

'Writing the Nation'.

**The contribution of writers to the shaping of a national identity
in nineteenth-century Germany and Flanders.**

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‘And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?’

Acts 2:8.

‘A major writer wants a major talent, and minor writers don’t do the nation any good’.

Jan Neruda, *Povidky malostranské*, 1878.

‘Men make their own history, but ... not ... under circumstances chosen by themselves’.

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1851-2).

Abstract.

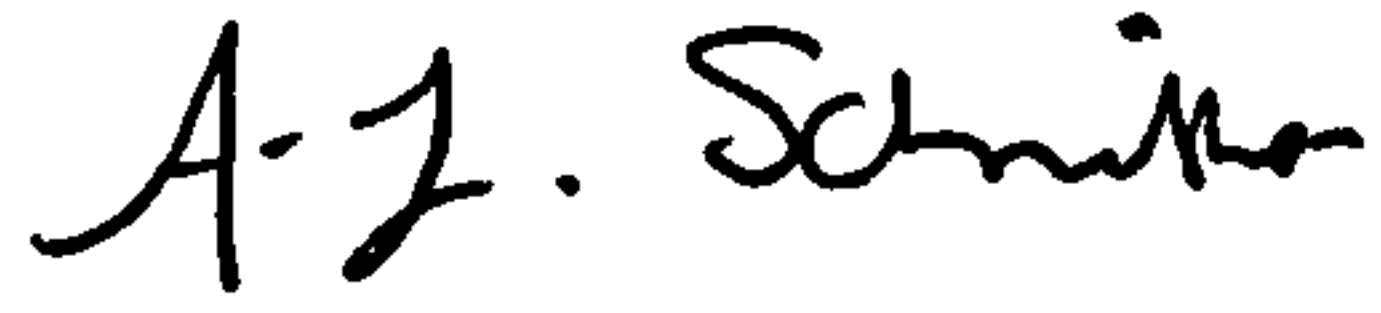
During the nineteenth century, Europe saw the development of national identities as the cornerstone of people's sense of belonging. This process, carried to a large extent by writers, had various outcomes, from the state-building that occurred in Germany and Italy, to the fragmentation it caused in the Balkans. The aim of this thesis is to determine the precise role of writers in the process of imagining the nation amongst two European peoples, the Germans and the Flemings. Of particular interest is the interrelationship that existed between these peoples and their intellectuals in the period under consideration, the exchange of ideas which occurred, and the similarities and differences in the processes through which 'Germany' and 'Flanders' were created in the minds of their peoples. In turn, the Flemish and German examples will throw more light upon the wider process through which European national identities came into being.

The men chosen as case studies for this thesis are the Flemings Jan Frans Willems (1793-1846) and Albrecht Rodenbach (1856-1880), and the Germans Jacob Grimm (1785-1863), his brother Wilhelm (1786-1859) and August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben (1798-1874). They can be divided into two categories of 'nationalist' writers: the philologist-researcher and the poet-songwriter. Together, these men shaped imagined communities for their peoples by providing a national past, a pantheon of national heroes, an ideal national man and woman, even a national landscape. In addition, they created the parameters for a national morality and ethos.

This thesis aims to show that the process through which national identities were created was far from simple. The inevitability suggested in many studies on nationalism simply fails to materialise in case studies such as these. The following chapters highlight the interaction between intellectuals and the great currents of history, and will show the volatility of the dynamics. The resulting story will clarify the ambiguity of the process through which national identities were written into existence in Germany and Flanders.

Declaration.

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own composition and that it contains no material previously published or submitted for the award of any other degree.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A-J. Schnitker". The letters are cursive and connected.

Anna Jane Schnitker.

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Introduction.

On 6 August 1806, the emperor, Franz II, abdicated the throne of the Holy Roman Empire. It was a symbolic gesture, through which he confirmed that the old world order had disappeared. The French Revolution had ensured that the role of the emperor as the temporal arm of government in Europe, largely emblematic since the end of the Middle Ages, was no longer required. The impact of the uprising against monarchical rule in France in 1789, had, indeed, been huge. Rarely does history contain a real break: the Revolution and its long aftermath constitute such a break. This is not just a retrospective judgement. To contemporaries it also seemed that they were witnessing something new, that change had been radical.¹ Even when the opportunity arose to reverse the process during the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the genie refused to be rebottled. Amongst this collapse of ancient certainties, many began to search for new parameters. It is this search that is addressed in this thesis.

At the core of this study sits that most profound, devastating, and, very occasionally, uplifting notion: national identity. Few ideas have had such influence on humanity during the past two centuries as this perception; few ideas are as contested. Most theories of nationalism accept the *a priori* existence of ‘a national identity’, that one can capture this in an ‘-ism’. Such concrete statements founder rather swiftly upon the evidence. Indeed, the only element in nationalism on which all commentators can agree, is the impossibility of defining it.² In the words of Eugen Lemberg, “Soviel Autoren, soviel Definitionen”.³ The same is true of national identities: put two Germans or Flemings in a room and ask them what constitutes their national identity, and it is likely that they will come up with greatly divergent answers. It is, therefore, undesirable to add yet another definition, or to choose one from the many on offer. In addition, such a choice is also unnecessary within the context of this thesis: it examines the *development* of national identities. Inflexible definitions are, therefore, detrimental to any such analysis. Here it will be

¹ The revolutionary government in France had even replaced the calendar with a new one.

² Shafer, B.C, *Nationalism. Myth and Reality*, chapter 1; Alter, P, *Nationalism*, pp. 1-3; Guenée, B, *States and Rulers in Later Medieval Europe*, pp. 216-20.

³ Lemberg, E, *Nationalismus*, vol. 1, p. 16.

sufficient to follow Benedict Anderson's description of the nation as 'an imagined community'.⁴ It is the imagining of the community which concerns us here, along with the impact it made on contemporary politics, and the parallel impact of politics on the process of imagination. This interaction makes it clear that the shaping of national identities and the political process of nationalism are, indeed, Siamese twins.

It also brings us to the key question under consideration: how did this process of imagining take place? Few would now be prepared to argue that imagined communities are timeless, indelible features of human society. It is true that in some European countries there was a long tradition of national coherence, based on commonly recognised symbolism, shaped through communal experiences.⁵ Denmark, Portugal, and, to a lesser extent, Great Britain, all serve to illustrate this 'nationalism' *avant la lettre*. Furthermore, among some peoples in Europe there had been a notion of 'sameness' even before the events following the French Revolution of 1789. Scotland is, perhaps, the classic example of this sentiment.⁶ In many respects, however, the first wave of nationalism had to invent itself, and the nation it claimed to represent, from nothing. Amongst the symbols by which communities represent themselves, the nation was, almost always, a latecomer. Religion, class, guilds, civic or rural loyalties, family, and monarchy were all symbolic indicators of a person's identity, long before they were, to some extent, replaced by the nation. In many cases, but not always, the state proceeded to embrace the symbols of the nation, and brought these into the homes of its citizens or subjects.⁷ Where it resisted, conflict ensued, and this certainly took the imagery of nationhood into every corner of the European continent.

During the eighteenth century, this slowly began to alter. Several factors contributed to this. One powerful engine for change can be found in the growing anti-monarchical sentiments that affected many parts of Europe and, indeed, the new world. The removal of the monarchy as *the* symbol of unity of a country, of the men

⁴ Anderson, B, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 5-6.

⁵ See for example Foot, S, "The Making of *Anglecynn*: English Identity before the Norman Conquest", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, vol. 6, (1996), pp. 25-49.

⁶ Lynch, M, *Scotland. A New History*, p. 343 and *passim*.

⁷ For the relationship between people and state prior to the modern period, see Guenée, B, *op.cit.* in particular part 3, "State and Society"; and Rice, E.F. and Grafton, A, *The Foundations of Early Modern Europe*, chapter 4, "The Formation of the Early Modern State".

and sometimes women who had designed the absolutist state, left a vacuum that cried out to be filled. It was in the country in which the monarchy disappeared first, France, that the torch of nationalism was lit. As so often in European history, the French capital, Paris, was the intellectual birthplace of an idea that was to change the world. The leaders of the Revolution had developed an ideology to sustain their assault upon the old order, which called for a new, all-conquering loyalty, and instituted a cult of the nation based on history and culture: *La France* had been born.⁸ This was reflected in law, for in an *arrêté* of 23 July 1789, the term *lèse-majesté* was replaced by *lèse-nation*.⁹ The state was thus elevated onto the pedestal hitherto reserved for the monarch, and *Les Citoyens* replaced Louis XIV's *l'état c'est moi*.

A second major process that undermined traditional markers of identity, and caused the search for new ones, was the accelerating Industrial Revolution and its accompanying urbanisation.¹⁰ Although less immediate, these processes were more detrimental to traditional forms of imagined communities than anything else. Artesian production and its accompanying guilds, small farming communities, and deep-seated belief structures were all swept away by unstoppable change. The process left deep wounds, and one has only to turn to the writings of those affected to appreciate the sense of loss, particularly the loss of identity, which it occasioned. Here is the Orkney poet, Edwin Muir, whose father's farm was unable to sustain the unequal contest with modernity, describing his enforced move to Glasgow,

“Then in 1751 I set out from Orkney for Glasgow. When I arrived I found that it was not 1751 but 1901, and that a hundred and fifty years had been burned up in my two days' journey”.¹¹

Less dramatically, but equally profound, is the shocked description by the Flemish poet, Prudens van Duyse, of a steam locomotive tearing through the peaceful Flemish countryside,

⁸ Rudé, G, *Revolutionary Europe 1783-1815*, pp. 118 and 156.

⁹ *Dictionnaire Historique de la Langue Française*, vol. 2, 1992 ed. S.v. “Nation”.

¹⁰ For the impact of the industrial revolution and urbanisation on the individual see, Perrot, M. (ed), *De Franse Revolutie en de opkomst van de bourgeoisie* and Perrot, M. (ed), *De negentiende eeuw: materiële cultuur en de wereld van het individu*.

¹¹ Quoted in Muir, E, *Scottish Journey*, p. xii.

“Gelijk de vuurwind der woestijn, schrik der natuur,
Vliegt, steeds versnellend een gevaart den kerkhofmuur
Voorbijgebleemd: 't schijnt een helsche koets, omflonkerd
Van vuur en dampen”.¹²

Several reactions followed this twin assault on the political and social order of the *Ancien Regime*. All of these can be more or less defined as the search for new identities. To Marx and Engels, a new identity was to be found in the communal experiences and hopes of the working class, the proletariat created by industrialisation. Their followers argued that this new identity ought to command the greater loyalty, overriding religious or national allegiance. Nowhere was this more forcefully expressed than through the institution of the First International. The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also witnessed a spectacular religious revival. Within Protestantism this was often aligned with nationhood, and, therefore, frequently part of a different search for identity. A powerful example for this may be found in the young United States of America, in particular on the Unionist side during the Civil War.¹³ Roman Catholicism, too, underwent a period of dramatic renewal.¹⁴ Here, the increasingly centralised Church began to demand ultimate authority, again over and above any other loyalties.

If some reacted to the upheavals of the Revolutionary years by a vigorous search for new forms, albeit mostly based on past models, others rejected the inventions of the Revolutionary epoch with the same vehemence as they rejected anything new. Mentally lost in the new world, they began to look back to the past for security. This could take the form of nostalgia for the *Ancien Regime*, but more frequently expressed itself in an exaggerated yearning for the perceived glories of the Middle Ages. Whatever period people turned to, it was conditioned by nostalgia for a ‘golden age’. In this golden age they thought they could discover the building blocks to reconstruct – restore – what had been lost in the intervening years.¹⁵ The past, then, was not just a mirror which held lessons for the present; it could also be

¹² Duyse, P. van, “De Stoomkoets”. In Duyse, Fl. van (ed), *Prudens van Duyse's Nagelaten Gedichten*, vol. 7, p. 210.

