



## Literary translation from Flemish into German during the Nazi regime

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**Abstract.** During the Nazi regime and, more specifically, the Second World War, literary translation was eyed with suspicion by the controlling instances as it inevitably involved the import of foreign thought as well as economic exchange with foreign states. Against this backdrop, Flanders represents an interesting case. On the one hand, since it was considered a 'kindred' source-language nation, the translation of Flemish literature into German was encouraged within the constraints of the totalitarian system. On the other hand, persisting literary traditions, the private market logic, the agency of mediators, and the prevailing Catholic tone and idyllic nature of much Flemish literature caused significant disparities between translation policy and practice. Starting from the publishing figures of translated Flemish literature in Nazi Germany and their evolution during the twelve-year period, this article confronts official attitudes and discourses regarding Flemish translated fiction with the actual situation within the translated fiction market.

**Keywords.** Translation / vertaling; Flemish literature / Vlaamse literatuur; Nazi Germany / nazi-Duitsland; Second World War / Tweede Wereldoorlog; censorship / censuur; propaganda

Der ungehinderte Kulturaustausch zwischen Deutschland und  
Flandern lässt den Wunschtraum mancher jungen Schriftsteller  
ins Deutsche übersetzt zu werden, Wahrheit werden.<sup>1</sup>

[The unhampered cultural exchange between Germany  
and Flanders makes the dream of young authors  
to be translated into German come true.]<sup>2</sup>

In 1942, in the midst of the war, a thick prestigious volume in linen binding with gold-adorned lettering, large colour illustrations and no less than 184 black and white photographs appeared in the Nazi German *Reich*. This book by Heinz Havertz, entitled *Flandern*, is a somewhat curious publication, since its number of pages and its make-up suggest official support, yet, no book reviews or recommendations by Nazi literary offices are to be found. Whether state-supported or not, the above-mentioned quote on cultural exchange and translation provides an interesting starting point for this paper. Could there possibly, in the dictatorial context of the Nazi regime, have been any kind of ‘unhampered cultural exchange’ between Flanders and Germany? Did the Nazi regime<sup>3</sup> and, indeed, the Second World War present an opportunity for Flemish authors to publish their work in German translation or does Havertz’ claim qualify as pure propaganda? Last but not least, which rationale supported the regime’s approach towards translation of Flemish literature into German during the twelve years of its reign? To answer those questions, this article examines the official discourse on Flemish translations as well as the production of Flemish translated literature in Nazi Germany, and confronts both against the background of Nazi translation policy and practice in general.

### **Translation policy and practice during the Nazi regime**

When Kate Sturge published her PhD ‘*The Alien within. Translation into German during the Nazi Regime*’ in 2004, little research had been done into the role translation played in the ‘Third Reich’. More than a decade later, Sturge’s study is still a reference work for anyone involved in this topic. By exploring the regime’s official attitudes to translation, she demonstrates how, in line with literary policy, Nazi translation policy imposed severe restrictions on translation practice, yet, was fragmented and inconsistent due to overlapping competencies and power struggles. While Goebbels’s Propaganda Ministry formed the core of literary control and had the exclusive right to censor fiction, Sturge identifies numerous other Ministry and Party authorities

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<sup>1</sup> Heinz Havertz, *Flandern* (Karlsbad and Leipzig: Adam Kraft, 1942), p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> All translations are mine.

<sup>3</sup> Homogenising terms such as ‘the Nazi regime’, ‘the literary controlling apparatus’, ‘Nazi translation policy’ and ‘official discourse’ should not obscure the polycratic character of Nazi government, i.e. the fact that the Nazi dictatorship was characterized by competitive centres of authority, personal rivalries, overlapping competencies and diverging, even contradictory points of view. In this article, the words will be used as collective terms for the totality of governing institutions, the different literary offices involved in the regulation of (translated) literature, the entire collection of official approaches towards translation and the discourse in journals of the different Party and Ministry offices respectively.

involved in regulating the field of translation. Although Party offices had little direct institutional power, they managed – through a multitude of literary journals and book lists – to impose their views on the book trade and intimidate it with exhortations and threats.<sup>4</sup>

By confronting policy with translation practice, Sturge also exposes the complex relation between official statements, on the one hand, and the actual production and distribution of translated literature, on the other. Instead of a straight-forward implementation of a purely ideologically motivated policy, both policy and practice prove to be the result of a continuous negotiation, on the part of the policy makers between short-term interests and long-term ambitions, on the part of the publishers between the regime's ideological requirements, economic interests, literary traditions and the public's taste, and on the part of authors and translators between personal, literary and political concerns.<sup>5</sup> Last but not least, Sturge shows that, in line with racist thinking and foreign policy, source languages were subject to different fates, and their balance shifted significantly during the Nazi regime.

Those insights confirm the relevance of investigating in more detail individual source languages like Flemish. They raise awareness about the different agents, approaches, motives and realities which shaped the policy and practice of translation from Flemish into German during the Nazi regime, and the resulting disparities between official discourse and the actual situation within the book market. By analysing the formal censorship of Flemish translated literature in relation to its actual publishing figures in Germany between 1933 and 1944, this article will provide the necessary background for further research on the roles, motivations and agendas of publishers, translators and other agents involved in the production of Flemish fiction in translation during the Nazi regime.

## **Flemish translated literature in Nazi Germany**

In Nazi literary and translation policy, source languages were defined in national and ethnical, rather than linguistic, terms. Thus, a clear distinction was drawn between, for instance, British English and American English, and, of interest here, Flemish and Dutch. This differentiation should allow the literary controlling apparatus to attune its approach to particular languages and literatures to the Nazi regime's ideological convictions and foreign policy goals, as well as to the political attitude and later also the military involvement of their source nations in the war. Against this background, the term 'Flemish' will be used throughout this article to denote language and literature from Flanders.

During the twelve years of the Nazi regime, Flanders belonged to the officially favoured source-language nations for translation. The reason for this preferential treatment was political: along with the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, Flanders was judged a 'kindred' nation, in plain language: territory that Nazi leadership envisaged as a future province of the 'Great Germanic Reich'. According to Dietrich Strothmann, it figured on a list of so-called "übersetzungsfreie" Staaten' ['translation-free' states], which entailed, for instance, that

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<sup>4</sup> K. Sturge, *The Alien Within. Translation into German during the Nazi Regime* (Munich: Iudicium, 2004), p. 31. See also: J.P. Barbian, *Literaturpolitik im ‚Dritten Reich‘. Institutionen, Kompetenzen, Betätigungsfelder* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> See also I. Van linthout, *Das Buch in der nationalsozialistischen Propagandapolitik* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), especially chapters 2.3 and 3.2.

ensorship was, by comparison, mild on applications concerning Flemish literature, and that official lists recommending translation-worthy authors for the book trade included Flemish writers.<sup>6</sup> As the following graphics show, publication patterns indeed point at the promotion of Flemish translated literature. Those graphics are based on a self-compiled corpus of 332 book publications – both first editions and reprints – of Flemish fiction in German translation which appeared in Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1944.<sup>7</sup> To interpret the publication numbers, they are held against Kate Sturge’s findings on general patterns in literary importation into German during the same period. The scientific assessment of publication patterns poses methodological challenges, which are not often taken into account in literary and translation research.<sup>8</sup> One of them is the fact that the time of publication of books – which is commonly used to establish evolutions, continuities and ruptures in book publication – can be influenced by the most diverse factors of a political, ideological, economic or more pragmatic and personal nature.<sup>9</sup> Another challenge is that working with small numbers of publications might easily lead to over-interpretation, especially if differences and shifts are small. In the present case, the trends in the publication patterns of Flemish translated fiction are found to be significant enough to be relevant against the background of general trends, especially during the period of war.

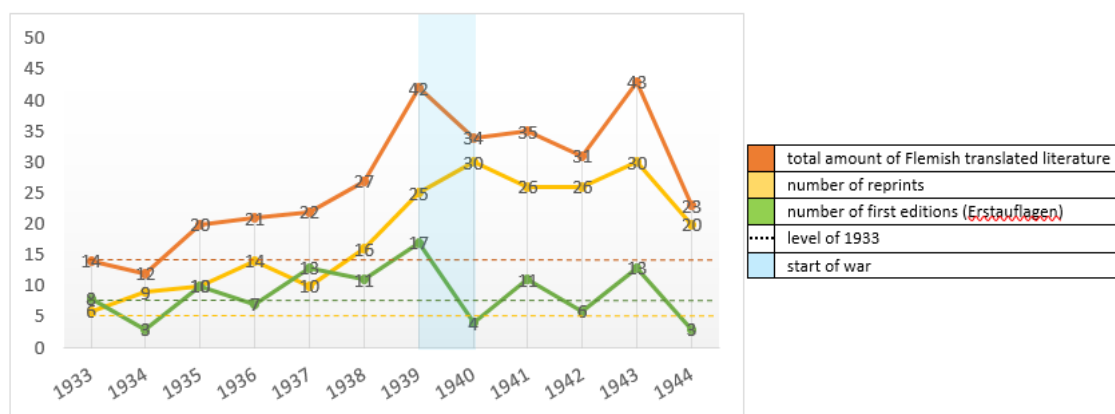


Figure 1: Translations of Flemish literature into German during the Nazi regime, Ine Van linthout ©

<sup>6</sup> D. Strothmann, *Nationalsozialistische Literaturpolitik. Ein Beitrag zur Publizistik im Dritten Reich* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1960), pp. 198, 200. It is not clear whether Strothmann coined the term ‘übersetzungsfrei’ himself or borrowed it from Nazi terminology. He puts it in quotation marks, yet does not attribute the quote to a source.

