaning of the notion of internationalism allowed Brunclair to adapt his discourse to the dominant ideas of each medium for which he writes: in Flemish magazines, the signifier 'Flanders' gets more visibility than in *L'Art libre*, where Brunclair inserts his argumentation in the dominant discourse of humanitarian expressionism. These contributions by Brunclair show a certain tendency, however, due

24 'Clarté nu, beperkt zijn werking bij de instelling van een supra-staatsche, internationale geestesliga, die alle ethnische eenheden wil omvatten en plaats inruimt voor de grootste kultureele veelvormigheid. Deze laatste waarborg kan slechts de onbelemmerde ontplooiing van alle nationale kultuurpotentie bevorderen, en meteen zijn de kosmopolieten uitgeschakeld, die wars van alle nationalisme het processus aldus aangeven: mensch-wereld. Het wereldburgerschap is slechts te bereiken via nationale kultuuractie. Waar deze reële [sic] basis ontbreekt, wordt de eigendommelijke zelfstandigheid ingeboet, de psychische volksgestalte misvormd'. Victor Brunclair, 'Rondom Clarté', *Opstanding*, nos 2-3 (1920), p. 7.

25 Matthijs de Ridder, 'Europeanism in One Country: August Vermeylen, Paul van Ostaijen, and the International Approach to Nationalism', in *Re-Thinking Europe: Literature and (Trans)National Identity*, ed. by Nele Bemong, Mirjam Truwant, and Pieter Vermeulen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), pp. 21-32 (p. 25).

26 'l'effort vers la synthèse et la condensation est parfois poussé à l'extrême'. Victor Brunclair, 'Initiation au dynamisme flamand: II', *L'Art libre*, no. 10 (1919), p. 109.

27 'je me résigne à comprendre ni le rythme ni l'esprit'. B. M., 'Bezette Stad (P. van Ostaijen)', *L'Art libre*, no. 5 (1921), p. 81.

28 Dieter Vandenbroucke, *Dansen op een vulkaan: Victor J. Brunclair: Schrijver in een bewogen tijd* (Antwerp: De Bezige Bij, 2013), p. 155. Vandenbroucke also notes that Brunclair's ideas about internationalism were largely influenced by Van Ostaijen: 'real world citizenship could only be achieved through national cultural action' ['echt wereldburgerschap [viel] pas te bereiken [...] via nationale cultuuractie']. Vandenbroucke, p. 91.

to his limited number of articles for *L'Art libre*, they are less important than the series of works by Eugène De Bock.

### *Eugène De Bock*

Unlike Brunclair, who wrote his contributions specifically for each issue, the series of articles by Eugène De Bock is a translation of an existing work, *Beknopt overzicht van de Vlaamsche letterkunde, hoofdzakelijk in de 19e eeuw* [*Brief Survey of Flemish Literature, Mainly of the Nineteenth Century*] (1921).<sup>29</sup> Hence the argumentative strategies with which the Flanders/internationalism tension is treated are situated not so much on the level of the (source) text but (a) in the preliminary choice of the editorial board to give the floor to De Bock in *L'Art libre* and (b) on the level of the shifts between source text and translation (made, in fact, by Colin himself).

The same reasoning behind featuring De Bock in *L'Art libre* can be found in the editorial decision to promote Brunclair: De Bock, too, overtly adhered to the Clarté ideals. He was also the founder of the magazine *Ruimte* (1920–21). Created in Antwerp and seen as the representative of humanitarian expressionism, *Ruimte* was not an official channel of Clarté and hence was more heterogeneous in nature. The idea of 'broadening', which appears from the title *Ruimte* — *Space* — can, of course, be linked to the social commitment of the artist and to the international ambition of the editors. Indeed, many foreign literary works were published in the magazine. The preferred literature was clearly German, whereas French literature remained largely neglected. Was the attention for French literature irreconcilable with the posture of a magazine that set itself up as an advocate of the Flemish cause? Buelens summarizes the poetics defended by De Bock in *Ruimte* as follows: 'De Bock thus strived for a rare specimen: entirely organic folk art on an international level; a non-degenerated, Flemish literature which was neither folkloric nor an imitation of foreign examples'.<sup>30</sup>