¹³ Rozwenc, E.C. (ed), *The Causes of the American Civil War*.

¹⁴ Coppa, F.J, *The Modern Papacy since 1789*, pp. 33-99.

¹⁵ This notion of ‘restoring’ the past, embellishing it to make it more ‘real’, and constructing a new identity from it, is explored in exemplary fashion in Bergeron, K, *Decadent Enchantments*.

reconstructed and enhanced to serve the present.¹⁶ It was, above all, a past that could serve *every* member of a given community, a *national* past.

The armies of the French revolution determined who constituted this community. In one of those deep ironies of history, the forces of the men who conjured up the ideology of the state forced it upon those they subjected. Sweeping away all other markers of community, they left only language as the unifying factor of those they conquered. As a result, new identities came to be constructed around language, in Germany as well as in Flanders: nationalism grew from a fusion between cultural and political resistance. The nineteenth century became an age in which, to quote Leslie Bodi, the intellectual “gave poetic expression to the political dreams and aspirations of his age”.¹⁷ This process was not without its own ambiguities. Finding and defining the national, it will be suggested here, was a haphazard and intermittent affair, not even a real, continuous process. There were false starts, cul-de-sacs and u-turns; there was, in other words, no inevitable march to the holy grail of a German or a Flemish identity.

Amongst those who would become the Flemish, a first stirring may be detected in the lonely voice crying in the wilderness of Jan Baptist Verlooy. It is symptomatic that his *Verhandeling op d’Onacht der moederlyke Tael in de Nederlanden* of 1788, made little impact; this was just one of those false starts.¹⁸ Amongst the Germans, by contrast, one may detect an unbroken line from Leibniz’s publication of his *Ermahnung an die Teutsche, ihren verstand und sprache beßer zu üben* in the late seventeenth century, to cultural activists in the nineteenth.¹⁹ For all this continuity, there was still very little that was certain about the ultimate shape of a German national identity. Only on the importance of a shared language was there any agreement. This relative malleability of an eventual identity, and of the

¹⁶ A good analysis of this process is given by Kühnel, J, “Nationale Versepiik”. In H.A. Glaser (ed), *Deutsche Literatur*, vol. 7, pp. 282-3. In Germany, Novalis made the classic statement on the Golden Age in 1799, in his *Die Christenheit oder Europa*, p. 507 and passim. It was also expressed in architecture and even through the new medium of photography. See for example Fillitz, H, “Der Traum vom Glück”. In H. Fillitz (ed), *Der Traum vom Glück*, p. 15; Andries, P. et al, *Camera Gothica*.

¹⁷ Bodi was referring to Heinrich Heine, but the particular can be made to fit the general here. Bodi, L, “Heinrich Heine: the poet as *frondeur*”. In E. Kamenka and F.B. Smith (eds), *Intellectuals and Revolution. Socialism and the Experience of 1848*, p. 43.

¹⁸ Verlooy, J.B.C, *Verhandeling op d’Onacht der moederlyke Tael in de Nederlanden* (1788).

¹⁹ Blackall, E.A, *The Emergence of German as a Literary Language 1700-1775*, pp. 1-9.

Vaterland/vaderland which accompanied it, was perfectly summed up by the German poet, Dingelstedt,

“Das Vaterland ist immer so,
Wie 's passend wird befunden,
Bald Klein-Sedez, bald Folio,
Doch immerdar – gebunden!”²⁰

Dingelstedt harboured no doubt at all as to the reality of his *Vaterland*, but indicates that its ultimate shape, and hence the elements that should make up its identity, were up for discussion.

This is a most important issue, especially when the lack of attention to the details of the process of shaping national identities is kept in mind. Flanders, as it existed before 1830, referred to a medieval principality, and *nobody* considered that it incorporated all Dutch speakers in the southern Low Countries. Before this could happen, a slow process, accompanied by virulent disagreements, had to take place. Amongst the Germans, there was a consensus that there was indeed such a thing as a German identity, based on language. Here, however, the consensus ended. All other details were as disputed as in Flanders. There were debates on the role of religion and denominations, debates on what was ‘typically’ German. In addition, German speakers could not agree upon the boundaries of a nation-state, a question that was not even an issue amongst the Flemings. All these factors will be explored in greater depth in the following chapters.

How these two European national identities were shaped, and what exactly the role of the writer was in these two creations, forms the central topic of this thesis. Writers gave expression to, and, at times, ‘lived’ the nation. The centrality of these writers was such, that one nineteenth-century Czech writer could claim at a meeting of nationalist authors that, “if the ceiling were to fall on [them] now, that would be the end of the national revival”.²¹ This was certainly also true in Flanders, where

²⁰ Dingelstedt, F, *Lieder eines kosmopolitischen Nachtwächters*, pp. 153-4. The italics are mine. ‘Klein-Sedez’ and ‘Folio’ refer to paper size in books. Referring to the struggle between *Groß-* and *Kleindeutschen*, the lines are very applicable to the wider nationalist search for what the *Vaterland* actually was.

²¹ Quoted in Taylor, A.J.P, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1809-1918*, p. 33. The word ‘nationalist’ often has rather negative connotations. Needless to say, it is used here in a ‘neutral’ tone to denote writers concerned about national identities.

arguably it might have taken two such accidents. In Germany, many more buildings would have had to collapse, but the argument holds up here as well. The centrality of writers in the process was such, that it is no exaggeration to claim that in many cases the nation and national identity were actually written into existence.²² This is particularly true for Flanders, but to a lesser extent also for Germany. To quote Péter Hanák, “Politics and culture are interpenetrating realms of human creativity and destructiveness” and this was never more true than during the birth of national identities.²³

It is clear that the process through which national identities were born was far from simple. It was also a Europe-wide phenomenon, which invariably leads to over-generalisations in many studies on nationalism. Ever since the seemingly unstoppable rise of the *Annales* School, professional history has been dominated by notions of processes, of deep underlying currents sweeping puny human individuals before them, regardless of their own preferences.²⁴ However, these processes are frequently best observed through the eyes of individuals, particularly when these individuals helped to give shape to them. This micro-historical approach, now common in the Low Countries and increasingly in France, is ideally suited to highlight the ambiguities in the shaping of national identities in Flanders and Germany. Case studies can fill in many of the details missing in more general studies.

Adopting a comparative approach will enhance its effectiveness, particularly as the two ‘nations’ under consideration, Germany and Flanders, differ from one another in many respects.²⁵ Nowhere are these differences more pronounced than in the field of state building. By 1871, most Germans were living in a nation-state that defined itself through its culture, *Deutschland*. Flanders was still no more than a cultural

²² A process that continues until the present in many countries. See, for example, the contemporary situation in India, with the ‘Hinduisation’ of the country’s past. Marqusee, M, “History of Hate”, *BBC History Magazine*, vol. 5, no. 7, (2004), pp. 28-30.

²³ Hanák, P, *The Garden and the Workshop*, p. xix.

²⁴ The classic statement of the *Annales* School is Braudel, F, *Civilisation matérielle, Economie et Capitalisme XVe-XVIIIe Siècle*, 3 vols. Paris, 1979.

²⁵ A strong argument in favour of comparative studies may be found in Lovejoy, A.O, *The Great Chain of Being*, pp. 17-8.

notion, had no legal status, and was not to have one until the 1990's!²⁶ As a result, some commentators have made a distinction between what they believe to be two forms of nationalism, the full-blown variety which may be observed in Germany, and regionalism, as is to be found in Flanders.²⁷ However, the apparent differences cover up much more fundamental similarities, similarities that tell their own story. Here the most striking aspect lies in the astonishing success of writers in Germany and Flanders in forging a sense of unity amongst peoples with extremely diverse backgrounds and historical experiences. Within the process, as in the outcome, there were considerable differences, but these only help to develop deeper insights. There is, for example, the fact that whereas 'Germany' existed as a concept *before* the nineteenth century, Flanders did not. Among German intellectuals the debate about a national identity focused primarily on the strains caused by the conflicting demands of statehood and ethnicity; amongst the Flemish the arguments tended to revolve around the centrality of Catholicism to their newly-found identity. These differences and similarities only serve to enhance our understanding of the process in hand. With such a detailed comparative study, sweeping generalisations can be challenged, and the local restored as the basis for theories on the general.²⁸

At the heart of the four case studies that follow are five men and their works: Jan Frans Willems (1793-1846), Jacob Grimm (1785-1863) and his brother Wilhelm (1786-1859), Albrecht Rodenbach (1856-1880), and August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben (1798-1874). Two main criteria have determined who the five protagonists are.²⁹ The first and obvious consideration was the impact that they had on the shaping of a national identity within their respective nations. The whole concept of a national identity revolves around shared perceptions, and those who did most to influence, indeed to shape, these perceptions are the obvious candidates for

²⁶ Nörtemann, G.H, "ImagiNation", *Historische Anthropologie*, vol. 9, no. 1, (2001), p. 27.

²⁷ For an attempt to evaluate the type of nationalism which may be seen in Flanders, see Hroch, M, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, chapter 14 and *passim*.

²⁸ Definitions, according to Kamenka, should only be offered at the end of an enquiry, and are no replacement for the comprehension of a subject in its historical and social context. Kamenka, E, "Political Nationalism – The Evolution of the Idea". In E. Kamenka (ed), *Nationalism*. p. 3.

²⁹ There is, of course, no failsafe methodology. It may be argued that either Hendrik Conscience or Richard Wagner should have been included based on the above criteria, and it would be difficult to refute such an argument.

inclusion. This influence need not always have been direct. At times, it took others to popularise their research and conclusions. Nevertheless, all five men made enormously influential – often vital – contributions to the definition of national identities in Germany and Flanders. At times this occurred through a whole oeuvre, at times through one or two poems, sometimes even through the example they set in their own lives.

In addition, the five lives had to tell different stories if the comparative method was to yield any results. A major aim of this thesis is to explore the ambiguities in the process through which national identities are given shape. It would have been pointless if each life provided the same information. Beyond this, and again with the aforementioned aim in mind, these lives somehow had to complement each other, for it is *through* them that the wider canvas should become visible. Finally, the tensions within the intellectual communities of Germany and Flanders about what constituted the nation also had to become clear: these case studies had to indicate the fluidity of the process under consideration.

The first three men combine to form one panel of a diptych, with, as its major underlying theme, the means through which writers contributed to the growth of national identities. Through an examination of the life and works of Jan Frans Willems, the *Vader der Vlaamse Beweging*, the discovery of Flanders can be traced. The dynamics between outside forces on the one hand, and Willems' own unique intellect on the other, contrasts sharply with the much more methodical, preconceived plan of the other two men. Jacob Grimm and his brother, Wilhelm, have been inseparable in the public's mind ever since the nineteenth century. Thanks to their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, they are also the only household names amongst our five men. The chapter in which they star charts the development of a German identity. The combined efforts of Willems and the Grimms are principally to be found in their oeuvres. Yet their legacy was much more direct; it can also be found in their voluminous correspondence, including the letters they wrote to one another. They also exercised massive influence from that typical medium of nineteenth-century communication, the public platform. Speeches to large congresses reveal some of the most important elements of their intellectual achievements. Examined in

unity, these sources illustrate the process through which Willems and the brothers Grimm contributed to the shaping of national identities of Flanders and Germany.