<sup>7</sup> My corpus is based on Herbert Van Uffelen’s *Bibliographie der modernen niederländischen Literatur in deutscher Übersetzung 1930-1990* (Münster and Hamburg: Lit, 1993), Sturge’s bibliographical data (available on <https://www.iudicium.de/katalog/771-8.htm>), library catalogues, searches for antiquarian books and contemporary sources such as literary periodicals and archival records. The compiled data include anthologies and collections, but not the individual short stories or poems contained in them. German theatre adaptations of Flemish novels are not taken into account. The data presented in this article reflect the stand of April 2018.

<sup>8</sup> See also: Anthony Pym, *Method in Translation History* (Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, 1998), pp. 38-54.

<sup>9</sup> For instance: the military situation, restrictions on foreign currency payments, copyright issues, war-related problems such as the destruction of publishing houses or the shortage of personnel, strategic decisions on the part of the publisher, personal issues such as conflict or illness and so on.

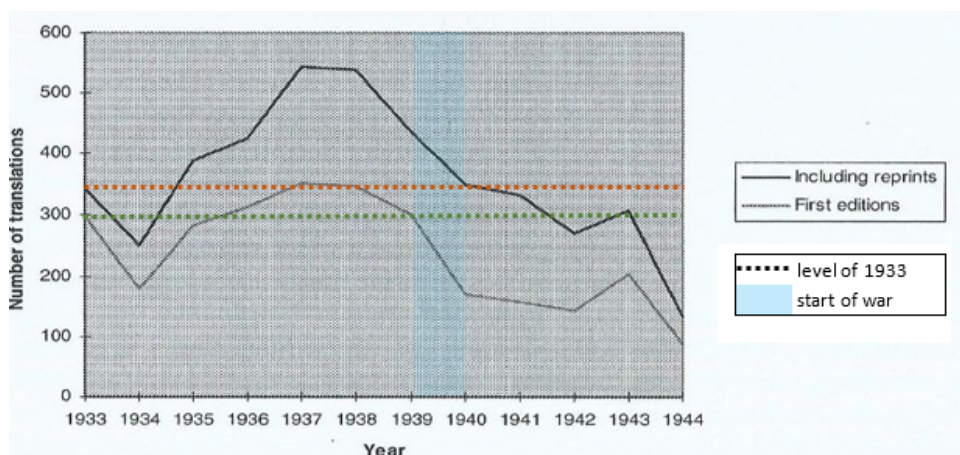


Figure 2: Number of translations from all source languages into German during the Nazi regime, Kate Sturge ©, *The Alien Within*, 2004 (colors added).

In the 1930s, the rise of Flemish translations (see figure 1) concurs with the general upward trend that Sturge illustrates in figure 2. Yet, when war censorship causes a drastic drop in translations, Flemish translated fiction manages to hold, and even increase, its numbers. This position is mostly accounted for by a rise in reprints, which starts in the late 1930's and creates a wide gap with first editions until the end of the war. The preponderance of reprints could mean several things: a defensive attitude on the part of publishers regarding titles that had not passed censorship yet, commercial success in the face of the high demand for fiction, an attempt to keep down copyright and translation costs, the result of war-time constraints, or a mixture of those. In any case, it signified a weakening of cultural exchange with 'less new literature [...] imported and more prominence given to already established, partially "domesticated" or canonised works'.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, we see first editions peak in 1939, 1941 and 1943 at a level well above that of 1933. If Sturge is right in taking 1933 as a 'relatively "neutral" [...] starting-point' similar to previous years,<sup>11</sup> we can safely state that, especially during the war, Flemish translated literature was flourishing in comparison with the general trend.

While both the peaks in first editions and the high number of reprints signify official support, another sign of Flanders' privileged position is that, over the twelve-year period including several years of war, 32 Flemish authors were published in German translation, 21 of whom for the first time. Newcomers were Arthur Broekaert, Emiel Buysse, August van Cauwelaert, Valère Depauw, André Demedts, Filip de Pillecyn, Gaston Duribreux, Willem Elsschot, Fred Germonprez, Jef Hinderdael, Paul Lebeau, Maria Peremans-Verhuyck, Jef Simons, Karel van de Woestijne, Anton van de Velde, Emiel van Hemeldonck, Albert van Hoogenbemt, Raf van Hulse, Edward Vermeulen, Cyriel Verschaeve and Reinier Ysabee. If not only book publications, but also

<sup>10</sup> Sturge, *The Alien Within*, p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> Sturge, *The Alien Within*, p. 56.

translated short stories and poems in anthologies are taken into account,<sup>12</sup> another 44 Flemish authors can be added to the list, 27 of whom were published in German translation for the first time. Debuts were made by Albe, René Berghen, Theo Bogaerts, Eugen Bosschaerts, Pieter G. Buckinx, Frans Buyle, Lode Cantens, Franz de Backer, Jozef de Cock, Bert Decorte, Sylva De Jonghe, Maurice Gilliams, Herwig Hensen, Raymond Herreman, Karel Leroux, Marcel Matthijs, Wies Moens, Bert Peleman, Willem Putman, Piet van Aken, Ernest van der Hallen, Urbain van de Voorde, Jan van Nijlen, Gilbert van Outere, Ferdinand Vercocke, Karel Vertommen and Jan Vercammen.<sup>13</sup> In total, work by 76 Flemish authors was published in book form during the twelve-year reign, of whom 48 authors made their debut. The fact that 31 of those made their first appearance during the war (1940-1944), is remarkable in view of the reduced scope of cultural exchange, caused by stricter regulation, increased difficulties with foreign currency and severe restrictions in terms of mobility.

Finally, the promotion of Flemish translation was reflected by the disproportionately large coverage it was given in official publications compared to its actual share in published translated fiction.<sup>14</sup> This official discourse – i.e. reviews or articles in journals which belonged to one or other Ministry or Party office – was intended as a binding directive for professionals within the book trade as to which kind of Flemish literature was to be promoted or condemned. It is a useful indicator of how those offices evaluated Flemish translated literature and why. The journals included in his study are the Party publications *Bücherkunde*, *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* and *Nationalsozialistische Bibliographie* and the Ministry publications *Die Bücherei*, *Die Werkbücherei* und *Der Buchhändler im neuen Reich*.

## Official discourse on translated Flemish fiction in Nazi Germany

In official discourse on translated literature, three main attitudes towards translation can be discerned, each of which provoked a different reaction, ranging from promotion over pragmatic encouragement or mere acceptance to rejection. Some official institutions advocated just one or two approaches to the exclusion of the others, while other instances considered them to be complementary. Yet, the attitudes could also co-exist unintentionally within the same offices or journals. Before we turn to the case of Flemish translated literature, a short overview of the three

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<sup>12</sup> Seven collections of Flemish short stories and/or poems by different authors appeared in German translation during the Nazi regime: C.H. Erkelenz (ed.), *Flämische Weihnacht. Erzählungen flämischer Dichter mit Bildern alter Meister* (München: Kösel-Pustet, 1937); C.H. Erkelenz (ed.), *Unsere Liebe Frau aus Flandern. Erzählungen flämischer Dichter* (Salzburg, Leipzig: Pustet, 1939); W. Moens (ed.), *Das flämische Kampfgedicht* (Jena: Diederichs, 1942); F. de Pillecyn (ed.), *Das zwiefache Leben. Flämische Novellen der Gegenwart* (Diederichs: Jena, 1943); J. Simons and E. Charlet (eds.), *Zwischen Leie und Schelde. Eine Blumenlese aus der flämischen Literatur* (Braunschweig: Westermann, 1943); K. Jacobs (ed.), *Flandern erzählt. Ein Sammelband flämischer Dichter* (München: Alber, 1943) and W. Cordan (ed.), *Der vlämische Spiegel. Die vlämische Dichtung von Guido Gezelle bis zur Gegenwart* (Amsterdam, Leipzig: Tiefland, 1943). See also Theresia Feldmann's article in this volume. Publications in newspapers and periodicals are not taken into account.

<sup>13</sup> The choice of authors will be discussed in follow-up research.

<sup>14</sup> See also: Sturge, *The Alien Within*, p. 102.

attitudes towards translation in general is needed to provide the necessary historical and institutional background.<sup>15</sup>

A first official attitude treats translation as a potential, or fundamental, threat to the German nation with regard to both kinds of transfers it entailed: On the one hand, the regime feared the importation of difference, i.e. translation's power to "introduc[e] discourse shifts, destabiliz[e] received meanings, creat[e] alternate views of reality, establis[h] new representations, and mak[e] possible new identities", to borrow Maria Tymoczko's words.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, being a source of economic contact between Germany and foreign countries, translation was perceived as a threat to Germany's economic autarky and, especially during the Second World War, as a form of unwanted financial support to Germany's enemies.<sup>17</sup> The regime's institutional response was the introduction of a pre-publication permission process in July 1935 specifically directed at translated literature. From 1939 onwards, a much stricter censorship system was put in place, with blanket bans imposed on literature from 'enemy states'.