Flanders is clearly visible in both the magazine *Ruimte* and De Bock's *Overzicht van de Vlaamsche letterkunde* [*Overview of Flemish Literature*]. Due to spatial constraints, the *Survey* appears only partially in *L'Art libre*. The omitted fragments<sup>31</sup> are of a secondary nature, but the changes on a lexical level in the rest of the text are more significant: namely, adjectives or descriptions of the literatures or nations under consideration, especially the designation of Dutch-language literature in Flanders and the Netherlands. Even in the paratext, there is sporadic mention of this: for instance, the translator specifies in a post-scriptum of the third contribution that, until then, he has been using the term 'langue et littérature bas-allemandes' [low German language and literature], but one should prefer the term 'néerlandaises' [Dutch].<sup>32</sup> The terminological vagueness is not limited to these terms. There are several (different) French translations for the same terms in Dutch: '(Noord-Zuid-)Nederland(s)' [Northern-Southern Netherlands] or 'Vlaams/Vlaanderen' [Flemish/Flanders] are not systematically translated in the same way, for instance.

29 In a letter to De Bock of July 1921, Colin suggests to publish his book in French, 'which, by the way, seems desirable' ['ce qui, entre parenthèses, me paraît souhaitable'], on the basis of a translation that Colin had already prepared. Paul Colin to Eugène De Bock, 1 July 1921, Letterenhuis, Antwerp.

30 'De Bock streefde dus naar een zeldzaam specimen: volstrekt organische volkskunst op internationaal niveau; een niet-ontaarde, Vlaamse literatuur die niét folkloristisch was en zich toch ook niet aan buitenlandse voorbeelden spiegelde'. Geert Buelens, *Van Ostaijen tot beden: Zijn invloed op de Vlaamse poëzie* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2001), p. 167.

31 In addition to the first two chapters, a number of paragraphs have been deleted, especially towards the end of the twelve chapters.

32 Eugène De Bock, 'Littérature flamande: III: 1880–1890', *L'Art libre*, no. 11 (1921), p. 172.

A comparison of these nomenclatures in the entire article series reveals two structural tendencies. When Flemish literature is analysed in relation to the literature of the Netherlands; that is, *within an international perspective*, the signifier Flanders remains visible in the translation and sometimes the distinction Netherlands/Flanders is even amplified, in particular when ‘Zuid-Nederland’ [Southern Netherlands] is translated as ‘Belgium’ or as ‘Flanders’. This first tendency is less frequent and less marked than the second one.

When Flemish literature is analysed *within a national perspective* (Belgium), the Flemish identity is made less explicit and the distinction between Francophone and Dutch-speaking literature in Belgium is somewhat downplayed. Georges Eekhoud, for instance, is described in the source text as ‘a Fleming writing in French’ [‘Franschrijvenden [sic] Vlaming’], whereas this addition is eliminated in the translation.<sup>33</sup> Cyriel Buysse is initially ‘a surly Germanic Maupassant’ [‘un Maupassant germanique revêche’], but the adjective ‘Germanic’ disappears in the translation.<sup>34</sup> A description of Theodoor van Rijswijck changes too. In Dutch, he is ‘the biting satirist, who [...] would throw out biting songs and poems to the public, against the Walloons, the Gallicized Flemings and other oppressors of the people who were like brothers and sisters to him’.<sup>35</sup> In French it reads as follows: ‘the biting satirist, who [...] would publish biting songs and poems against the oppressors of his people’.<sup>36</sup> In another passage, Maurits Sabbe is compared to Georges Rodenbach. With his *Bruges la Morte* (1892), Rodenbach delivered the typical example of the ‘mythe nordique’. It is precisely this construction that is criticized by De Bock: for him, the Flemish language that is spoken in Bruges is essential to the Flemish identity. In the translation, Colin maintains the negative appreciation of Rodenbach, but conceals the main point made by De Bock: the Flemish language. Compare the two fragments:

He seems to be the incarnation of his native city Bruges. The citizen of Bruges is optimistically sentimental and mystically idealistic, his city is not like how Georges Rodenbach, the poet of ‘Bruges la Morte’, has depicted it for us — he understood the canals and the nostalgic swans, but not the people and their distinct soul: the language.<sup>37</sup>

He seems to be the incarnation of Bruges, his native city. The citizen of Bruges is optimistic and sentimental, mystical too: his city is not the one Georges Rodenbach spoke of in ‘Bruges la Morte’ — he understood the nostalgia of its canals and its swans, but not the soul of the people.<sup>38</sup>

33 Eugene De Bock, *Beknopt overzicht van de Vlaamsche letterkunde, hoofdzakelijk in de 19e eeuw* (Antwerp: De Sikkel, 1921), p. 29. See also Eugene De Bock, ‘Littérature flamande: II: 1840–1880’, *L’Art libre*, no. 10 (1921), p. 159.