The second panel of the diptych depicts what it was that writers contributed to developing national identities. Nationalist writers were not all cut from the same cloth, a fact frequently overlooked by theoretical historians. To contrast the staid, scholarly Grimms and Willems, the third and fourth chapters turn to the *enfants terribles* of the movements in Flanders and Germany: the Byronesque Albrecht Rodenbach, and the *bon vivant* August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben. Both men towered over the nationalist scene, without ever being a real part of it; their lives were regarded as mythical even before they died. At times, it is difficult to separate legend from history, particularly as the main sources for their lives intended to propagate these myths. In a way, this matters little. These chapters aim to trace the importance of 'life as art' to national identities. Through their lives and myths, Rodenbach and Hoffmann von Fallersleben created iconic images of Flanders and Germany.

They also composed *the* two iconic poems of Flemish and German nationalism, Rodenbach the student battle hymn *Het lied der Vlaamsche zonen*, Hoffmann what was to become the German national anthem, the *Lied der Deutschen*. There was, however, much more to their poetry than just these two poems. By examining the themes of the two men's oeuvres, the final two chapters will sketch the iconic images that they presented as essential to the national identities of their respective nations. No investigation of the development of national identities would be complete without some thoughts on exactly what was being constructed, and these last chapters will provide some of the answers.

Nationalism is still a very volatile subject, perhaps more so during the past decade and a half than had been the case for almost half a century; volatile in its own right, but particularly in the two cases under consideration.³⁰ German national identity has been blighted by nationalism as no other, to the extent that the topic is frequently

³⁰ One may concur with Smith that the "prevailing image of nationalism in the West today is mainly negative", although as with so much of the theoretical writing on nationalism, that rather depends where one lives. Nationalism is very much respected in the USA, and so-called regional nationalism is also alive and well, and well-respected in many parts of Europe. Smith, A.D, *op.cit.* p. 8.

regarded as taboo. The Second World War also marked Flemish national identity, but not to the same extent. Since the late 1980's, it has once more become an issue, with extreme right wing politics back on the agenda in a way that would be inconceivable in the contemporary *Bundesrepublik*. All this adds up to spell trouble for an academic research project, but also makes such a project more necessary than ever. A detailed knowledge of how these situations came about might create the insights needed to understand both past and present developments. On the basis of what follows, it will hopefully also be possible to distinguish between acceptable cultural pride and unacceptable nationalist sentiments. The five men in this thesis certainly displayed both.

It should also be borne in mind that this early nationalism lacked one element that was to turn the idea into the evil that it eventually became. Race reared its head only in the wake of Charles Darwin's monumental and earth-shattering book *On the Origin of Species* of 1859.³¹ Knox, a British medical doctor, translated Darwin's theories in the field of human culture in a string of articles during the 1850's and early 1860's, which allowed the spurious notion of 'human races' to become respectable.³² Culture came to be equated with 'race', just as earlier in the century language had been equated with culture. Jacob Grimm's co-operation with the Serb nationalist poet, Vuk Karadžić, or Hoffmann von Fallersleben's meetings with the pan-Slavs in Prague in 1827 and 1834, would both have been inconceivable in the racist nationalist Germany of a later age.³³ Wagnerian notions of race, or Houston Chamberlain's racism, had little resonance amongst the people studied here. Even Albrecht Rodenbach, who wore his admiration for Wagner on his sleeve, never betrayed any inclination towards a racism that, by his time, was already endemic amongst the nationalists of all European countries. This is not to argue that non-racist nationalism is never dangerous: the victims of the French Revolution, or of the revolutions of 1848, bear testimony to this.

³¹ James Joll traces the impact of Darwin through to Hitler for Germany. Unfortunately, such a critical assessment does not exist for Flanders, but Joll's general remarks are applicable to all of Europe. Joll, J, *Europe since 1870*, p. 102 and passim. See also Mosse, W.E, *Liberal Europe*, p. 48 and passim.

³² Knox, R, *The Races of Men: A Fragment*, 8 vols. See also Augstein, H.F, *Race: The Origins of an Idea, 1760-1850*.

³³ Bojić, V, *Jacob Grimm und Vuk Karadžić*; For Hoffmann in Prague see *ML*, vol. 2, pp. 47-8 and 237-9.

In the final analysis, what follows is the story of the power of ideas. It is not a debate on the effectiveness of these ideas. Few would risk suggesting that they were not effective: the Nazis are too persuasive an argument. Some have claimed that nationalism is not about ideas at all, that to focus on culture is to lose sight of the fact that nationalism is about politics and power.³⁴ This rather inverts the process at hand. Surely for a politician to be able to exploit national sentiment, that sentiment has to exist beforehand.³⁵ If a shared perception of a common German identity had not existed, the Nazis would have had little to appeal to in the first place. In addition, cultural nationalism does not invariably lead to political nationalism.³⁶ A good example may be found in the Swedish-speaking Åland Islands, thoroughly Finnish in political outlook, completely Swedish culturally. It is, therefore, suggested here that to uncover the shaping of a national identity, one has to examine its cultural origins. This thesis, then, traces the growth of an idea, and a very successful one at that. As Hans Kohn pointed out, it may be doubted that the vast majority of Germans, let alone Flemings, were particularly worried about the identity of their community in 1815.³⁷ There can be no doubt that this had changed completely by 1914, not to mention 1933.

What these chapters will hopefully do, is to recreate for the reader some of the excitement felt by the protagonists as they entered upon their voyages of discovery of the 'national'; of how they doggedly stuck to the defence of their own language and culture, frequently against all odds.³⁸ Here is told the story of how Willems, Rodenbach, the brothers Grimm and Hoffmann von Fallersleben tried to find and convey to others what they thought it meant to be Flemish, what it was that made people German. Not for them the perversions of later generations of nationalists, whose intolerance was matched only by their brutality. These men saw beauty in all European cultures, even if, in the case of the French, only grudgingly. What follows

³⁴ Breuilly, J, *Nationalism and the State*, p. 1.

³⁵ The classic example for this comes from Revolutionary France, where the writers of nationalist pamphlets became the politicians *after* the Revolution. Shafer, B.C, "Bourgeois Nationalism in the Pamphlets on the Eve of the French Revolution", *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 10, no. 1, (1938), p. 31.

³⁶ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 8, Micropaedia. 1991 ed. S.v. "nationalism".

³⁷ Kohn, H, *Nationalism*, p. 38.

³⁸ "Überhaupt hat unser Studium die ganz eigene Freude, daß wir, wie die Entdecker neuer Weltteile ... in Gegenden geführt werden, die vorher noch nicht betreten waren". Wilhelm Grimm to Savigny; *Savigny*, p. 120.

tells of an intellectual *tour de force*, carried out under difficult circumstances, for which the five, at times, paid a personal price.

By rediscovering these stories, new light may be shed on the current state of affairs in Europe. Many have predicted the demise of the nation-state within contemporary Europe, pointing towards the European Union and other trans-national entities taking over many of the nation-state's attributes. This is a sentiment – for it is little more than that – shared by Euro-enthusiasts and Euro-sceptics alike. Sovereignty has once more become a battleground, as it was in the days of Willems and the Grimms. At its core is the fear of nationalism on the part of the enthusiasts, and the fear of the demise of national identities on the part of the sceptics. The four case studies which follow show that they may both be mistaken. National identities do not require the nation-state to flourish, and nationalism can be just as vicious, or, as the Yugoslav civil wars have shown, even more vicious, without the nation-state. The stories of Willems, the Grimms, Rodenbach and Hoffmann von Fallersleben also contain a more positive message for the present. All five men were passionate about European cultures, regardless of boundaries or divisions. They lived in a mental 'European home', where differences were seen as normal, at least most of the time. Perhaps that is where sceptics and enthusiasts should look for common ground when building a new Europe: a Europe of cultures rather than of bureaucrats to replace the warring nation-states of the past.

A final word should go to the problem of nomenclature. In Belgium in particular, many towns and cities have two, three, and occasionally even four names. Brussels, for example, is also Bruxelles and Brussel. In Germany, this is less of a problem, except in those regions where Polish or Czech names are now used instead of German ones. For this thesis, the Polish name Wrocław instead of the German Breslau is the most obvious example. For the sake of clarity, modern, local names are used wherever possible. Thus, Gent is preferred to Ghent or Gand. The one exception has been made for Wien, which has retained its English version for the sake of readability. Only in cases such as Breslau, where the older version is more appropriate, has the German nomenclature been maintained. After all, Hoffmann von Fallersleben knew the place as Breslau. What is a problem with place names is

equally troublesome with first names and surnames. Once again, these are given in the local language. There is, after all, nothing more grating than having to read 'Hapsburg' instead of 'Habsburg'.

1. Jan Frans Willems and the Birth of Flanders.

Jan Frans Willems (1793-1846)



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1. Jan Frans Willems and the Birth of Flanders.

A Nationalist from Birth: the French Years.

On 18 May 1848, jubilant crowds waving black, red and gold flags witnessed a procession making its way to the Paulskirche in Frankfurt-am-Main. Amongst the throng walked the newly-elected delegates to the National Assembly, who embodied the aspirations of many for a united Germany. The initial months of the revolution had passed, and the people lining the streets were hopeful that real German unity was about to be achieved. A few weeks later, another crowd gathered to watch another parade, accompanied by music, choirs, poets and prose. This time the setting was the small village of Boechout in Belgium, and, instead of the black-red-gold of the German revolutionary flag, the crowd stood cheering amidst a myriad of international flags, which had been loaned by the ships moored alongside the quays at Antwerpen.¹ Boechout may seem to have been an unlikely setting for such an event, but, as the birthplace of Jan Frans Willems, it had gained a firm place in the mental landscape of the Flemish movement. And so 4 June 1848 saw the unveiling of a commemorative monument to Willems' honour. The writer had died almost two years earlier, on 24 June 1846, and was never to experience the heady days of the 1848 revolutions, nor the disappointments that followed.²

The continued sense of loss that was felt after Willems' death by those who knew him, bears witness to the lasting impression he made on his people and his country. His death was mourned by the many who knew him in the Netherlands and in Germany. In Flanders, the identity of which he had done so much to create, his funeral became a day of 'national' mourning.³ The poet, Prudens van Duyse, one of Willems' greatest friends,

¹ Crick, J, *Jan-Frans Willems*, p. 36.

² Witte, E. et al, *Politieke Geschiedenis van België*, pp. 55 and following.

³ Willemsfonds, *Het, Jan Frans Willems en het Willems Fonds*, p. 1; Potter, F. de, *Verhandeling over de Vlaemsche letterkunde in België*, p. 132.

composed some verses especially for the unveiling of the monument. Calling him “vader Willems”, he declared that,

“... wat storm er rond moog spookten,
Gy heerscht op 't nageslacht tot Vlaendren zy vergaen!”⁴

This notion of Willems as the “Vader der Vlaamsche Beweging” was to live on, for it accurately reflected his importance in the creation of a Flemish national identity.⁵ During his life, Willems went through a process during which the concept of what it meant to be a Dutch-speaker in the southern Low Countries underwent a dramatic number of changes, almost invariably occasioned by political upheaval. It had been his destiny to try to shape an identity for his people throughout all this.