Followers of this defensive, if not hostile, attitude emphasized the foreignness of the translated text, the need to keep it apart from domestic literature and the necessity to take further measures to prevent the potential harm it could do. Methods to criticize, reject and prohibit translations included negative book reviews, partial or full bans, denying access to foreign currency, the control of paper stocks and confiscation as well as the mere threat of it, since the fear of commercial losses edged the book trade into self-censorship.<sup>18</sup> Reasons for rejection could be the political status or Jewish descent of the author, translator or publisher, the book's content and tenor, and Germany's political relationship with the translation's source language nation or culture.<sup>19</sup> There is little evidence that the quality of the translation or the choice of translation strategies were sanctioned, even though comments to that effect are not completely absent.

The second official approach considered translation a politically and ideologically useful mediator between the source and target culture of a translated text. Building on the Nazi interpretation of the Romantic tradition, which posited an inextricable link between literature and the *Volk*<sup>20</sup> it originated from, good translations were promoted as offering an authentic representation of their source culture, in Sturge's words, as 'truthful ethnography'.<sup>21</sup> This stance is well captured in the following quote from the *gleichgeschaltete* [nazified] *Börsenblatt des Deutschen Buchhandels*:

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<sup>15</sup> The following overview is largely based on: Van linthout, *Das Buch*, K. Sturge, "Flight from the Programme of National Socialism?" Translation in Nazi Germany', in *Translation under Fascism*, ed. by C. Rundle and K. Sturge (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 51-83; K. Sturge, *The Alien Within*; J.P. Barbian, *Literaturpolitik im 'Dritten Reich'*.

<sup>16</sup> M. Tymoczko, 'Translation, ideology and creativity', in *Linguistica Antverpiensia* NS 2 (2003), p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> Sturge, *The Alien Within*, p. 37.

<sup>18</sup> Sturge, *The Alien Within*, p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> See also: D. Aigner, 'Die Indizierung "schädlichen und unerwünschten Schrifttums" im Dritten Reich', in *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* 11 (1971), pp. 933-1034.

<sup>20</sup> In line with Kate Sturge's approach to specific Nazi vocabulary, the terms *Volk* and *Volkstum* and related adjectives are not translated, but used in the original in the specific sense of '(membership of) a racialised folk community, bound by blood, that was imagined by Nazi ideology' (pp. 9, 23).

<sup>21</sup> Sturge, *The Alien Within*, p. 201.

Die Übersetzung aus der Fremdsprache solle in erster Linie ein Vermittler der Kultur des fremden Volkes sein und uns in sein Denken, Fühlen und Wollen einführen. Nach diesen Gesichtspunkten habe auch die Auswahl der Übersetzungen zu erfolgen. Für sie komme somit primär solches Schrifttum in Frage, das uns Kenntnisse und Erkenntnisse über die geistige Haltung, über das geschichtliche und politische Wollen der Völker vermittele. Selbstverständlich sei darin auch das schöngeistige Schrifttum eingeschlossen. Auf diesem Gebiet seien besonders die Schriften zu bejahren, die wirklich *Neues* und *Gültiges* über die Geisteshaltung des Fremdvolkes gäben, also Werke *volkhaften* Charakters.<sup>22</sup>

[The translation from the foreign language should first and foremost be a mediator of the culture of the foreign *Volk* and introduce us into its thinking, feeling and wishes. The choice of translations must be made according to these criteria. Therefore, primarily such writings are taken into account which provide us with knowledge and insights about the mental attitude, the historical and political will of *Völker*. Of course, this also includes fiction. In this area, especially such writings should be welcomed, which can give really *new* and *valid* information about the state of mind of the foreign people, thus works of a *volkhaft* character.]

It goes without saying that the insights into other nations which translations were supposed to provide, were only considered ‘good’, ‘authentic’ or ‘valid’ if they (at the very least) did not contradict Nazi beliefs and interests, and (ideally) could be put at the service of Germany’s foreign policy aims, either in support of a policy of *rapprochement* or to discredit the *Reich*’s enemies. Adjectives like ‘new’ and ‘*volkhaft*’ reveal, in this respect, that translation was assigned an active role: the role of *constructing* nations or *Völker* along the lines of Nazi Germany ideology and politics. This approach to translation shows that Nazi literary offices were well aware of what Lawrence Venuti asserted several decades later in a different context: that ‘[t]ranslation wields enormous power in constructing representations of foreign cultures’.<sup>23</sup> National image construction became, indeed, one of two main functions of translation in Nazi Germany, aside entertainment. This ethnographical approach was probably most prominently used to further the Nazi’s imperialistic design of a ‘Great Germanic Reich’. In this context, it was the translated text’s capacity to ‘foster [the] Germans’ sense of racial kinship’ that mattered.<sup>24</sup> Instead of stressing differences, emphasis was put on the source language’s relatedness to German and the reduction of foreignness between source and target cultures. Translations were promoted by ministerial directives specifying which translated texts were permitted for review,<sup>25</sup> recommendations in Party publications, author readings, so-called *Dichtersfahrten* [author excursions], literary prizes and the creation of the European Writers’ Association (ESV) with carefully selected foreign writers from carefully selected foreign countries.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> ‘Der Buchhändler und die staatliche Schrifttumsführung. Gauversammlung des Berliner Buchhandels’, in *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel* 150 (2.7.1939), p. 528 (my italics).

<sup>23</sup> L. Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation. Towards an Ethics of Difference*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 67.

<sup>24</sup> Sturge, *Flight from the Programme*, p. 69.

<sup>25</sup> Strothmann, *Nationalsozialistische Literaturpolitik*, p. 294.

<sup>26</sup> See J.P. Barbian, *Literaturpolitik*, p. 420-50; F.-R. Hausmann, ‘*Dichte, Dichter, tage nicht!*’. *Die Europäische Schriftsteller-Vereinigung in Weimar 1941-1948* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2004).



The third official attitude viewed translation pragmatically, as an answer to inconvenient realities such as the substantial gaps left by censorship, the failing success of ideologically streamlined literature, the incapacity to satisfy the high public demand for fiction and light entertainment, the lack of qualitative literature to counter the criticism of cultural barbarism, or the fact that certain persisting literary traditions – as well as the national images they conveyed – could, from a propagandistic point of view, not simply be ignored. This third attitude illustrates best the continuous balancing act of translation policy-makers between short-term necessities and long-term aspirations, practical considerations and ideological imperatives, the public's taste and the regime's requirements, whereby the line between deliberate policy and enforced acceptance is not an easy one to draw. At the same time, it is the most contested category among Nazi offices. While proponents of the pragmatic approach, in front Propaganda Minister Goebbels, condoned, and even promoted, to a certain extent, ideologically unaligned popular fiction in view of its regime-stabilising function, opponents, like Party ideologue Alfred Rosenberg and his offices, repeatedly denounced the 'Überfülle an Übersetzungen fremdsprachlicher Werke, die [...] den deutschen Buchmarkt überschwemm[en]' [overabundance of translations of foreign works, which [...] flood the German book market], lamented the irrelevance of most translations 'für die kulturelle Austauscharbeit' [for cultural exchange purposes] and pleaded for 'stärkere Einschränkungen auf diesem Gebiet' [stronger restrictions in this area].<sup>27</sup>

Flemish translated literature was subject to all three attitudes, be it in different degrees. With Flanders being an officially favoured source culture, it is not surprising that the main stance of literary offices was one of promotion. Yet, rejection, acceptance and pragmatically motivated encouragement were also important responses of the literary controlling apparatus to imported Flemish literature. Eventhough the different categories of Flemish translations are not clear-cut, they will be discussed separately for the sake of the analysis.

### **Not in the least deserving of a translation into German<sup>28</sup>**

Starting with the defensive or hostile stance, I have so far not found any official censorship records on translation proposals of Flemish fiction turned down at the stage of pre-publication censorship, or on translated texts banned or confiscated after publication. While this lack of records might be partly attributed to the official encouragement Flemish translated fiction received, it can also be explained by the loss of substantial parts of the relevant state censorship archives. After all, the correspondence between publishers, authors and translators of Flemish literature reveals that there have very well been cases of pre-publication censorship. One example

<sup>27</sup> 'Übersetzungen', in *Bücherkunde* 6 (1939), p. 309. The journal *Bücherkunde* was established in 1934 as the mouthpiece of the literature office headed by Alfred Rosenberg. The journal addressed all mediators of German literature and intended to be, according to the preface of the first four issues, the 'most reliable critical medium [...] that Germany has had since Lessing'.