34 De Bock, *Beknopt overzicht van de Vlaamsche letterkunde*, p. 74. See also Eugene De Bock, ‘Littérature flamande: VI: Le premier “Van nu en Straks”’, *L’Art libre*, no. 2 (1922), p. 32.

35 [‘de bijtende satiricus, die [...] vlijmende liederen en gedichten zou werpen in het openbaar leven, tegen de Walen, de franskiljons en andere onderdrukkers van het volk die hem broer en zuster was’. De Bock, *Beknopt overzicht van de Vlaamsche letterkunde*, p. 29.

36 ‘le satiriste mordant qui [...] allait publier des chansons et des poésies acerbes contre les oppresseurs de son peuple’. De Bock, ‘Littérature flamande: II: 1840–1880’, p. 159.

37 ‘Hij lijkt de incarnatie van zijn geboortestad Brugge. De Bruggeling is optimistisch sentimenteel en mystisch-idealistisch, zijn stad is niet zoals Georges Rodenbach, de dichter van ‘Bruges la Morte’, haar ons heeft uitgebeeld, die wel de kanalen en de nostalgieke zwanen maar niet de mensen en hun uitgesproken ziel: de taal, heeft begrepen’. De Bock, *Beknopt overzicht van de Vlaamsche letterkunde*, p. 99.

38 ‘Il semble l’incarnation de Bruges, sa ville natale. Le Brugeois est optimiste et sentimental, mystique aussi : sa ville n’est pas celle dont Georges Rodenbach nous a parlé, dans “Bruges la Morte”, qui avait compris la nostalgie des canaux et des cygnes, mais non l’âme des hommes’. Eugene De Bock, ‘Littérature flamande: VIII: La dernière période’, *L’Art libre*, no. 5 (1922), p. 79.

The examples mentioned above are not exhaustive, but they do give a good impression of the shifts between source text and target text. The signifier ‘Flanders’ is definitely visible in *L’Art libre*’s discourse, but when it risks endangering the Nordic-myth construction and the accompanying privileged position of Belgium as ‘land predestined to internationalism’, these elements are eliminated as much as possible from the translation. In the correspondence between De Bock and Colin, one can note a similar impulse. On 18 February 1920, Colin writes,

You are a fanatic, yes, I am one too. Each of us is fighting with passion for his cause and this is why I have a sincere sympathy for you. However, yours is nationalist, this is to say, exactly the opposite of mine. If it were only a question of the free recognition and free development of a ‘nationality’, we would be very close to each other. Because, for all of us, internationalists and revolutionaries, our program is to base upon the solid vault of ‘nationalisms’ the monument of our internationalism, of our Europeanism and of our Occidentalism. Unfortunately, your program is tainted with nationalism. Your politics is not merely positive: it is largely negative too and consists of destroying a culture before establishing [unreadable] ours. It is here that I disagree with you, with regret and with grief.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

The semantic uncertainty of the notion of ‘internationalism’ produced a proliferation of definitions in the postwar period. Did an international orientation obstruct the attention for a national (or even regional) literature? This was a crucial question, given the fact that Flanders was ubiquitous in the discourse of many artistic magazines, among them *L’Art libre*. This presence was somewhat paradoxical: although Flanders found itself, on a social and literary level, in an inferior institutional position in terms of the dominant Francophone discourse, it was much more visible in the Francophone magazines than French literature in the Flemish periodicals.