As the legacy of Willems, and others like him, grew in strength and gave way to more radical forms of national sentiment, his stature and reputation underwent considerable modifications. Appropriated at first by mainly anti-clerical liberals, his name subsequently became associated with the much more radical Flemish sentiments in the increasingly bitter nationalistic world of the first half of the twentieth century. Willems, thus, posthumously mutated from a writer and scholar who had struggled to define what it was to be a Dutch-speaker in the southern Low Countries, to the first great leader of the ‘Flemish Movement’.⁶ Events had come full circle, and those who defined themselves as ‘Flemish’, and owed the possibility of doing so to Willems and a few others, now could no longer perceive of a world where Flanders still had to be invented. The contribution made by Willems to the birth of this concept was almost exclusively through history, literature and philology; fields in which his standing remains undisputed to this day.⁷ In his survey of Flemish literature, R.F. Lissens called Jan Frans Willems

⁴ Duyse, P. van, “Bij de inhuldiging van Willems gedenkteeken”, *De Vlaemsche Rederyker*, vol. 9, (1848), pp. 22-4.

⁵ Mierlo, J. van, *Jan Frans Willems*, p. 3.

⁶ This retrospective attitude towards the early thinkers and artists in nineteenth-century Flanders was criticised by Tom Verschaffel in his definitive study on nineteenth-century book illustrators. Verschaffel, T, *Beeld en geschiedenis*.

⁷ Godfried Croenen, for example, uses Willems’ Van Heelu edition in an article published in 2000. Croenen, G, “Regions, Principalities and Regional Identity in the Low Countries: The Case of the Nobility”. In P. Ainsworth and T. Scott (eds), *Regions and Landscapes*, pp. 141-2.

“de eerste Vlaamse figuur van formaat in de nieuwe tijd.”⁸ Leo van Puyvelde went even farther. In a commemorative speech delivered to the *Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde* in 1946, he attributed to Willems the laying of “den grondslag ... van onze taal- en letterkundige wetenschap”.⁹ Willems’ standing is thus beyond debate, yet the measure of his contribution and its implementation is a different matter. It is only by turning to his life story that one may discover the depth and significance of the man.

Jan Frans Willems’ arrival into the world on 11 March 1793 coincided with one of the greatest periods of turmoil in the history of Europe. It was less than one year since revolutionary France had declared war on the emperor-elect Franz II, with the objective of establishing France’s ‘natural border’ on the Rhine.¹⁰ This was to be the start of twenty-three years of warfare. The village of Boechout lay in the territory ruled by Franz II as Duke of Brabant. It had been occupied by the Revolutionary armies subsequent to their defeat of the Imperial army at Jemappes on 6 November 1792. Consequently, Willems’ birth took place amidst the presence of an army of occupation. According to his son, Felix, this was almost literally the case, for Willems’ parents had nearly ended up with five French soldiers billeted in their house.¹¹ It was not the first time that a foreign army had overrun the southern Netherlands, but the consequences would be more far-reaching than at any time since the revolt against Spain in the sixteenth century.

Although an allied victory on 18 March 1793 at Neerwinden meant that the seven-day-old Willems was to find himself back under Habsburg rule, Jourdan’s defeat of the duke of Saxe-Coburg at Fleurus on 16 June restored the French to power, and put a permanent end to Habsburg government in the southern Low Countries. The French victory set the political parameters of Willems’ life for the next twenty-one years: he would spend his youth under French rule. On 1 October 1795, the occupied territories were officially

⁸ Lissens, R.F, *De Vlaamse Letterkunde van 1780 tot heden*, p. 43.

⁹ Puyvelde, L. van, “Inleidende Toespraak”, *KVATL*, vol. 10, no. 2, (1946), p. 1.

¹⁰ Doyle, W, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, p. 351.

incorporated into the French Republic. These included the former prince-bishopric of Liège, which had a substantial Dutch-speaking population. The annexation of the multitude of territories that made up the Austrian Netherlands was the final blow to the political and cultural paradigms within which its population had been living. The arrival of the Revolutionary armies was not, however, the first attack upon the certainties of the past. The accession of the emperor Josef II in 1780 had signalled the start of an extensive reform programme in the region.¹² The authority of the Catholic Church had been undermined, the allegiance to which had been the principal plank of local identity since the late sixteenth century. The emperor had also tried to abolish the various principalities in an attempt to create a uniform political entity. Josef II's insensitive reforms contributed to the revolt against Habsburg rule in 1789-90, which almost succeeded in establishing a southern Netherlandic state, including not just the Habsburg principalities, but the prince-bishopric of Liège as well.¹³ The arrival of the French, therefore, completed an ongoing process, which saw centuries-old markers of communal identity being undermined and then finally swept away.

As a result, the young Willems belonged to the first generation in his village for over seven centuries who could not think of themselves as Brabander first and foremost. Ancient loyalties could not, however, be suppressed that easily. As late as 1833, when French rule had been replaced by Dutch rule, and it by Belgian, Willems could still refer to himself as a "Brabançon".¹⁴ French occupation, nevertheless, completely subsumed this 'regional' identity. Willems, therefore, grew up and regarded himself – at least until 1812 – as a *citoyen*, first of the French Republic, and subsequently of the French Empire. The French invasion of 1792 started a process of political unification of *all* Dutch-speakers, a process which was completed with the annexation of the separate Bonapartist kingdom of Holland to the Empire in 1810.¹⁵ The Revolutionary army also brought with it the modern concept that there should be only one language of state,

¹¹ Crick, J, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10. Ironically, they managed to prevent the bivouac by having a notice put on the door, which proclaimed that a new citizen of the Republic had just been born.

¹² For the Josephine reforms see Dumont, G, *Histoire de Belgique*, p. 296.

¹³ Pirenne, H. and Verkruysse, J, *Les Etats Belgique Unis*.

¹⁴ Willems, J.F, *Reinardus Vulpes*, p. 13.

¹⁵ See Israel, J.I, *The Dutch Republic*, chapter 44.

something that had rarely played a role in the considerations of Dutch-speakers before.¹⁶ One of the more paradoxical results was that people like Willems were suddenly able to conceive of the Dutch language and culture as a single entity within the much larger, French-dominated Empire.

Willems would naturally have been too young to have been aware of the major implications of the first years of French rule. A process of Frenchification, which could already be observed under the Austrian Habsburgs, now became official policy. All signs and newspapers had to be in French, and education was almost exclusively delivered in that language; if one was to progress in society, one had to be proficient in French.¹⁷ These measures had a direct impact on Willems' family. In 1807, the French dismissed his father, who was a tax collector and councillor in Boechout: his linguistic skills fell short of requirements.¹⁸ It was this incident that caused Willems to write his first poem. His *Hekeldicht* is a strong complaint against the actions of the state, but it would be dangerous to draw any conclusions from this poem as far as Willems' attitude towards the French rulers is concerned.¹⁹ The *Hekeldicht* was a personal reaction to an incursion of the French into Willems' private world; it was never published, and that was probably his intention.

The poem was composed in Lier, where Willems had been sent to be educated as a verger. The Lier years were to inform many of his ideas over the subsequent period to 1834 and beyond. Here he became involved with the *Rederijkers*, the two Lier branches of that corporate body of poets and writers with their roots in the later Middle Ages.²⁰ The importance of this involvement stretched well beyond the inspiration it gave him to write the *Hekeldicht*. Willems himself attributed his precocious interest in poetry to the members of the chambers. The birth of his muse was assisted by his relationship with

¹⁶ In France the Jacobins imposed French as the 'language of liberty' and condemned local dialects and regional languages. Forrest, A, *The French Revolution*, p. 152.

¹⁷ Roegiers, J, "Sociocultureel leven in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden 1794-1814". In *AGN*, vol. 11, p. 72 and passim.

¹⁸ Deprez 1993, pp. 7-8. Under the old regime, Dutch was still in use in the local administration of Brabant and Flanders. Kossmann, E.H, *The Low Countries 1780-1940*, p. 80.

¹⁹ Willems, J.F, "Hekel-dicht op den Maire en Municipaliteyt van Bouchout", quoted in Deprez, A, *Jan Frans Willems. Een bijdrage tot zijn biografie tot 1824*, Bijlage I, pp. 30-1.

²⁰ Willems, J.F, "Kronyk der Kamers van Rhetorica te Lier", *Belgisch Museum*, vol. 8, (1844), p. 288.

the Lier schoolmaster Bouwens. Reminiscing towards the end of his life, Willems recalled that Bouwens had lent him copies of northern Dutch poets, in particular the poetry of Feitama, whom he valued above all.²¹ This strongly influenced his notion of an ‘organic’ and unified Dutch culture.

The various influences which Willems experienced during his sojourn in Lier were completed by his acquaintance with Georg Bergmann. The latter had been born in Nassau, and had been an officer in the service of the last Stadholder of the Dutch Republic, Willem V. In Lier he became involved with the town council after arriving there as a French prisoner of war in 1794.²² According to Bergmann’s son, George, his father had been educated in Germany, and was a keen student of German language and literature. During his service in the army of the Dutch Republic, Bergmann had learnt Dutch, later adding French to his linguistic achievements.²³ Wishing to convey his interest in languages to his children, Bergmann was confronted with the French-only policy of the schools, and decided to teach them at home.²⁴ Willems entered into this arrangement, driven by his own interest in Dutch language and literature. Bergmann’s most important direct impact upon Willems was his “onverholen liefde voor de moedertaal”.²⁵ With his firm foundation in what would later be called *Germanistik*, Bergmann impressed a strong sense of the intrinsic value of Dutch culture and language upon his young protégé. This fused with his other experiences in Lier: the love of all Dutch literature on the part of Bouwens, and the medieval traditions of the *Rederijkers*. All this provided Willems with a glimpse of the possibilities of cultural resistance to the overwhelming presence of French in the Empire.

Willems was to carry his Lier experiences with him when he moved to Antwerpen at the age of sixteen, where he settled down as a clerk to the Antwerpen imperial notary,

²¹ Ibid. Willems was fortunate to have access to these books, as “kettische werken” from Holland were banned. Heremans, J.F.J., “Jan Frans Willems herdacht”. In M. Rooses, *Keus van Nederlandsche Redevoeringen*, p. 203.

²² *Deprez 1993*, p. 10.

²³ Bergmann, G., “Mijne Herinneringen aan Jan Frans Willems (1828-1833)”. In Het Willemsfonds, *Jan Frans Willems*, no. 129, p. 128.

²⁴ Vroede, M de, “Onderwijs en opvoeding in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden 1794-1814”. In *AGN*, vol. 11, pp. 63 and 65.

²⁵ *EVB*, vol. 2, S.v. “Willems, Jan Frans”.

Van Puyenaer. University education was out of the question, his father no longer having the financial means to support him. The climate for Dutch-speakers in Antwerpen was deteriorating at the time of his arrival. In 1810, the prefect would prohibit the printing of any material in Dutch, and the contrast with his environment in Lier must have been noticeable.²⁶ Willems, however, managed to strike a compromise. He was willing to accept political domination by the French, as long as he had scope to express himself in the medium of his choice. In other words, he had become a cultural activist in the mould of his acquaintances in Lier. As for political nationalism, this was not even on the horizon. Evidence for this comes from the verses he wrote after his arrival in Antwerpen. In 1811, he took part in a poetry competition organised throughout the Empire on the occasion of the birth of Napoleon's son. The competition was a rather strange affair, for the imperial authorities allowed entries in other languages, even though they had recently embarked upon another wave of Frenchification.²⁷

Willems was to make full use of the opportunity provided. His poem, entitled *Geboortezang voor den koning van Rome*, was published in Paris as part of the *Hommages poétiques à leurs Majestés Impériales et Royales, sur la Naissance de S. M. le Roi de Rome*.²⁸ It was inspired by a poem by the northern Dutch poet, Hoogvliet. Willems' glorification of the Imperial dynasty was continued in his *Hymne aan het vaderland* of 1812.²⁹ It had as its subject matter Napoleon's victory over the Russians in the Battle of Friedland and the ensuing Peace of Tilsit. The *Hymne* was the result of a prize question set by the *Rederijkers of De Fontaine* in Gent. His employer encouraged Willems' entry, and the poem carried away the gold medal.³⁰ The timing of the competition is significant. The French invasion of Russia had started, with the first

²⁶ Roegiers, J, *op.cit.* p. 73; Prims, F, *Antwerpen in 1830*, vol. 1, p. 66.