<sup>28</sup> Reviewer Fritz Peuckert rejects in *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* Ernest Claes' work *Der Pfarrer aus dem Kempenland* [*The Pastor from the Campine*, orig. *Pastoor Campens zaliger*] with the words 'daß ein solches Werk heute eine Übertragung ins Deutsche zuallerletzt verdiente' (F. Peuckert, "Und Flandern?" *Neue Bücher aus Flandern in deutschen Verlagen*, in *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* 138 (1941), p. 880). The journal *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* characterized itself as the 'only central political and cultural mouthpiece of the NSDAP'. It was founded in 1930 and changed hands from Adolf Hitler to Alfred Rosenberg in November 1933.

is a letter by Maurice Gilliams' translator Heinz Graef to the author, which states that the publication of Gilliams' novel *Elias* in translation had not been approved.<sup>29</sup> A systematic examination of authors', translators' and publishers' records must yield more information of this kind. In the meantime, official rejection of Flemish translated literature is only visible in the form of negative verdicts and book reviews in publications of Ministry and Party offices: a 'merely' discursive form of post-publication censorship, which served, however, as a powerful warning and directive for publishers, librarians and book sellers. The limited presence of formal censorship could, in this respect, also be attributed to the efficiency of self-censoring practices, which could have been more responsible for restrictions in the translation of Flemish fiction than direct state intervention.<sup>30</sup>

In those book reviews, the Flemish literature present on the German translation market was criticized mainly for its idyllic character, its francophone influences and its Catholic tendency.<sup>31</sup> Especially the Catholic character of Flemish fiction presented the Nazi regime with a dilemma: If Nazi institutions were to condemn all religiously-inspired fiction from Flanders, little literature would be left, while tacit indulgence would be at odds with Nazi ideology. This problem was mainly countered by the use of a discursive strategy of domestication, which dissociated Flemish fiction from its Catholic character and re-associated it with a more palatable Flemish, or even Germanic, religiosity. However, as official discourse on Flemish religiously inspired literature became more critical from the late 1930s onwards, there were also cases of downright rejection. In an outspoken review in December 1938 in the Party journal *Bücherkunde* about the collection *Unsere liebe Frau aus Flandern. Erzählungen flämischer Dichter* [Our Lady of Flanders. Stories by Flemish writers],<sup>32</sup> the anonymous reviewer fiercely attacks the book's religious content and warns German publishers and translators that 'alle konfessionelle Winkelliteratur hat als Gefährdung und getarnter Angriff auf unsere deutsche Volksgemeinschaft außerhalb der deutschen Reichsgrenzen zu verbleiben' [all denominational thesis literature should, as a danger and disguised attack on our German *Volksgemeinschaft*, remain outside the German *Reich* borders].<sup>33</sup> Another representative example is a review in *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* from 1941 about Ernest Claes' *Der Pfarrer aus dem Kempenland* [*The Pastor from the Campine*], which explicitly raises the opposition between 'denominational tendency literature' and 'real religious literature':

[...] so müssen wir bedauernd feststellen, daß ein solches Werk heute – allein schon aus Gründen der Papiereinsparung für bessere und notwendigere Bücher – eine Übertragung ins

<sup>29</sup> Graef himself had been notified by the publishing house Droste. Gilliams quotes Graef's words in a letter to Mrs Pankok-Droste, dated 25 March 1942, in which he asks for clarification (AMVC Letterenhuis, G395-B). The book's full title is *Elias of het gevecht met de nachtegalen* [Elias or the Fight with the Nightingales].

<sup>30</sup> See M. Tymoczko, 'Censorship and Self-censorship in Translation: Ethics and Ideology, Resistance and Collusion', in E. Ní Chuilleanáin et al., *Translation and Censorship. Patterns of Communication and Interference* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), p. 30.

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of those three aspects in the context of national image construction: see Van linthout, *Flandern*, pp. 335-46.

<sup>32</sup> Edited and translated by Carl Hanns Erkelenz, published at Anton Pustet in Munich in 1939.

<sup>33</sup> 'Von jenseits der Grenze. "Unsere Liebe Frau aus Flandern" von Carl Hanns Erkelenz', in *Bücherkunde* 12 (1938), p. 690.

Deutsche zuallerletzt verdiente: es [sic] ist ein banale und kunstlose Aneinanderreihung farbloser Pastorenanekdötchen, in denen betenderweise vor nahezu jedem katholischen Ortsheiligen auf den Knien gelegen und um die Erfüllung der seltsamsten und kleinlichsten Wünsche der Himmel bemüht wird – kurzum: schönster blühender Kitsch und Musterbeispiel *konfessioneller Winkelliteratur statt echter religiöser Dichtung*.<sup>34</sup>

[thus, we must regretfully say that, nowadays, such a work – if only for the sake of saving paper for better and more necessary books – does not in the least deserve a translation into German: a banal and artless run-down of colourless little anecdotes about priests, in which – kneeling before local Catholic saints – people pray for the fulfilment of the most peculiar and trivial heavenly wishes – in short: mere trifles and a typical example of *denominational thesis literature instead of real religious literature*.]

In official discourse, the concepts ‘denominational’ and ‘real religious’ function as dominant parameters to classify religiously tinged Flemish and other foreign novels as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’. In late autumn 1939, the journal *Die Bücherei*<sup>35</sup> made a six-page attempt to explain this crucial opposition to librarians by comparing the Flemish novels *Das Kind* [The Child] by Gerard Walschap and *Donkelhof und Wasinghaus* (orig. *Het leven van Herman Coene*) by Ernest Claes. The key criterion for assessing religious content, it argues, is the author’s ‘hierarchy of values’, which could be tested by the question

ob die Religion und das kirchlich-religiöse Bekenntnis über Volk, Volkstum und Heimat ein *formendes und beherrschendes, diesem allem erst Sinn und Weihe gebendes Element* sind oder ob sie, jeweilig verschieden in den verschiedenen Menschen und Volkstümern aufleuchtend, eine wenn auch starke und unersetzliche, so doch *nur mitformende und mitnährende Lebenskraft* darstellen.<sup>36</sup>

[whether religion and ecclesiastical-religious confession was for *Volk, Volkstum* and *Heimat* a *shaping and controlling element, which gave them their first meaning and consecration*, or whether they represent, illuminating differently in the various people and peoples, a strong and irreplaceable, but *only additional shaping and co-nourishing life force*.]

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<sup>34</sup> Peuckert, *Und Flandern?*, p. 880 (my italics). The use of the terms *Literatur* and *Dichtung* is significant here, as the former generally bears a negative, the latter a positive connotation in Nazi terminology. Cf. Van Linthout, *Das Buch*, pp. 322-6.

<sup>35</sup> *Die Bücherei* [The Library], which carried the subtitle *Zeitschrift der Reichsstelle für volkstümliches Büchereiwesen* (later *Volksbüchereiwesen* and then *Büchereiwesen*), was the mouthpiece of the Ministry office that regulated the library trade. Its intention was to provide libraries with a ‘practical work tool’ by discussing current issues related to the profession and by giving guidance in the purchase of new books.

<sup>36</sup> B. Rang, ‘Zwei neue flämische Romane. Eine grundsätzliche Betrachtung zur Frage: Konfessionelle oder religiös-volkhafte Dichtung?’, in *Die Bücherei* 11-12 (1939), p. 529 (my emphasis).

In other words, in literature, as in real life, religion was considered acceptable if it was subordinate to Nazi ideology or could be interpreted in terms of its values.<sup>37</sup> Against this background, Claes' *Donkelhof und Wasinghaus* was judged a perfect example of

die tiefere Religiosität, die nicht konfessionell beengt ist und die darum auch vorbehaltlos und ohne Einschränkung die Werte des Volkstums, der Heimat wie des menschlichen Lebens überhaupt bejaht und bejahen kann das geheimnisvolle Wunder seiner göttlichen Geschaffenheit.<sup>38</sup>

[the deeper religiosity, which is not denominationally cramped and which, therefore, without reservation and without restriction, affirms the values of *Volkstum*, *Heimat* and human life, and is able to confirm the mysterious miracle of its divine nature.]

Walschap's novel, on the other hand, was assumed to derive its meaning from Catholicism and was therefore turned down as a 'bewußte Abkehr von der völkischen Grundhaltung' [conscious departure from the basic *völkisch* attitude]. In general, two different, though related, strands of argumentation were to be used to reject Flemish fiction considered denominational. Either the novel's Catholic disposition was framed in general terms as an attack against the German *Volksgemeinschaft*, or it was, more specifically, presented as a failure to capture the 'true' character of the Flemish. The discussion of Walschap's *Das Kind* in *Die Bücherei* is an example of the first argument: It presents the book as undermining the Germans' National Socialist education and warns librarians that novels – because they are 'wirksamer, zeugender und bezeugender, als es irgendein Sach- oder Fachbuch zu tun vermag' [more effective, more convincing, and more expressive than nonfiction or specialist literature] can lure the reader into a 'konfessionelle Gedankenwelt in oft recht geschickter und dem Laien nicht sofort bemerkbarer Weise' [denominational world of ideas, often in quite a clever and to the layman not easily discernible way].<sup>39</sup> The second argument is exemplified by a review article in *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* in 1940, which criticizes stories by Antoon Thiry, Ernest Claes, Jef Simons and Felix Timmermans for their rootedness in confessional tradition, because it would prevent them from offering the German reader a 'Deutung der flämischen Lebensfrage' [an interpretation of the Flemish question of life].<sup>40</sup> Only sporadically is the clash between 'good' and 'bad' religious Flemish literature framed in explicitly political terms. Such is the case in a review article in *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* in 1941, which argues that not the passive Catholics, who put their fate into God's hands, should be portrayed in Flemish literature, but the 'truly' religious people in Flanders who take up the arms and risk their lives for a more profane ideal, namely the war against Bolshevism and the National-Socialist realization of a newly ordered Europa in which Germanic Flanders would occupy a privileged place:

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<sup>37</sup> This parallelism between the literature and real life is best illustrated by a quote from *Bücherkunde*, which states that 'any open or hidden attack on the totality claim of the National Socialist worldview will experience ruthless resistance, as in all areas, so also religious literature' ('Religiöses Schrifttum', in *Bücherkunde* 12 (1935), p. 381).

<sup>38</sup> Rang, *Zwei neue flämische Romane*, p. 532.

<sup>39</sup> Rang, *Zwei neue flämische Romane*, pp. 526-7.