The dominant artistic ideal of social commitment made the Flemish issue unavoidable. As a social reality, Flanders did indeed fit into the program of recognition for suppressed nations. Yet as an artistic reality, its existence was more problematically situated within a tendency for ever-increasing artistic internationalization. Moreover, Flanders *had* acquired a fixed and important position for quite some time, in particular as part of the identity formation of the Nordic-myth construction, which not only allowed the Belgian literary establishment to distinguish itself from France, but also to appeal to a kind of innate international nature — Belgium as ‘crossroads of the Occident’ or as ‘balcony over Europe’, as formulated by Franz Hellens in 1922.<sup>40</sup>

39 ‘Vous êtes un fanatique, oui; — j’en suis un aussi. Nous militons chacun avec passion pour notre cause, et c’est pourquoi j’ai pour vous la plus sincère sympathie. Elle [De Bock’s cause] est cependant, nationaliste, c’est-à-dire, précisément le contraire de la mienne. S’il ne s’agissait que d’une libre reconnaissance et du libre développement d’une “nationalité”, nous serions très près l’un de l’autre. Car notre programme, à nous tous, internationalistes et révolutionnaires est d’asseoir sur la voûte solide des nationalistes, le monument de notre internationalisme, de notre européenisme, de notre occidentalisme. Malheureusement, votre programme est entaché de “nationalisme”. Votre politique n’est pas seulement positive: elle est largement négative aussi et consiste à détruire une culture avant d’établir [illisible] la nôtre. C’est ici que je me sépare de vous, à regret et avec tristesse [...]’ [emphasis in original]. Paul Colin to Eugén De Bock, 18 February 1920, Letterenhuis, Antwerp. However, the collaboration between De Bock and *L’Art libre* did continue for a while. His last (translated) contribution appeared in May 1922 and afterwards Colin again appealed to him for a similar column in the French magazine *Europe*. De Bock accepted the invitation from Colin and published a fortnightly column.

40 Franz Hellens, ‘La Belgique, balcon sur l’Europe’, *Écrits du Nord: Revue mensuelle de littérature*, no. 1 (1922), p. 34.

In short, literarily speaking, it was not simple to separate out Flanders and to consider it an autonomous entity. This difficulty is perceived most explicitly in the way in which Flanders acquires a place within the Francophone literary press, and in particular in *L’Art libre*. The internationalisation and the social commitment of the artist, which, generally speaking, were counted as poetic ideals in the periodical press, revealed themselves clearly in this magazine, which functioned as the official channel of the French Clarté movement. Therefore, the coverage in *L’Art libre* was quite homogeneous and rather limited. Other magazines formulated different ideas: in Flemish (Dutch language) periodicals, critics promoted different varieties of internationalism, in which the national component had a more visible place; on the other hand, the ‘radical’ avant-garde movements carried their internationalism even further, by pleading for a Pan-Europeanism and/or attention to non-European literatures.

Colin, the editor-in-chief of *L’Art libre*, defended a dualist poetics, leaving very little room for nuance. The analysis of the contributions on Flemish literature illustrates this. Victor Brunclair does discuss some Flemish writers but pays little attention to their Flemish identity. Eugeen De Bock actually does the latter: he systematically pays attention to the emancipation of the Fleming, Flemish literature and languages. However, he rarely offers a concrete definition of these terms. In Colin’s translation, it becomes clear that, compared to the source text, the attention paid to Flanders becomes more visible in an international perspective, whereas it is toned down within a national perspective; that is, when compared to other Flemish writers or institutions.

This analysis has shown only one possible answer to a debate in which many different positions were defended, in both Francophone and in Dutch-language periodicals. Further research will have to show what other kinds of positions were adopted. Elsewhere<sup>41</sup>, I have already shown that the language(s) in which the different contributions (artistic critique or literature) were submitted was seen as a symptom of internationalism. In the meantime, the articles in this special issue of *JEPS* show a number of other manifestations of how European thought took shape in periodicals outside Belgium.

**Francis Mus** is Assistant Professor at the University of Liège and a Research Assistant at the University of Leuven. He is the author of a doctoral dissertation on the internationalization of the Belgian avant-garde. His interests concern translation and writing in multilingual spaces. He has written several articles on this topic, amongst others on Leonard Cohen and Milan Kundera. In 2015, he published his book (in Dutch), *De demonen van Leonard Cohen*, and the English translation (*The Demons of Leonard Cohen*) is forthcoming in 2020 with the University of Ottawa Press.

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