²⁷ This wave had already started in 1810. When news of the birth reached Antwerpen by telegraph the whole town was lit up in celebration. Mertens, F.H. and Torfs, K.L, *Geschiedenis van Antwerpen*, vol. 7, pp. 98-99 and 107-9.

²⁸ Willems, J.F, "Geboortezang". In *Hommages poétiques à leurs Majestés Impériales et Royales, sur la Naissance de S.M. le Roi de Rome*, vol. 1, pp. 410-412. There were only two entries in Dutch. Duyse, P. van (ed), *Dicht- en Tooneelkundige Nalatenschap van J.F. Willems*, p. 291.

²⁹ Willems, J.F, *Hymne aan het vaderland over den Veldslag van Friedland en de daaropvolgende Vrede van Tilsit*. The choice of the word *vaderland* is also noticeable. Willems appears to regard the Napoleonic Empire as his fatherland.

successful Battle at Mohilev only recently fought. Disaster was awaiting Napoleon, but this was far from apparent at this early date in the campaign, and, as the subject of the competition showed, the emperor had defeated the Russians before. Later in life, Willems was to be criticised for his praise of the French Empire and its dynasty.³¹ The reality of the moment, however, was seemingly unshakeable French rule. Napoleon had governed the state since 1798, and had defeated almost all his foreign opponents since then. There was no possibility of taking a political option: the defence of his own culture and language was the only road open to Willems. This is borne out by a letter to the priest, J.B. Buelens, with whom Willems later conducted a fiery polemic.³² In it, Willems refuted any accusation of collaboration,

“ik ben ’er fier op, Mynheer, van, in 1812, onder de vlaemschhaetende fransche bestiering, een gouden Eerpenning te hebben verworven in de *nederduytsche* dichtkunst!”³³

This was a clear statement of priorities: what mattered was the language, and its value was enhanced by the repression it suffered under the French. The act of writing in *Nederduytsch* had become an act of *political* resistance. In December 1812, with the news of Napoleon’s defeat at the hands of the Russians starting to filter through, Willems took his defence of his culture a step further. He became a working member of the *Antwerpensch Tael-en Dichlievend Genootschap onder de zinspreuk Tot Nut der*

³⁰ Elslander, A. van, “Jan Frans Willems (1793-1846). Voorzitter van De Fonteine (1842-1846)”, *Jaarboek van De Fonteine*, vol. 4, (1948), p. 122; Potter, F. de, *op.cit.* p. 53.

³¹ For Willems’ critics see Deprez, A, “Volk, natie, taal en staat bij Jan Frans Willems”, *VM KANTL*, nos. 2-3, (1995), pp. 173-4.

³² Buelens objected to Willems’ defence of the revolt against Spain in the sixteenth century and his rejection of the Church’s censorship of books. Buelens, J.B, *Brief-Wisseling tusschen J.F. Willems ... en J.B. Buelens*, p. 109.

³³ *Ibid.* ‘Nederduytsch’ as opposed to French, of course, which would have been the natural choice for anyone writing a panegyric for the French imperial family. *Nederduytsch* had been a concept covering the Dutch-speakers from the fifteenth century onwards. Confusion abounded, however, as to where its borders lay. Verlooy, for example, makes a case for *Nederduytsch* stretching as far as the “Hanze-steden, Hamburg, Lubeck, Dantzig, Embden enz.”. Verlooy, J.B.C, *Verhandeling op d’Onacht der moederlyke Tael in de Nederlanden (1788)*, p. 109. The name was later dropped in favour of ‘Nederlands’ or ‘Vlaams’.

Jeugd, which met to discuss linguistic and literary issues, mainly in Dutch.³⁴ This undoubtedly re-enforced his idea of a cultural unity amongst all Dutch-speakers, for the *Genootschap* was founded by Johannes Terbruggen, who had come to Antwerpen from Utrecht.³⁵ The *Genootschap* provided Willems with an outlet for his cultural sentiments, and this at a time when the political certainties that had been part of Willems' life from the day he was born were beginning to crumble.

The Orangist Apogee: the United Kingdom Years.

The failure of the Russian campaign, followed by the total defeat of Napoleon in the 'Battle of the Nations' at Leipzig in October 1813, fatally undermined French prestige in the Low Countries.³⁶ In November, Allied troops entered what had been the lands of the Dutch Republic, and, in December, Willem, heir to the late Stadholder and prince of Orange, landed in Scheveningen.³⁷ The French occupation did not melt away overnight. Some French garrisons held out for a considerable time, and Antwerpen was amongst these. Orangist rule furthermore took time to be imposed; it was not until the Allied capture of Paris in March 1814 that the last opposition disappeared. The tacit approval of a union of all the Low Countries, not seen since the 1560's, followed in June. The Great Powers signed an agreement assigning the Low Countries to the House of Orange. Willem, prince of Orange, held his entry into Brussel the following month. The complications surrounding the consolidation of Willem's government need not concern us here. The return of Napoleon from Elba in March 1815 finally enabled him to

³⁴ The members were mainly schoolteachers. *EVB*, vol. 2, S.v. "Tot Nut der Jeugd"; Vanacker, H, "De taal-en letterkundige genootschappen in Vlaanderen". In A. Deprez and W. Gobbers (eds), *Vlaamse literatuur van de negentiende eeuw*, p. 31.

³⁵ Elias, H.J, *Geschiedenis van de Vlaamse Gedachte*, vol. 1, p. 160.

³⁶ François, L, "Het nationaal Gevoel in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden: Betekenis en Invloed ten Tijde van de Vorming van het Verenigd Koninkrijk". In P. Lenders (ed), *Het politiek personeel tijdens de overgang van het ancien regime naar het nieuwe regiem in België (1780-1830)*, p. 85.

³⁷ Couvée, D.H. and Dikkemaat, G, *ons koninkrijk geboren 1813-1815*, p. 36 and passim.

proclaim himself king of a United Kingdom, with his son's heroism at the Battle of Waterloo sealing the dynasty's hold on the Low Countries.³⁸

To Jan Frans Willems, the imposition of Orangist rule was most welcome. His own background had provided him with the perfect preparation for the event, and the propaganda which the supporters of the dynasty used to justify their claims – the *re-union* of north and south and the emphasis on the unity between all Dutch-speakers – chimed with Willems' own notions on these matters.³⁹ It was almost as if Bergmann's lessons had been intended to prepare the young language activist for the advent of Orangist rule.⁴⁰ In the years immediately following Waterloo, Willems was to consolidate his ideas about what constituted the identity of 'his' people under the rule of the king from the House of Orange. The result would form the principal foundation of his cultural and political beliefs well into the 1830's.

The enthusiasm with which Willems, and others like him, embraced the United Kingdom has often been termed Orangism.⁴¹ In Willems' case, however, a less concrete terminology would be more appropriate: he remained primarily interested in the defence and promotion of the Dutch language and culture. The fact that he thought Orangist rule as beneficial to the furtherance of this cause was, initially at least, of secondary importance. He made this abundantly clear in his poem *Ode op de herstelling der Nederduitsche taal door Willem I, prins van Oranje-Nassau, in 1814*.⁴² The emphasis on the "herstelling der Nederduitsche taal" is immediately obvious; written even *before* the

³⁸ The prince of Orange was wounded at Waterloo and became a national hero. The events were drawn by P.A. Langendijk with as title 'Verwonding van den Prins van Oranje in den slag bij Waterloo om ongeveer 17 uur 30 van den 18den Juni 1815', one of hundreds of representations that made the event a seminal moment in the creation of the United Kingdom. Bas, W.G. de, *Quatre-Bras en Waterloo*, facing p. 152.

³⁹ *Vereniging als hereniging* – Union as Re-union – was a slogan used in many pamphlets in the south in the years 1814-15. The main architect of the justification for the new kingdom was Gijsbert Karel van Hoogendorp who also engineered Willem I's return. Bornewasser, J.A., "Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden 1815-1830". In *AGN*, vol. 11, pp. 225 and following.

⁴⁰ Bergmann was politically active in promoting the House of Orange and the union from early in 1814 onwards and remained a supporter of the dynasty after 1830. Bergmann, G.K.L., *Uit Vader Bergmann's Gedenkschriften*, p. 54; *Deprez 1993*, p. 31.

⁴¹ Picard gives a nuanced description of Orangism. He points out that Orangists were also to be found in the French-speaking region of the south and that most of the Orangists in Antwerpen – including their leader F.J. Geelhand – spoke and corresponded in French. Picard, L., "Honderd Jaren Vlaamsche Beweging", *Haagsch Maandblad*, 15, no. 1, (1931), p. 8.

⁴² Willems, J.F., "Ode Op de herstelling der Nederduytsche Tael door Willem I. Prins van Oranje-Nassau, in 1814", *AAvN&V*, vol. 1, (1815), pp. 19-21.

proclamation of the United Kingdom, its praise of Willem I was always of subordinate importance. Beyond doubt is the pleasure Willems felt at being able to express openly his cultural pride. It was to take some time, however, before this pleasure was to metamorphose into full-blown political Orangism. For now, he restricted himself to showing his joy at the cultural possibilities promised by the advent of Orangist rule. Bergmann's pipedream of the 1810's, of one Dutch-speaking nation, was apparently being fulfilled. Indeed, Willems' *Ode* makes no mention of the old divide; it is "onze Nederduitsche taal" which has been liberated from the "Franse juk", both in north *and* south.⁴³ The prince of Orange's merit lies, for Willems at least, in his role as initiator and facilitator of this process, and he is consequently thanked for acting accordingly,

"Hoe dierbaar, Willem! is 't geschenk,
Dat ge aan uw vaderland komt geven".⁴⁴

And again, a few lines on,

"Op uw bevelen zal, wel ras,
Des grooten Vondels taal herbloeien".⁴⁵

All of Willems' past experiences are expressed in these lines: the conclusions he had reached on the organic unity of all Dutch-speakers, the inherent value of his own culture, and the need to promote and protect it against French pressures.

That Willems saw Netherlandic culture as encompassing more than language and literature alone may be seen in five works that he devoted to the visual arts between 1815 and 1818.⁴⁶ These were in many respects pioneering achievements, establishing

⁴³ Ibid, lines 1-2.

⁴⁴ Ibid, lines 15-16.

⁴⁵ Ibid, lines 17-18.