<sup>40</sup> F. Peuckert, 'Neues Schrifttum aus Flandern', in *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* 125 (1940), p. 510.

so sind wir mit allen guten Flamen des festen Glaubens, daß ‘die besten Menschen von ganz Flandern’ 41 heute als freiwillige ‘Flämische Legion’ in Osteuropa zusammen mit den auserlesenen Kämpfern der anderen Völker für die europäische Gesittung und damit auch für die höchsten Werte ihrer artheigenen Religion gegen den Bolschewismus ihr Leben einsetzen, statt als ‚Mitglieder des Bundes vom heiligen Herzen‘ in einer Haltung und Weltanschauung zu verharren, die nur im dumpfen Händefalten und Kniebeugen tatenlos den Segen des Himmels sich verdienen wähnt. Flandern ist erwacht und wird neu erstehen, weil es wieder zu kämpfen gelernt hat!<sup>42</sup>

[so we are, with all the good Flemish, of firm faith that the ‘best people of all Flanders’ are today risking their life as volunteers in the ‘Flemish Legion’ in Eastern Europe together with the chosen fighters of other *Völker* for the European morals and thus for the highest values of their own religion rather than Bolshevism, instead of remaining as ‘members of the covenant of the Sacred Heart’ in an attitude and world-view which only in dull folds of hands and kneeling down would seem to deserve the blessing of heaven. Flanders has awakened and will rise again because it has learned to fight again!]

On the whole, the proportion of Flemish translations that met with downright disapproval was small in comparison with those that were either promoted for ideological and political reasons and those that were accepted or encouraged as entertainment. From an official perspective, all translated Flemish literature should ideally belong to the following category, in which, once again, the argument of an ‘accurate’ understanding of Flanders will be the most commonly used.

### **The book should be promoted!<sup>43</sup>**

Official discourse of Nazi literary offices makes it more than obvious that Flemish translated literature received their support. Most explicitly promoted was translated literature that could assert Flanders’ oppression by the Belgian state or by previous foreign rulers and Flanders’ relatedness to the German *Volk*.<sup>44</sup> This relatedness was even aspired in terms of the distance between Flemish and German literature on library shelves. In March 1939, *Die Werkbücherei*,

<sup>41</sup> This quote alludes to an extract from Claes’ condemned book *Der Pfarrer aus dem Kempenland* (1940, pp. 69-70): ‘Selbst im Kempenland, wo doch, wie jeder weiß, die besten Menschen von ganz Flandern wohnen, wo alle Männer Mitglied des Bundes vom Heiligen Herzen, alle Frauen Mitglied der Marianischen Kongregation oder des Vereins der christlichen Mütter sind, um nur diese zu erwähnen, selbst im Kempenland hat ein Pfarrer noch viel Ärger mit seinen Kunden.’ [Even in the Campine, where, as everyone knows, the best people from all Flanders live, where all men are members of the Covenant of the Sacred Heart, where all women are members of the Marian Congress or of the Association of Christian Mothers, to mention only these, even in the Campine a priest has a lot of trouble with his disciples.]

<sup>42</sup> Peuckert, *Und Flandern?*, p. 88o.

<sup>43</sup> This recommendation in *Bücherkunde* relates to Emile Buysse’s novel *Miele kehrt heim* [Miele Returns Home], which was published in 1939 by Droste Verlag. According to the anonymous reviewer, the German reader feels ‘that a genuine kindred sympathy inhabits this novel and reciprocates it’ (‘Neues schöngeistiges Schrifttum: Miele kehrt heim von Emile Buysse’, in *Bücherkunde* 12 (1940), p. 364).

<sup>44</sup> See I. Van linthout, “Flandern, halte dich bereit, als Westmark in dieser Welt deinen Platz einzunehmen.” Westforschung, Literatur(-Wissenschaft) und Flandern im Nationalsozialismus, in *Griff nach dem Westen. Die ‘Westforschung’ der völkisch-nationalen Wissenschaften zum nordwesteuropäischen Raum (1919-1960)*, ed. by B. Dietz, H. Gabel and U. Tiedau (Münster: Waxmann, 2003), pp. 325-50.

which was compulsory reading for librarians who fell under the jurisdiction of the Reichsschrifttumskammer [Reich Chamber of Literature],<sup>45</sup> requested that foreign literature should be shelved separately from domestic literature, while Flemish (and Dutch) translated fiction should be classified as German.<sup>46</sup>

Translations which met with the regime's explicit approval, include classics like Charles De Coster's *Till Ulenspiegel und Lamme Goedzak* and Hendrik Conscience's *Der Löwe von Flandern* [The Lion of Flanders], which, besides their easily exploitable content, offered the added bonus of being out of copyright. It might come as a surprise that Charles De Coster, who was Flemish but wrote his works in French, is included in a database on Flemish translated literature. Yet, another consequence of defining source languages in national and ethnical instead of linguistic terms, was the fact that the label 'Flemish fiction' did, at the time, not only apply to literature written in Flemish, but could also subsume francophone literature if its author and content were judged 'truly Flemish' within a racialised frame of reference. De Coster was characterised this way, while writers like Maurice Maeterlinck and Emile Verhaeren were labelled 'francophile defectors'.

Flanders' Germanic character was found best expressed by authors like Cyriel Verschaeve ('der flämische Dichter unserer Tage [...], der mit am eindeutigsten germanische Züge im flämischen Schrifttum verkörpert'<sup>47</sup> [the Flemish writer of our time [...], which embodies most clearly Germanic traits in Flemish literature]), Stijn Streuvels ('ein germanischer Dichter der Gegenwart'<sup>48</sup> [a Germanic writer of the present]) and less well-known names like Gaston Duribreux. Most appreciation was given to Flemish novels about the First World War, which turned the period of military opposition between Flanders and Germany into a period of *rapprochement*. The following passage is quoted at length, as it characterizes well the choice of novels and the outspokenly political framework in which they are placed:

Wir begrüßten auf deutscher Seite im Jahre 1937 des flämischen Frontkämpfers Jef Simons realistisches und männliches Erinnerungsbuch 'Flandern stirbt nicht' wie einen ersten Kameradengruß über die einst trennenden Gräben hinweg und erkannten darauf in Jef Hinderdaels humorvoll ritterlicher Schilderung des erstmaligen Zusammentreffens deutscher Soldaten mit flämisch-belgischen Kleinbürgern in seinem 'Spiel der großen Kinder – Roman vom Kriegsausbruch in Flandern' 1939, den wahren politischen Hintergrund eines tragischen Bruderkampfes zweier stammverwandter Völker. Aber erst ein junger und bis dahin unbekannter Autor, der Nordflame Emile Buysse, schenkte uns die dichterische Gestaltung des bedeutsamsten und ältesten Motivs aller Kriegsromane in seinem Roman 'Miele kehrt heim' (1939). Hier ist die Stelle, wo das Kriegsbuch im weitesten Sinne zum politischen Buch werden muß, indem es mit der Heimkehr seiner Soldaten und ihrem nun

<sup>45</sup> *Die Werkbücherei* was a tool of the Propaganda Ministry section regulating *Werkbüchereien*, i.e. libraries which were 'situated within companies to supply employees with both technical literature and fiction'. (Sturge, *The Alien Within*, p. 82; J.P. Barbian, *Literaturpolitik*, p. 818.)

<sup>46</sup> Sturge, *The Alien Within*, p. 90. Interestingly, 'Nordic' literature should be shelved with foreign literature, because of the 'lack of *völkisch* fellow feeling shown by many Scandinavian authors' (idem).

<sup>47</sup> F. Peuckert, 'Germanische Züge im Antlitz des jüngeren flämischen Schrifttums', in *Bücherkunde* 5 (1943), p. 173.

<sup>48</sup> F. Peuckert, 'Das Buch. Stijn Streuvels – ein germanischer Dichter der Gegenwart', in *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* 106 (1939), pp. 177-9.

beginnenden Ringen um die Geltung alter und neuer Werte der Gemeinschaft zugleich das Volk selbst in seiner tiefen Wandlung darzustellen hat.<sup>49</sup>

[We welcomed in 1937 the German translation of the realistic and masculine remembrance book 'Flanders does not die' by the Flemish front warrior Jef Simons as a first comrade salute over the once dividing trenches, and we recognized in Jef Hinderdael's humorous knightly description of the first meeting of German soldiers with Flemish-Belgian petty bourgeois in his 'Game of the big children – Novel about the outbreak of war in Flanders' in 1939 the true political background of a tragic brotherly fight between two *Völker*. But only a young and hitherto unknown author, the Northern Flemish Emile Buysse, gave shape to the most significant and oldest motif of all war novels in his novel 'Miele goes home' (1939). Here is the place where the war book must, in the broadest sense, become a political book, in that it must, together with the return of its soldiers and the struggle now begun for the validity of old and new values of the community, represent the *Volk* itself in its profound transformation.]

Although those novels were considered useful for the promotion of Nazi Germany's imperialistic ambitions, literary offices saw themselves confronted with a substantial lack of ideologically and politically suitable Flemish literature. In 1941, the *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* lamented that most Flemish authors turned to the wrong material for their novels:

Statt der Tragik des flämischen Volkes im erbitterten Grenzkampf der lateinischen und germanischen Kultur überhaupt sich bewußt zu werden, geschweige denn nach künstlerisch-kämpferischem Ausdruck dafür zu suchen, bemächtigten sich die meisten flämischen Schriftsteller solcher Romanstoffe, wie sie in Kleinstadt- und Dorfromanen mehr oder weniger idyllischer Natur gegeben sind.<sup>50</sup>

[Instead of even becoming aware of the tragedy of the Flemish *Volk* in the bitter frontier struggle of Latin and Germanic culture, let alone of searching for its artistic-militant expression, most Flemish writers took possession of topics that characterize small-town and village novels of a more or less idyllic nature.]