⁴⁶ Willems, J.F, "Aen Antwerpenen op het wederkomen der Schilderstukken". In *Toejuyching der Leden van het Genoótschap; Tot Nut der Jeugd: aen d'Antwerpensche Maetschappy der Schoone Konsten: By gelegenheyd van de wederkomst der, aen haer ontroofde, Schilder-Stukken van de vermaerdste meesters der Nederlandsche Schoól*, pp. 10-14; Willems, J.F, *Quinten Matsys, of wat doet de liefde niet! Tooneelspel in 2 Bedryven*; Willems, J.F, "Over het nut der kunsten en weétenschappen". In *Narration De tout ce qui s'est passé dans la ville d'Anvers, le 24 Août, jour de l'anniversaire de Sa Majesté le Roi des Pays-bas [...]*, pp. 9-10; Willems, J.F, "Rubens. Ode", *AAvN&V*, vol. 3, (1817), pp. 66-9; Willems, J.F,

painting as the premier expression of the genius of the Low Countries. In these poems we witness the quintessential need to enhance the prestige of one's 'native' culture by endowing it with iconic figures from the past, so common to all nineteenth century cultural and political thinkers.⁴⁷ This was to be a defining characteristic of Dutch-speaking national identity, both in north and south. Other nations celebrated poets or musicians, some generals or politicians, a few even engineers. The Dutch and Flemings had painters for heroes. Highlighting the great painters also served to create a national pantheon with international credibility: the painters of the Low Countries – both north and south – were widely recognised as artistic giants.

The result of Willems' poems was a strong friendship and, indeed, cultural alliance with the leading Antwerpen painter of the period, Mathias van Bree, with whom he collaborated on several occasions.⁴⁸ The return of the large collection of paintings that the French had removed to Paris in 1815, served to increase this sense of the value of the great masters of the past. Willems published a poem welcoming the paintings 'home'. This was followed by the play *Quinten Matsys*, in which he celebrated the life of the first great Antwerpen painter, and by his ode to Rubens.⁴⁹ In spite of his admiration for the great painters of the past, Willems was unable to disguise his own first love: his first choice for a heroic figure came from the field of literature. Almost inevitably the poet chosen for this role in his 1814 *Ode* was the great Vondel. It was an appropriate choice in many respects. Vondel was born in the southern Netherlands and worked in the north. He also wrote in a language which fused idiom and syntax from various regions where

"Op het voortreflyk schilderstuk Van Mynheer M. van Brée, verbeeldende de standvastigheid van den Burgermeester Vande Werff, geduerende het beleg van Leyden in 1574", *AAvN&V*, vol. 4, (1818), pp. 58-60.

⁴⁷ Minogue notes that in addition to requiring a literature, "there is room for the nation's great painter, composer, sculptor, etc.". Minogue, K.R, *Nationalism*, p. 118.

⁴⁸ Hamelius, P, "Van Bree en Willems. De Betrekkingen tusschen Vlaamsche Schilderkunst en Letterkunde vóór 1830", *Germania*, (December 1898), pp. 158-168; *Dictionary of Belgian painters born between 1750 & 1875*. 1981 ed. S.v. "Van Bree, Mathieu, Ignace, (1773-1839)", by P. Berko.

⁴⁹ Willems acted in his own play on this occasion. For Willems and painting see Roemans, R, "Jan-Frans Willems' kunstopvattingen", *Album Vercouillie*, vol. 2, (1927), pp. 231-234.

Dutch was spoken, again underlining, in Willems' mind, the intrinsic unity between north and south.⁵⁰

On a more personal level, the creation of the United Kingdom benefited Willems' career greatly. The alliance between the political ambitions of the House of Orange and the cultural-linguistic ambitions of the young activist propelled him into several important cultural posts in Antwerpen.⁵¹ He earned his promotions by his steadfast and very public support for the new king. In 1816, for example, Willems gave a speech on the occasion of Willem I's birthday celebrations, when the king visited Antwerpen to present a number of prizes for cultural achievements. His promotion to the post of junior archivist of the city followed in the same year, and provided him with his first taste of archival research. Here, the old archivist, Lenaerts, taught him palaeography, and here, too, the foundations for Willems' most remarkable achievements were laid.⁵² Crucially, the archive taught him the value of history, which was to become Willems' "principale instrument de propagande".⁵³

The identification in Willems' mind of political Orangism with cultural freedom was cemented in 1818. That year he published his long poem *Aen de Belgen*, a reaction to a fiery poem by J.B. Plasschaert in the French language paper *Observateur*, in which the latter attacked the current political status quo.⁵⁴ Plasschaert objected to the use of the word *Neerlandais* to describe the inhabitants of the new United Kingdom; instead he wished to be known as a *Belge*. This opened a veritable Pandora's Box. The poem recalled the brief experiment of southern Netherlands' independence in the *Etats Belgiques Unis* of 1790, stressed the differences between north and south, and, most importantly from Willems' point of view, covertly objected to the equalization of French

⁵⁰ Vondel was not alone in this, but was the foremost poet of the seventeenth century and therefore, in an age which sought the 'greatest', the most obvious choice.

⁵¹ H.J. Elias also noticed the relative importance that Willems and his followers attached to culture and the House of Orange. Elias, HJ, *op.cit.* vol. 1, p. 169.

⁵² Mierlo, J. van, *Jan Frans Willems*, p. 8.

⁵³ Seyn, E. de, *Dictionnaire des Ecrivains Belges. Bio-Bibliographie*, vol. 2, S.v. "Willems (Jan-Frans)".

⁵⁴ Willems, J.F, *Aen de Belgen. Aux Belges*. The word 'Belgen' here is another indication of the problematic nomenclature. 'Belg' as a concept had been applied to various political entities, including the sixteenth century lands of Charles V. Willems is here referring to the southern Netherlands, the future Belgium, but is not quite clear himself whether 'Belg' indicates a Dutch-speaker from that region or from

and Dutch by the new regime. This was certainly not just a question of semantics. Willems' reply made a huge impact, if only through his acknowledgement of the existence of a Belgian identity,

“Ik ook, ik ben een Belg en mag tot Belgen spreken”.⁵⁵

But to Willems this identity had little to do with the French language. According to him, the ancient Belgians spoke Dutch not French, and, therefore, Willems' own language of preference,

“Ik zing de vrije taal, die de oude Belgen spraken”.⁵⁶

As he saw it, the problem of his own times was that, even with the freedom that the new kingdom had brought, most of his educated contemporaries still refused to honour their own culture, and persisted in imitating the French.⁵⁷ Unsurprisingly, therefore, his poem echoes Bergmann's insistence on the intrinsic value of Dutch,

“Neen, Belgen! 'k min die taal [French] ...
Maar 'k wil ook, dat men de uwe [Dutch] en recht en hulde doe.”⁵⁸

Who did the French-speakers think they were, he asked? They should not forget that they now lived in a predominantly Dutch-speaking state. Inspired by the principles of the French Revolution, Willems went one step further: Dutch should become the sole language of state. From here it was but a small step to the statement that it would be best for the French-speakers in the Low Countries – “des débris d'une nation” – to follow the example of the Frisians and switch over to Dutch, a claim he was to put forward in 1829

the whole of the Netherlands. The name Belgique or België would become confined to mean the southern Netherlands from 1830 onwards. See also Elias, H.J, *op.cit.* vol. 1, p. 315.

⁵⁵ Willems, J.F, *Aen de Belgen*, line 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, line 5.

⁵⁷ See also chapter three, p. 208.

⁵⁸ Willems, J.F, *Aen de Belgen*, lines 123-4.

in his infamous letter to Sylvain Van de Weyer.⁵⁹ To Willems, a French-speaking Belgian was little more than a cultural traitor, perhaps even a political traitor, a “vreemden huurling”.⁶⁰ With this, one arrives at a critical junction in the development of cultural nationalism, a point where defence turned into aggression. Gone is the tolerance that marks so much of early nationalism, gone the emphasis on the value of one’s own culture. With Willems, this was a brief phase, and nor was it to show itself too much during the early part of the century anywhere in Europe. All the same, it had reared its head. The seeds of destruction had been sown. At the time, the episode convinced Willems that the House of Orange was fundamental to the defence of Dutch culture in the southern half of the United Kingdom. He makes king Willem I’s role in the preservation of Dutch culture against French pressure clear in the final part of the 1818 poem,

“Gij hebt een koning [Willem I] ...
Hij kent uw moederspraak, hij zal haar rechten staven,
En al wat Neerlandsch is ... handhaven”.⁶¹

The poem turned Willems into a public persona overnight. It created his reputation as a defender of his own culture and language, and made him many friends amongst the writers in the north.⁶² It also earned him the gratitude of the Orangist regime, which promoted him to several learned bodies, which, in turn, impressed on Willems just how dependent he had become on the regime.⁶³ Cultured opinion in the south was less enamoured. To the overwhelmingly French or Frenchified bourgeoisie, Willems became a figure to be disdained; to the hierarchy of the all-powerful Catholic Church even more so. The displeasure of the Catholic episcopate was to cast long shadows. Theologically and politically unable to accommodate the Protestant Willem I, they could not even contemplate working with those like Willems, who could. As Catholicism was deeply

⁵⁹ Willems, J.F., *De la langue Belgique. Lettre de Jean François Willems, membre de l’Institut des Pays-Bas, etc., à M. Sylvain Van de Weyer.*

⁶⁰ Willems, J.F., *Aen de Belgen*, line 249.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, lines 255 and 257-8.

⁶² For Willems and the northern writers, see *EVB*, vol. 2, S.v. “Willems, Jan Frans”.

⁶³ Nieuwenhuis, B., *Jan Frans Willems. Een bijdrage tot de ideologie der Vlaamsche Beweging*, p. 14.

ingrained in the identity of many – possibly most – in Flanders, a chasm between two forms of Flemish identity was already opening up.⁶⁴

Willems' liberal reputation was cemented by the subsequent publication of what may be called a two-part manifesto: *Aen de Belgen* of 1818, and his *Verhandeling over de Nederduytsche Tael- en Letterkunde*, which appeared in instalments between 1819 and 1824.⁶⁵ This was ostensibly a history of Dutch literature with an emphasis on the southern Netherlands, but the *Verhandeling* contains many of the ideas expounded more openly in his poem of 1818, including a defence of “onzer moederspraek”.⁶⁶ The foreword states this most succinctly: here is a work,

“bestemd om in het zuydelyk gedeelte van Nederland, den smaek voór onze tael- en dichtkunde gemeen te maeken”.⁶⁷

At this point Willems no longer considered the south to be anything but part of ‘Nederland’, which ought to know about its own literary history.⁶⁸ Perhaps in a naïve attempt to forestall Catholic criticism, Willems declares that the nation-state, with its national language, was God ordained.⁶⁹ The audacity of the argument cannot be overemphasised. A large part of the Catholic hierarchy had refused to acknowledge the jurisdiction of the state over their Church, to which Willems' statement was diametrically opposed.⁷⁰ He implied God's benediction over the Protestant Willem I, anathema to the Catholic hierarchy in the south. The statement that God had raised Dutch to its current status further riled the leading Catholic clergy, most of whom were

⁶⁴ By the end of the period under consideration, when Albrecht Rodenbach was writing, these seeds had germinated and polluted the air between the various Flemish nationalists. See chapter three, pp. 199-206.

⁶⁵ Willems, J.F., *Verhandeling over de Nederduytsche Tael- en Letterkunde, opzigtelyk de Zuydelyke Provintien der Nederlanden*.

⁶⁶ See *NBW*, vol. 11, S.v. “Willems, Jan Frans”, where *Aen de Belgen* is recognised as a “voorportaal” to his *Verhandeling*.

⁶⁷ Willems, J.F., “Voorberigt”. In J.F. Willems, *Verhandeling*, vol. 1.

⁶⁸ It seems that Willems' concept of himself as a ‘Belg’ did not survive 1818. *Nederland* was now his fatherland, and by implication he must have thought of himself as a ‘Nederlander’.