Exponents of such idyllic literature were, first and foremost, Felix Timmermans and Ernest Claes, whose fiction was frequently criticized for presenting the German audience with a wrong, or, at best, 'one-sided' image of the idyllic, profoundly religious and self-contained Flanders that did not justify outside interference from its German neighbour. Accordingly, an important reason for promoting the more realistic Streuvels, in spite of the fatalistic and Catholic tenor of his work,<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Peuckert, *Germanische Züge*, p. 171. Peuckert also recommends Norbert Fonteyne's *Kinderjaren* [Childhood Years] about the First World War, which was translated into German by Erich Stück, but never got published. (F. Peuckert, 'Flandern gestern und heute. Neue Bücher aus und über Flandern', in *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* 158 (1943), p. 439.)

<sup>50</sup> Peuckert, *Und Flandern?*, p. 878.

<sup>51</sup> The Nazi German view on Streuvels' novel *Der Flachsacker* [The Flax Field], which was adapted for the screen during the Nazi occupation of Belgium, is discussed in: R. Vande Winkel and I. Van Linthout, *De Vlaschaard 1943. Een Vlaams boek in nazi-Duitsland en een Duitse film in bezet België* (Kortrijk: Groeninghe, 2007).

was the outspoken wish of literary offices to push the dominant Timmermans to the background. In the case of Streuvels, the interests of translation policy converged with those of Nazi adherent Adolf Spemann, owner of Engelhorn publishing house and a personal fan of Streuvels' work, who made it his mission to give the Flemish author the widest possible recognition during the Nazi regime. The fact that Spemann's choice of author received official praise<sup>52</sup> might have furthered the boom of reprints of Streuvels' work during the Nazi regime (37 in total) and the Second World War (28 between 1940 and 1944).

It is fair to conclude that Flanders' rural-set literature constituted an ambiguous category for Nazi literary bureaucracy. Some of it was downright rejected, some of it was promoted as literature of the *Blut-und-Boden* type and welcomed as enabling knowledge on the Flemish people, some of it was criticized for its dominant idyllic and Catholic overtones but tolerated in view of other qualities, while some of it was unreservedly praised for its entertaining value. The last two reactions were symptomatic of the third approach to Flemish translation, which testifies to a pragmatic, rather than an ideological, rationale.

### **Recommended in this respect**<sup>53</sup>

The third category contains translations which did not qualify as 'truthful ethnography' and might in certain cases even be seen as unaligned with Nazi ideology, yet, were not considered a real threat. They were tolerated, or even promoted, for pragmatic reasons mostly, such as the author's international prestige (Stijn Streuvels), his or her popularity with the German public (Felix Timmermans), the persistent demand for fiction, exacerbated by the wartime bans on English, American and French literature (Ernest Claes tripled the number of pre-war publications between 1940 and 1944), the more general need for entertainment and the shortage of ideologically better-suited Flemish literature.

This negotiation of interests frequently leads to highly ambivalent or mixed assessments. For instance, in a review on Stijn Streuvels' novel *Die große Brücke* [The Big Bridge], which appeared in *Bücherkunde* in June 1939, the anonymous reviewer openly criticizes the book – and, by extension, all work by Streuvels – for its 'konfessionelle Gebundenheit' [denominational tendency], yet, recommends the novel for its literary qualities: 'in diesem Sinne [...] zu empfehlen' [recommended in this respect].<sup>54</sup> In a similar vein, Timmermans' collection of short stories *Das Licht in der Laterne* [The Light in the Lantern] is categorically turned down in

<sup>52</sup> In *Nationalsozialistische Bibliographie* (NSB), for instance, which was the strongly politically motivated mouthpiece of Philip Bouhler's *Parteiamtliche Prüfungskommission*, an article with the title *Das deutsche Schrifttum und die Übersetzungsflut* [German Writing and the Flood of Translations] proposes the introduction of special promotional measures for 'good' translated literature, in particular for 'die kultur- und volkspolitisch sehr fundierte Arbeit gewisser Verlage' [the very well-founded cultural and ethnopolitical work of certain publishers] like Spemann's Engelhorn: 'Spemann [...] bringt mit erfreulichem Eifer Streuvels heraus, – es ist ungeheuer wichtig, daß wir die flämische Kunst und Kultur, ja, das flämische Volk nicht immer noch allein in Felix Timmermans verkörpert glauben' [Spemann [...] publishes Streuvels with a pleasing zeal – it is enormously important that we do not continue to believe the Flemish art and culture, indeed the Flemish people, to be embodied in Felix Timmermans alone] (F. Kaiser, 'Das deutsche Schrifttum und die Übersetzungsflut', in *Nationalsozialistische Bibliographie* 3-4 (1939), p. 104).

<sup>53</sup> This verdict concerns Stijn Streuvels's novel *Die große Brücke* ('Übersetzungen. "Die große Brücke" von Stijn Streuvels', in *Bücherkunde* 6 (1939), p. 310).

<sup>54</sup> *Übersetzungen. Die große Brücke*, p. 310.



*Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* because of the stories' 'streng kirchlich katholische Melodie' [strictly ecclesiastical Catholic tone] to the point of 'eine Propaganda Fidei', their lack of narrative qualities and Timmerman's well-trodden formula of having a farmer stumble across the stage as a good-natured and funny fool. In the final paragraph, however, the book's presence on the translated fiction market is being justified in very ambiguous terms. Anticipating the following quote, it should be noted that works on flowers and animals did not belong to the regime's favourite genres, the adjective *literarisch* bore a negative connotation in Nazi literary terminology, *fabulieren* was generally criticized for not being 'true to life' (read: not useful for image construction purposes), and *sauber* und *ergötzlich* contrast with positive markers for literature in Nazi discourse such as *volkhaft* or *echt*:

Übrig bleiben ein paar wirklich hübsche Blumen- und Tierstücke, die als saubere und ergötzliche Arbeiten eines literarischen Kunsthandwerks immer ihre Liebhaber finden werden. Als solch ein fabulierender Kleinkunstmeister des Alltags ist uns Felix Timmermans nach wie vor ein gern gelesener Gast.<sup>55</sup>

[What is left are some really pretty flower and animal works that will always find their lovers as pure and delightful works of a literary craft. As such, a storytelling master of *Kleinkunst* about everyday life, Felix Timmermans is still a much-read guest.]

Another example, this time from a Ministry journal, is a review on Marie Gevers' novel *Die Lebenslinie* [The Lifeline] in *Die Bücherei*. While Gevers is generally promoted as a 'truly' Flemish author during the Nazi regime, this review explicitly draws attention to the fact that Gevers' books are written in *French* and that this was also noticeable in the translation; that she is a member of the *Belgian Academy*, while 'Belgian' was a word with an extremely negative connotation;<sup>56</sup> and that her novels are less appealing to the Germans than those of other Flemish writers because of their bourgeois setting and intellectual influences. The reviewer continues by granting the novel a better quality than Gevers' previous work and many 'dichterische Schönheiten' [literary beauties], only to finish with a warning for librarians that it is 'in unseren Büchereien wegen der begrenzten, uns erlebensmäßig fernliegenden Themenstellung nur in sehr beschränktem Umfange einsatzfähig' [because of the limited, to our mind outlandish, subject matter, only to a very restricted extent deployable in our libraries].<sup>57</sup>

The complexity of this third category also manifests itself in the fact that certain titles receive different assessments by Ministry and Party offices. A comparison of the reviews shows that the Propaganda Ministry was generally more supportive of popular, though ideologically less

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<sup>55</sup> F. Peuckert, 'Das Buch. Zweierlei Flandern? Neue flämische Erzählungen und Romane in deutschen Verlagen', in *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* 114 (1939), p. 863.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. I. Van linthout, "Ein belgisches Volk gibt es nicht" oder "dem belgischen Volk aus der Seele gesprochen"? Eine Untersuchung der Belgien-Diskurse im "Dritten Reich", in *Belgica – terra incognita? Resultate und Perspektiven der Historischen Belgienforschung*, ed. by S. Bischoff, C. Jahr, T. Mrowka and J. Thiel (Münster: Waxmann, 2016), pp. 174-83.

<sup>57</sup> J. Peters, 'Gevers Marie, Die Lebenslinie. Aus dem Französischen von Eva Mertens (1938)', in *Die Bücherei* 1 (1939), pp. 17-8.

deployable, authors than the Party.<sup>58</sup> This observation echoes Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels's pragmatic view that 'trivial' and 'apolitical' literature as 'an element of escapism could only strengthen the regime's hold', as well as the necessity he felt to negotiate with established literary traditions and the public's taste.<sup>59</sup> In this light, it is more than anecdotal that novels like *Pallieter* or the already-mentioned collection of short stories *Das Licht in der Laterne* by Felix Timmermans are critically received by the Party's *Bücherkunde* (see above), while the author and his work is recommended without any reservation by the Ministry's *Der Buchhändler im neuen Reich*:

Felix Timmermans ist schon lange einer der Unseren geworden. So sind denn viele seiner Geschichten und Erzählungen, die der Insel-Verlag in dem Sammelband 'Das Licht in der Laterne' herausgebracht hat, den Verehrern des flämischen Dichters von seinen jährlichen Vortragsreisen her bekannt. Viele neue sind dazu gekommen, alle unvergleichlich schön. [...] Und so ist das Buch: voller Schönheit und Wunder.<sup>60</sup>

[Felix Timmermans has since long been one of our own. Hence, many of his tales and stories, published by the Insel Verlag in the anthology 'Das Licht in der Laterne', are known to the admirers of the Flemish writer from his annual lecture tours. Many new ones have been added, all incomparably beautiful. [...] And so is the book: full of beauty and wonder.]