⁶⁹ Willems, J.F., *Verhandeling*, vol. 1, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Aubert, R., “Kerk en Godsdienst in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden 1815- circa 1840”. In *AGN*, vol. 11, pp. 117-127; Smits, A., *De scheuring van het Verenigd Koninkrijk en de houding van het Vlaamse land in 1830*, pp. 30-31.

from France or exclusively Francophone. The divisions in the southern Netherlands deepened and widened.

The *Verhandeling* was, in many respects, a hinge between his career to date, and the one he was to follow in subsequent years. The passing of the language laws of 1819 and 1822, which protected the status of Dutch in all provinces where that language was spoken, allowed him to shift the focus of his *Verhandeling* to a more literary sphere.⁷¹ Now, the issue was no longer one of defence: the Orangist state had proven itself equal to Willems' expectations, and had enforced the status of Dutch by law. This freed Willems to prove his language's intrinsic value without regard to politics, or, at least, so it would appear at first. The political aspect of this shift should, however, not be overlooked. Willems sought to create a legitimate basis on which Dutch could lay claim to replace French in the Walloon provinces, and did so by proving the language's impressive past achievements. Through the *Verhandeling*, he provided his audience with a knowledge and understanding of their own literary history.⁷² With this knowledge, they would be able to understand the claim of Dutch to be the sole language of state. The work was reliant on Willems' own source research, and shows him both at his best and worst.⁷³ Immaculately researched, it was also dogmatically rigid. Through its fine academic veneer shone the inherent contradictions of nationalism in the nineteenth century and beyond: protesting loudly when one's own language is under pressure, whilst unflinchingly demanding the demise of others when one had political support. From there it was a relatively small step to demand the eradication of a culture, or, indeed, the eradication of a people. Willems would probably have been horrified at the thought, but it was the logical result of his thinking.

⁷¹ Smedt, M. de, "25 Augustus 1830". In M.A. Schenkeveld-Van der Dussen (ed), *Nederlandse literatuur, een geschiedenis*, p. 432.

⁷² Willems' *Verhandeling* was the first literary history in the southern Low Countries. Musschoot, A.M, "De literatuuargeschiedschrijving in Vlaanderen", *Spiegel der Letteren*, vol. 33, no. 4, (1991), pp. 235-6. He clearly intended to reach a larger audience. In his own words, the *Verhandeling* was intended "meer om doór Belgen geleézen dan om doór geleerden geraedpleégd te worden". Willems, J.F, *Verhandeling*, vol. 1, p. 13.

⁷³ Willems, J.F, *Verhandeling*, vol. 1, p. 7.

In the brief history of the United Kingdom, the mid-1820's stand out as the only period of relative political calm. Although friction between the Orangist state and its southern subjects continued to smoulder, overt politics was placed on the back burner.⁷⁴ For Willems this meant he could concentrate more fully on his historical and philological research. This period saw him becoming firmly embedded in the political and cultural establishment of the United Kingdom. He was appointed a member of the prestigious *Commissie tot uitgave van de oude vaderlandsche kronijken*, which had been created by the government in 1826. Its task was to,

“faire découvrir, examiner et mettre au jour, dans l'intérêt de l'histoire des Pays-Bas, les documents qui la concernent et qui, jusqu'ici, sont restés inconnus”.⁷⁵

The new state was clearly aware of the importance of history to provide a precedent for the present political situation; Jan Frans Willems had already come to much the same conclusion in the Antwerpen archive. The *Commissie* was rather more prestigious than the provincial archive. Its membership was very illustrious. With the Minister of the Interior, Van Gobbelschroy, as president, it further included Raoul and baron de Reiffenberg, professors at Leuven, Bernhardt, the university's librarian, Van de Weyer, librarian of the *Bibliothèque de Bourgogne*, the country's largest collection of medieval manuscripts, and Van Hulthem, curator at the university of Gent and one of the principal private collectors of ancient manuscripts in the kingdom.⁷⁶ Unlike the other members, Willems held neither an academic post nor did he have an independent income. His only claim to fame was his knowledge of historical and literary texts. In an age not known for its meritocracy, he had been chosen purely on his intellectual merits.

Two major projects were assigned to Willems: the preparation of editions of two of the most important texts in Middle Dutch, Jan van Heelu's *Rymkronyk*, and Jan van

⁷⁴ Although religious friction was to continue unabated throughout Willem I's government. Aubert, R, *op.cit.* pp. 117-127.

⁷⁵ Académie Royale de Belgique, *La Commission Royale d'Histoire 1834-1934. Livre Jubilaire*, p. 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 11.

Boendale's *De Brabantsche Yeesten*.⁷⁷ These texts were not chosen at random. Both the *Rymkronyk* – which describes the great Brabantine victory in the Battle of Woeringen of 1288 – and *De Brabantsche Yeesten* describe two events in the history of the medieval duchy of Brabant. Its disappearance with the advent of French rule has already been alluded to, but its significance was to survive its demise. The medieval duchy straddled the old border between the northern and southern Netherlands, and its existence and history 'proved' – at least in the mind of the unionists – that north and south were indeed an organic entity. The Brabander Willems, who showed his own attachment to the old duchy in his 1833 article on *Reinaert de Vos*, was the natural choice to work on these texts.⁷⁸

His background research for the *Rymkronyk* further stimulated his interest in history, chronicles and Middle Dutch texts in general. It also led him to write historical fiction. In 1828 he published a poem called *Maria van Braband*, which he based on original sources, including Jan van Heelu's *Rymkronyk*.⁷⁹ It was an incidental excursion into the world of fiction: by now he was dedicated heart and soul to historical and philological research. This is evident even in *Maria van Braband*. He concluded the poem with references to all sources used, allowing his readers to pursue the matter further. It was originally printed "voor de vrienden des dichters" and certainly encouraged some of his fellow enthusiasts for the Dutch language to compose their own rhymed versions on events from the Middle Ages. Noticeable amongst these is Ledeganck's poem *Boudewyn van Constantinopel*, which he dedicated to "den Heere J.F. Willems".⁸⁰

Two elements of Willems' career at this time stand out: the blurred line between historical research and historical fiction, and his increasing interest in the Middle Ages. Neither is peculiar to Willems. The confusion between history and historical fiction possibly had its origins in the works of Walter Scott. His library held most of the major

⁷⁷ Willems, J.F., *Rymkronyk van Jan van Heelu betreffende den Slag van Woeringen, van het jaer 1288*. Jan van Boendale had not yet been identified as the author of this work and was known as Jan de Klerck. Willems, J.F., *De Brabantsche Yeesten, of Rymkronyk van Braband*, 3 vols.

⁷⁸ Willems, J.F., *Reinardus Vulpes*. p. 13.

⁷⁹ Willems, J.F., *Maria van Braband (A° 1276)*.

⁸⁰ Ledeganck's poem *Boudewyn van Constantinopel*, which tells of the period 1200-1206, was a 'Dichtstuk aen den Heere J.F. Willems'. Ledeganck, K.L., *Bloemen myner Lente*, pp. 39-58.

historical sources available at the time, and there is little doubt that Scott knew his material intimately.⁸¹ His writings took the form of fiction, but this was not always how contemporaries regarded it. In a letter to Jenny von Droste-Hülshoff in 1825, for example, Wilhelm Grimm wrote that there was “viel Wahrheit und Reiz” in Scott’s works.⁸² In an age when men thought they could find the pure essence of anything in what Jacob Grimm termed the *Urquell*, this is perhaps not very surprising. Willems’ own poetical effort may be seen as forming part of this trend, a trend that was in the end to overwhelm historical research, when historical fact and historical fiction merged in the mind of a lay audience to prove that history is indeed little more than textuality. Willems later witnessed this in Flanders, where the enormous success of Hendrik Conscience’s historical novels created a more indelible version of the ‘national’ past than Willems’ own careful archival work was ever to achieve.⁸³

Most of the attention paid to the past during the nineteenth century focused on the Middle Ages. It was there that the pure authentic past was sought, there that men sought the ‘true essence’ of the modern nation. Willems’ interest in the Middle Ages, then, formed part of a Europe-wide phenomenon, usually generalised as the Gothic Revival. During the nineteenth century this developed into a veritable movement, expressed in literature, architecture, painting, music, crafts and even the new medium of photography.⁸⁴ Looking towards the past for artistic inspiration was not particularly new. During the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, Classical Antiquity was the ‘Golden Age’ to which artists looked. Nor was this totally replaced when Enlightenment gradually came to be intertwined with Romanticism.⁸⁵ Lord Byron, the quintessential Romantic poet, was steeped in Antiquity, and his Hellenism was to be his undoing. All the same,

⁸¹ Wilson, A.N, *The Laird of Abbotsford*, p. 154.

⁸² Schulte-Kemminghausen, K. (ed), *Briefwechsel zwischen Jenny von Droste-Hülshoff und Wilhelm Grimm*, pp. 71-2.

⁸³ A lone voice of dissent sounded amongst the trees and lakes of New England, where in 1854 Thoreau vented his disgust at ‘medievally’ inspired novels, which he blamed for almost every evil under the sun. Thoreau, H.D, *Walden*. p. 117. And yet Thoreau was, of course, also very much a Romantic.

⁸⁴ For the Gothic revival see amongst others Eastlake, C.L, *A History of the Gothic Revival*, and Clark, K, *The Gothic Revival*.

⁸⁵ Traditionally, Enlightenment and Romanticism are seen as being opposed ‘ideologies’, but this does not stand up to scrutiny. Bianquis, G, *Histoire de la littérature Allemande*, p. 81 and passim; Clason, C.R, “Romanticism”. In K. Vivian (ed), *A Concise History of German Literature to 1900*, p. 196.

the Middle Ages was gradually becoming more important. That authoritative commentator on all things Romantic, Madame de Staël, put it in no uncertain terms,

“la littérature romantique ou *chevaleresque* est chez nous indigène”.⁸⁶

As noted, it was this perceived indigenusness that caused north European nationalists to value medieval artefacts above all else. Here they thought they could find the ‘true genius’ of their people, untainted by ‘foreign’ (for which read mainly French) influences.

To Willems this was the main motivation for his interest in Middle Dutch literature. As he wrote in his *Verhandeling*, the literature of the thirteenth century was characterised by its “reyn natuertael”, whilst that of the fourteenth and fifteenth was, to his mind, plagued by the influence of French.⁸⁷ The subsequent centuries he regarded as little more than a wasteland. Leading on from these views on linguistic purity, his *Verhandeling* also sheds some light on his opinion on the poetic quality of Middle Dutch literature. Strange to relate in view of what has been written so far, he considered the poetry of the thirteenth century as having “niet veél waerde”; for the next two centuries he sees the language subjected to “eene doórgaende veragtering”. He even went as far as blaming historical events for the “nacht der middeleeuwige domheyd” which he felt had descended over literary production in Middle Dutch.⁸⁸ This seems to indicate that to Willems, at least, the Middle Ages was far from a golden age.

He did, of course, have to deal with historical facts which contradicted his own, nationalist views. Objectively, one cannot but be struck by the artistic flowering of the southern Low Countries during the fifteenth century. Unfortunately from Willems’ perspective, that was the Burgundian epoch, when the region was ruled by French-speaking – indeed, French-born – princes. And thus contemporary politics came to dictate Willems’ judgement: for as long as ‘native’ princes ruled, the Dutch-speaking principalities had been cultural powerhouses. With the advent of the French dynasties,

⁸⁶ Staël, Mme De, *De L'Allemagne*, vol. 2, p. 134. The italics are mine.