Finally, considering the entire production of Flemish translated literature, we should note that certain titles appear in several categories due to factors such as the competing views of literary offices, the lack of explicit guidelines as to which literature should be reviewed in what way, or a differentiation between audiences, as the evaluation of fiction could vary according to the target group.<sup>61</sup> Conversely, not all translated texts were attributed to a category for the simple reason that not all of them were reviewed, or even mentioned, in official discourse. Reasons could be the insufficient censorship system – incapable of controlling the thousands of book titles published every year – or the journals' selection criteria as to which translations should be brought to their readers' attention.

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. C. Würmann, 'Entspannung für die Massen. Die Unterhaltungsliteratur im Dritten Reich', in *Zwischen den Zeiten. Junge Literatur in Deutschland von 1933 bis 1945*, ed. by U. Beiküfner and H. Siebenpfeiffer (Berlin: Lotos, 2000), pp. 9-36; I. Van linthout, "'Dichter, schreibt Unterhaltungsromane!'" Der Stellenwert der Unterhaltungsliteratur im "Dritten Reich", in *Im Pausenraum des 'Dritten Reiches'. Zur Populärkultur im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, ed. by C. Würmann and A. Warner (Peter Lang: Bern, 2008), Publikationen zur Zeitschrift für Germanistik, vol. 17, pp. 111-24.

<sup>59</sup> Sturge, *The Alien Within*, p. 34.

<sup>60</sup> 'Die Neuerscheinungen des Herbstes. Neue Übersetzungen. Flandern, Niederlande', in *Der Buchhändler im neuen Reich* 12 (1938), p. 457. *Der Buchhändler im neuen Reich* (1936-1943) was the mouthpiece of the Bund Reichsdeutscher Buchhändler [Association of German Booksellers], which in October 1936 became the Gruppe Buchhandel [Division Booksellers] in the Reich Chamber of Literature (M. Esterman and R. Wittmann (eds.), *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* (Frankfurt am Main: Buchhändler-Vereinigung GmbH, 1997), vol. 47, p. 156).

<sup>61</sup> This differentiation becomes visible in the fact that the Propaganda Ministry issued different lists of recommended reading for libraries in villages, for libraries in smaller and larger towns, for hospital libraries, for 'the national-socialist library', for 'the German clerk and his family', for men and women, for soldiers, and so on. For a discussion on the 'principle of totalitarian differentiation', see Van linthout, *Das Buch*, pp. 16-36.

## Comparing translation policy and practice regarding Flemish literature

While the official discourse on Flemish fiction allows to draw the contours of the officially ‘desired’ selection and presentation of Flemish translated texts, they also expose tensions between translation policy and the actual situation within the book market. In February 1937, Bernhard Payr, the head of Rosenberg’s literary office, made a first roundup of the translated fiction published after the Nazi take-over. With a sense of satisfaction, he announces that

dieses Schrifttum sich überwiegend aus Werken zusammensetzt, die Ländern und Völkern entstammen, deren geistigen Raum wir in mancherlei Hinsicht als verwandt mit dem unsrigen empfinden. An erster Stelle stehen hier die Werke des großen skandinavischen Kulturkreises sowie die der flämischen Literatur; denn in vielen Fällen ermöglicht uns die geistige Haltung dieser Dichtungen einen geraden und unmittelbaren Zugang zu ihrem Ideengut.<sup>62</sup>

[this literature is composed chiefly of works from countries and *Völker* whose mental [*geistige*] space we find in many ways related to ours. First and foremost, there is the literature from the large Scandinavian cultural region and of Flanders; for in many cases, the mental disposition of this literary work allows us straight and direct access to their cultural inheritance.]

This rendering of the situation was more wishful thinking than reality. Kate Sturge’s graphic of trends in source languages (figure 3) clearly shows that, between 1933 and 1940, English translations by far outnumbered Scandinavian and Flemish<sup>63</sup> translations. In fact, the large amount of English entertainment literature only dropped in numbers after the introduction of the war bans.

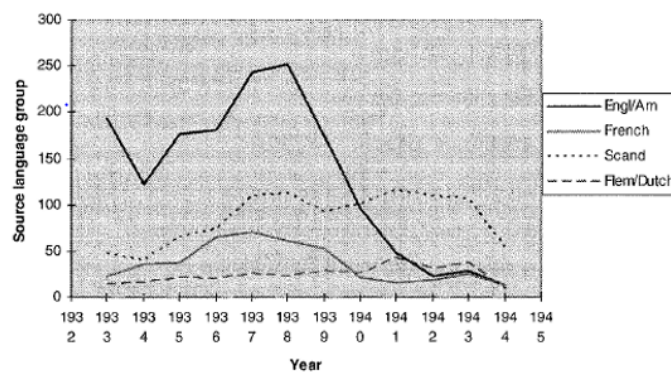


Figure 3: Trends in source languages, Kate Sturge ©, *The Alien Within*, 2004.

<sup>62</sup> B. Payr, ‘Überflüssige oder begrüßenswerte Übersetzungen?’, in *Bücherkunde* 2 (1937), p. 87.

<sup>63</sup> For the purpose of this graphic, Sturge exceptionally groups Dutch and Flemish together, in analogy to the Scandinavian languages. It must also be noted that Sturge’s numbers are – at least in the case of Flanders – not accurate. She counts 154 Flemish translations (both first editions and reprints) for the entire Nazi period, whereas my corpus comprises at present more than twice as many. This being said, the strong presence of English literature in the pre-war years can be taken as an established fact.

Also the situation of Flemish literature (see figures 4 and 5) reveals a discrepancy between official policy and actual practice. The dominant presence of idyllic writers like Felix Timmermans and Ernest Claes demonstrates a failure of literary offices to effectuate their intended canon revision and change the prevailing image of Flanders into a more combative one. At the same time, the translated fiction market could also be taken to mirror the Propaganda Ministry's pragmatically motivated encouragement of popular culture and its continuous negotiation with established literary tradition. Most of all, it reflects the dynamics of a commercially driven translation market and the ensuing fact that the field of translation 'defied' to a certain extent 'officially voiced wishes by following its own, traditional and commercial rationale almost throughout the period'.<sup>64</sup>

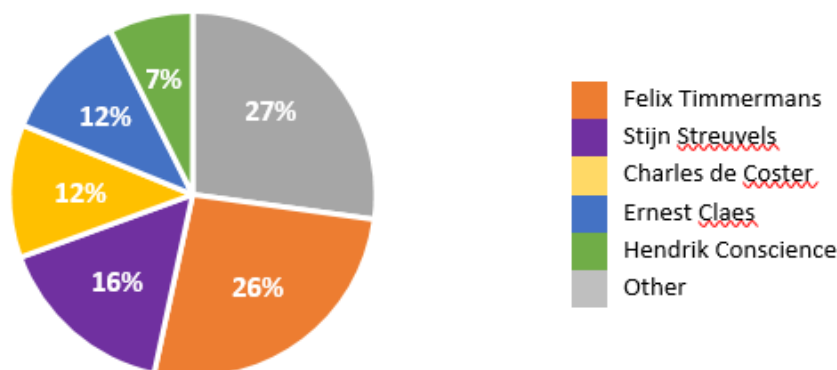


Figure 4: Number of translations per author in percentages (top five), Ine Van linthout ©

As the diagram reveals, Felix Timmermans remained by far the most translated Flemish author, with a share of almost 30 percent of all Flemish titles published in Nazi Germany. Although quite a few of his works had already been published before 1933 (11 titles between 1919 and 1932), the database reveals that another 12 titles saw their first edition and no less than 71 reprints appeared during the Nazi regime, in much larger numbers than books by other Flemish authors. *Pallieter*, the novel that was repeatedly criticized for its 'unjust' depiction of Flanders, received 18 editions between 1933 and 1944 (of which 13 during the war), amounting to a total number of 144,000 copies printed during the Nazi regime. Other novels by Timmermans ranged between 69,000 (*Das Triptychon von den Heiligen Drei Königen*; 1934, 1937, 1940) and 144,000 printed copies (*Sankt Nikolaus in Not und andere Erzählungen*; 1935, 1936(2), 1939, 1940, 1942, 1944). By way of comparison, Ernest Claes' top five stretched from 14,000 (*Der Flachskopf*; 1935, 1938, 1940, 1941, 1942) to 64,000 copies (*Hannes Raps. Eine Landstreichergeschichte*; 1934, 1939, 1941, 1942) and Stijn Streuvels' from 19,000 (*Die Ernte*; 1940, 1941) to 50,000 copies (*Martje*

<sup>64</sup> Sturge, *The Alien Within*, p. 34. In this respect, it is important to know that the Nazi government did not abandon free-market economy. Unlike the Soviet model, the Nazi economy tried – to some extent – to combine the perceived advantages of private initiative, profit-orientation and the principles of supply and demand, with the logics of totalitarian state control. For the book trade, this entailed, among others, that a considerable part of book production owed its existence to capitalist interests rather than ideological convictions. This was particularly true for the publishing companies that were still in private hands, which, in order to survive, had to perform a tricky balancing act between state control and free market imperatives, between propaganda and the public's taste. See Van linthout, *Das Buch*, pp. 211-44. See also footnote 65.

*Maartens und der verruchte Totengräber; 1937(2), 1941, 1942, 1943*). Only the classics might have done better than Timmermans with 23 editions for De Coster's *Till Ulenspiegel* and 24 editions for Conscience's *Der Löwe von Flandern*. For those titles, I have not been able to retrieve the print runs yet.

Conversely, the officially promoted selection of novels in support of a 'suitable' image of Flanders represents only a small fraction of Flemish translated fiction into German. Favourite titles by Emile Buysse, Jef Hinderdael, Jef Simons and Cyriel Verschaeve appeared in small editions of a few thousand copies and were not, or only once, reprinted, while, in some cases, rejected or strongly criticized literature could achieve several editions. The officially rejected *Der Pfarrer aus dem Kempenland* by Ernest Claes, for instance, was published five times by the Catholic Kösel-Pustet Verlag, amounting to 29,000 copies in 1941, and received one extra edition at Buchgemeinde (Bonn), also in 1941.

These discrepancies, as well as the existence of negative book reviews, do not only reveal institutional failure, rivalries and conflicting interests, but also point at the agency of another group of actors involved in the translation of Flemish literature, namely the publishers, translators, authors and other agents. The official promotion of Flemish as a 'kindred' source language, in combination with the (contained) free market logic, the primacy of economic interests over ideological convictions especially in the early 1930s,<sup>65</sup> the general shortage of fiction, and possibly also the polycratic nature of the literary controlling apparatus, created opportunities for publishers of Flemish fiction. Publishing companies like Diederichs, Engelhorn and Westphal hopped on the bandwagon and published officially approved literature. Insel Verlag continued its traditional translation programme with both concessions to the regime and choices against the political agenda, and managed to keep its reputation as a respected middle-class house.<sup>66</sup> Catholic publishers like Kösel-Pustet saw their way clear to publish ideologically unaligned, if not rejected, Catholic literature. Others such as Alster, Altenburg, Butzon & Bercker, Droste, Holle&Co, Rütten&Loenig, Staackmann and Vieweg ventured to introduce new Flemish writers to the German reader, the majority of them with a few or just one title. In some cases, the Flemish provenance of the translated text was made explicit by the addition of a Flemish label to the title. Thus, for instance, Streuvels' *Minnehandel* became *Liebesspiel in Flandern*, Marie Gevers' *Madame Orpha ou la sérénade de mai* was turned into *Frau Orpha, ein flämischer Roman*, Raf van Hulse's *Poldervolk* became *Das Mädchen Laura. Roman aus dem flämischen Polder* and Filip de Pillecyn's *Blauwbaard* was translated as *Blaubart in Flandern*. New collections were given titles such as *Flämische Weihnacht* [Flemish Christmas], *Unsere Liebe Frau aus Flandern* [Our Dear Lady of Flanders] or *Der vlämische Spiegel* [The Flemish Mirror]. While the Flemish provenance tag might have simply been added to indicate the stories' origin, it might also have been a conscious strategy to channel authors or work which were considered

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<sup>65</sup> Especially during the first years of Nazi dictatorship, when economic recovery was one of the main concerns of the Nazi regime, economic interests were often given priority over ideological beliefs. For the book trade, this meant that a number of publishing houses – especially those which were of economic importance in terms of jobs and export figures – were initially spared by Nazi authorities for a number of years, even if they were Jewish or foreign owned and published books that were at odds with Nazi ideology. The Jewish Hegner Verlag, for instance, which published work by Gerard Walschap and Filip de Pillecyn, could survive until 1936. See V. Dahm, *Das jüdische Buch im Dritten Reich* (München: C.H. Beck, 1993).

<sup>66</sup> See Sturge, *The Alien Within*, pp. 72, 74 and 81.

unaligned through the censorship system, such as Catholic inspired literature, anthologies including work by unaligned authors (Paul van Ostayen, Richard Minne, Karel van den Oever, Maurice Gilliams, Franz de Backer, Lode Baekelmans, Herwig Hensen), and novels by francophone writers such as Marie Gevers, whose *Madame Orpha* appeared in several languages, yet only received the addition ‘a Flemish novel’ in the German translation.

Table 1: 10 major publishers of Flemish translations (out of 59):

Insel	112
Engelhorn	32
Reclam	20
Diederichs	17
Hausen	14
Westphal	11
Staackmann	8
Langen-Müller	7
Kösel-Pustet	7
Alber	6

The next stage of this investigation will be to analyze the agency of those actors involved in the production of Flemish translated literature in the ‘Third Reich’. Judging from the correspondence between Stijn Streuvels and his publisher Spemann<sup>67</sup> and between Willem Elsschot and his publisher Van Kampen,<sup>68</sup> to give just two examples, the selection of Flemish authors and titles, the translation shifts and the novel’s paratexts can largely, if not entirely, be attributed to publishers, authors and translators themselves. Correspondence between them also proves to be an indispensable source to detect self-censorship. A letter from Insel Verlag to Gerard Walschap demonstrates that Anton Kippenberg renounced the German rights to the translation of the novel *Celibaat* [Celibacy] on the grounds of his ‘serious reservations’ about the book’s contents in view of the ‘latest trends in the German literary world’,<sup>69</sup> while letters between Willem Elsschot and his publisher reveal that the German translator of *Tsjip* omitted the book’s last sentence on her own initiative.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, the letters could bring to light attempts to

<sup>67</sup> The correspondence between Streuvels and his publishers is edited and made available online in 2016 by Centrum voor Teksteditie en Bronnenstudie and Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde (KANTL): <http://edities.kantl.be/streuvels/index.htm>.

<sup>68</sup> Letter from Elsschot to Van Kampen, dated 17 October 1940, and from Van Kampen to Elsschot, dated 28 October 1940 (AMVC Letterenhuis, E285-106).

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in B. Govaerts, ‘Een Duitse paragraaf in de biografie van Gerard Walschap 1990. Der Mann der das Gute wollte’, in *Literatuur. Tijdschrift over Nederlandse Letterkunde* 6 (1990), pp. 337-8 (my translation). The letter must date from 1936, as there is mention of the State Prize for Narrative Prose that Walschap had just received for the novel *Trouwen* [Marriage].

<sup>70</sup> Letter from the publishing house Holle&Co to Willem Elsschot (pseudonym for Alfons De Ridder), dated 24 March 1936 (AMVC Letterenhuis, E285-109).

circumvent and challenge censorship, for instance in the case of Catholic literature or anthologies. As a result, further research will have to shift the focus from formal censorship and the official discourse to the interaction between translation agents and to the close textual analysis of source and target texts.<sup>71</sup>

### **Havertz' quote: *Wunschtraum* or *Wahrheit*?**

Returning to Havertz' initial reference to the Nazi period as a window of opportunity for Flemish authors, we obtain a differentiated picture. On the one hand, Havertz' optimism is not unfounded. Both the actual production and the official promotion of Flemish translated literature between 1933 and 1945 substantiate his claim that the Nazis' twelve-year reign including the period of war was a productive time for the publication of Flemish literature in German translation. His subsequent statement that 'the sales territory of a ninety-million population opens up to young emerging talents such as Demedts, van Hulse, Germonprez, Duribreux, Matthijs'<sup>72</sup> equally holds true. It is even accurate that, due to Flanders' special status as a Germanic source text culture, the production of Flemish translated literature was less hampered by literary regulation than that of many other foreign literatures. As a consequence, and supported by the continued free-market logic (see footnote 64), private publishers enjoyed a definite degree of autonomy in their selection of authors and titles.

On the other hand, it is obvious that neither the regime's favourable attitude towards Flemish literature nor the publishers' agency regarding its publication in translation are tantamount with an 'unhampered' cultural exchange. Censorship as well as its mere threat impacted on the publishers' choice of authors and titles and on the publication patterns of Flemish translated fiction reveal a majority of reprints. Moreover, not all of the newcomers' work (or that of known authors for that matter) was appreciated, or even judged acceptable, by the literary controlling apparatus. In this respect, the disparities between policy and practice and the regime's post-publication attempts to correct the translated book market in official discourse betray the regime's constant grappling with the actual production of Flemish literature in translation.

Last but not least, it is obvious that the cultural exchange between Flanders and Germany was, on the part of the regime, fuelled by an outspoken political and ideological logic. All three discussed approaches to translated Flemish literature (and to translated literature in general) illustrate the regime's view on translation as a political force and a participant in nationalist ideology, used to support racial theories, to serve foreign policy goals and/or to contribute to domestic stability. Even the presence of criticized and rejected authors and works could to a certain extent serve to demonstrate Germany's openness to translated literature and bolster the idea of an 'unhampered cultural exchange', as is demonstrated in Havertz' prestigious work *Flandern*.

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<sup>71</sup> See J. Munday, 'Using primary sources to produce a microhistory of translation and translators: theoretical and methodological concerns', in *The Translator* 20 (2014), pp. 64-80; O. Paloposki, 'In search of an ordinary translator: translator histories, working practices and translator-publisher relations in the light of archival documents', in *The Translator* 23 (2017), pp. 31-48.

<sup>72</sup> Havertz, *Flandern*, p. 156.

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