⁸⁷ Willems, J.F, *Verhandeling*, vol. 1, pp. 174, 176 and 210.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 173, 176 and 179.

things had gone to the dogs. That this conveniently ignored the facts hardly requires to be emphasised. The great flowering of the fifteenth-century *Rederijkers* was largely ignored by Willems, ironically, as his own early interest in Dutch culture owed much to them. The French origins of the committal House of Flanders from the thirteenth century onwards he seems to have ignored altogether. He was far from unique in this: all across Europe historical fact simply *had* to suit contemporary political demands.

Adding to Willems' discomfort with the reality of the Middle Ages was the overwhelmingly religious content of its literature. To Willems, by now completely absorbed into the Orangist camp, this made it indigestible. Willems' Romantic conversion to medievalism came in 1833. This was the year in which he discovered that *Reinaert de Vos* originated in Flanders. All of a sudden he had a medieval literary masterpiece, born of a Flemish mind, and, perhaps most important of all, with an uncharacteristically vernacular theme. *Reinaert de Vos* did not require posthumous manipulation: its themes were readily transferable to the contemporary liberal cause.⁸⁹ He had, however, not yet reached this stage when writing his *Verhandeling*, in which Willems' interest was still primarily focused on proving the antiquity of Dutch culture, and of southern Dutch culture in particular.

The first aim of this 'crusade' was to prove that its language was at least the equal of French, but it went much further than this. He also wished to prove that Dutch as spoken and used in the Southern Low Countries was the language of an autonomous culture, a culture, moreover, that, because of its antiquity, was superior to those of the surrounding regions. Strangely pre-empting the requirements of the future Belgian state, he included the northern Netherlands amongst these. Two examples will suffice to illustrate Willems' approach. He contrasted a 'Hoogduytsch' Brussel town statute granted by the emperor Frederick II in 1235, with one in Middle Dutch dating back to 1229. To Willems what was of interest was not the information these might contain, but the simple fact that the Middle Dutch source was older. He repeated the exercise by

⁸⁹ The *Reinaert's* strong anti-clericalism was particularly appropriate in this respect.

contrasting the 1229 statute with one from Middelburg in Zeeland, noting that the *southern* document was twenty-five years older.⁹⁰

Before his discovery of *Reinaert de Vos*, then, antiquity rather than quality is what got Willems excited. The scant regard that he initially had for the artistic quality of Middle Dutch literature was widely shared. Previously, the little work that had been carried out in the field of Middle Dutch had been mainly etymological, linguistic, or the study of texts as historical sources. Willems' attitude reflected the opinion of, amongst others, the learned Balthazar Huydecoper, that Middle Dutch literature had nothing intrinsic to recommend itself. Huydecoper's view is most bizarre: it came from a man who was an avid collector of medieval manuscripts.⁹¹ But then he, too, was being torn between the exquisite siren call of the Middle Ages and his repugnance for its religiosity. For Willems, as stated, all this was to change with the arrival of *Reinaert de Vos*. Ultimately, Willems was to do more than almost anyone else to promote the idea that Middle Dutch literature *was* of great value. This change in attitude was undoubtedly influenced by his growing perception that the Middle Ages was of crucial importance to the identity of his people, a sentiment that grew as time went on. His realisation that the division between north and south, put in place in 1830, was indeed irrevocable, contributed enormously to this. This was, after all, the man, who, as far back as his *Verhandeling*, showed that he considered southern Dutch culture to be superior to that of the north. Willems, then, was not just the 'Vader der Vlaamse Beweging', but also pivotal to Middle Dutch literary research. His early years may be regarded as the close of a period in which he first shunned Middle Dutch literature, only to embrace its value subsequently.⁹²

Besides his membership of the *Commissie*, Willems had joined various other scholarly bodies that promoted Dutch language and culture in the United Kingdom. As early as 1819, he had become a member of the *Maatschappij van Nederlandsche Taal- en Letterkunde* in Leiden, and, from 1820, he had corresponded with the *Koninklijk*

⁹⁰ Willems, J.F., *Verhandeling*, vol. 1, pp. 128, 132 and 149.

⁹¹ Buck, H. de, *De Studie van het Middelnederlandsch tot in het midden der negentiende eeuw*, p. 27.

⁹² Ibid, p. 98; Mierlo, J. van, "J. Fr. Willems en de studie van de Middelnederlandsche Taal- en Letterkunde", *KVATL*, vol. 10, no. 2, (1946), pp. 23-54.

Nederlandsch Instituut in Amsterdam, becoming a member in 1828.⁹³ Both were primarily cultural institutes, but in the increasingly polarised society of the southern Netherlands of the late 1820's, they were inevitably also political symbols; language, culture and politics had become close bedfellows since the French Revolution. Willems' closeness to the establishment of the United Kingdom, and his vociferous support for its linguistic policies, identified him as a staunch supporter of the *status quo*. In spite of identifying with the regime, Willems was far from happy with some of the policies pursued by the king, even if it was tactics and not substance that caused him problems.

On 4 June 1826, Willems wrote a letter to his great friend Jeronimo De Vries in the north, in which he objected to the establishment of the *Collegium Philosophicum* by the king.⁹⁴ The *Collegium Philosophicum* was an attempt by the Orangist regime to gain control over the Catholic Church, by replacing its seminaries by a state run institute. This move caused huge resentment in the south, and was to become the *cause célèbre* of clerical opposition, without which the 1830 Revolution would have been impossible.⁹⁵ Willems' opposition is all the more remarkable when seen in the light of his uncompromising anti-clericalism, but, as stated, it was the tactics that caused him to disagree,

“Het oprechten van het *Collegium Philosophicum* doet den koning en algemeen geprezen gouvernement veel kwaad”.⁹⁶

The letter is illuminating in many respects. It proves that even one of king Willem I's most loyal southern supporters was beginning to question his monarch's wisdom. In addition, it also reveals the extent to which Willems had lost touch with his surroundings. From the letter there emerges a man whose anti-clericalism was clouding his judgement. It may have been caused by his peculiar background or perhaps by the vaguely anti-clerical sentiment in Antwerpen at the time, but it proved to be a fatal blindness. Catholicism was just too much a part of the southern psyche to be treated with

⁹³ Snellaert, F.A, “Jan Frans Willems”, *Belgisch Museum*, vol. 10, (1846), pp. 475-478.

⁹⁴ *Rooses Brieven*, p. 52.

⁹⁵ Aubert, R, *op.cit.* p. 119.

such insensitivity, and the embroilment surrounding the *Collegium Philosophicum* was not the first time the Orangist state had bruised Catholic sensitivities. By the later 1820's, Willems' "geprezen gouvernement" was all but that: 'veel *misprezen*' would have been more appropriate.⁹⁷

Southern unionists, in the mean time, continued to regard anti-Orangist opposition as a French plot to destroy the Dutch language in the south. Willems expressed this clearly in another letter to De Vries, in December 1829, by which time he was under no illusion as to the threat posed to the union by anti-Orangists.⁹⁸ In this letter, he equated the Church – here symbolised by the Jesuits, a potent expression of his anti-clericalism – with the imposition of French education. He also, correctly, identified the legal profession as the bastion of liberal, French-speaking opposition.⁹⁹ Willems had pinpointed the unlikely twin of southern anti-Orangism infallibly. He was also correct in noting the one element they shared: the French language. Understanding who the enemy was did not weaken his determination to maintain the *status quo*. On the contrary, in his letter he insisted that the government was showing weakness in the face of opposition. A striking suggestion in the light of events that year: the king, in his royal message, had insisted that Dutch should be the language of state in all Dutch-speaking provinces in the kingdom, hardly indicative of a willingness to compromise.¹⁰⁰ To Willems it simply was not enough, and, with hindsight, one may argue that his sense of the danger to the regime was more acute than the state's.

Willems' disenchantment with the north's attitude was also making itself felt in his academic work. Although not published in 1829, Willems wrote an essay that year entitled *Over het gedrag der Belgen by de scheuring der Nederlandsche Provinciën in de zestiende eeuw*.¹⁰¹ Touching a raw nerve, he apportioned blame to the earlier split between north and south during the uprising against Spanish rule to Holland, Zeeland,

⁹⁶ *Rooses Brieven*, p. 52.

⁹⁷ Witte, E. et al, *op.cit.* pp. 20-21.

⁹⁸ *Rooses Brieven*, p. 77.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Bornewasser, J.A, *op.cit.* p. 254.

¹⁰¹ Willems, J.F, "Over het gedrag der Belgen". In J.F. Willems, *Mengelingen van historisch-vaderlandschen inhoud*, pp. 389-423; *Deprez 1993*, p. 23.

and, most surprising in the light of the previous years, the Orange dynasty. Not only did the southern torchbearer of the union appear to suggest another imminent split, but he also seemed to suggest that the same people were, once again, to blame. It will come as little surprise, that, when he read the article at a meeting in Amsterdam, it was unfavourably received.

The episode is indicative of the wider political situation: even the unionists were already apportioning blame for the current situation. A note of apprehension, of fear even, was creeping into the tone of southern language activists and Orangists. This fear was enhanced only by the regime's unwillingness to act decisively. Willems clearly believed that a compromise between king and opposition was looming, a compromise which would endanger his plans for Dutch to become the language of state in all the Netherlands. His hawkish tone, detected previously with regard to the Walloons, was sounding harsher than ever. To his mind, the north was betraying the Dutch-speakers in the south by its shilly-shallying. The intrinsic unity between north and south, an article of faith since his childhood, was disintegrating before his eyes.

The following year Willems' world fell apart. The king did, indeed, offer a compromise, but it proved to be too little, too late. Willem I decided that he would end his insistence upon the use of Dutch as the language of state in the Dutch majority provinces in the south. He clearly hoped to divide the liberal and clerical opposition by giving in to the former.¹⁰² To Willems and his co-travellers, this must have been tantamount to betrayal. The elections in July were an unmitigated disaster for the Orangists in Antwerpen and Gent, traditionally the bulwarks of the regime *par excellence*.¹⁰³ Three things became immediately clear: the regime had failed to placate liberal sentiments in the south, it had lost its legitimacy there, and Willems and the other Orangists were dangerously isolated. Willems was at this point still blissfully unaware that worse was to come.

The United Kingdom's growing crisis played against the backdrop of renewed revolution in France. It was in this climate of fear, failed compromise, and the threat of

¹⁰² Luykx, Th, *Politieke geschiedenis van België van 1789 tot heden*, p. 46.

revolution, that the traditionally anti-Orangist newspaper, the *Courrier de Pays-Bas*, carried an article declaring the principle of Belgian nationality.¹⁰⁴ The paper went farther than anyone before: echoing Sylvain Van de Weyer, it argued that north and south were fundamentally different. To this it added that the southern Netherlands should never be a part of France. In Willems' own mind, these arguments must have found some resonance. After all, he had also pondered on the differences between north and south. Yet the association between the House of Orange and the status of Dutch in the south was too important to Willems even to contemplate separation: he regarded it as a mortal threat to his life's work. Language and state had become one in his mind.¹⁰⁵

The *Courrier* had long been the mouthpiece for southern dissatisfaction and its editorials had long puzzled Willems' northern colleagues and friends; Messchert went as far as to ask him, "wat willen die menschen toch?".¹⁰⁶ It was a curious lack of understanding, which helped spark off the events in Brussel, a mere fifteen days after the publication of the *Courrier* article. There, inspired by the revolutionary sentiment of Auber's grand opera *La Muette de Portici* which had been running in the *théâtre de la Monnaie* since 29 June, anti-Orangist rioting broke out. Rarely can there have been such an appropriately symbolic symbiosis between art and real life as on that occasion. The opera portrayed the successful uprising of the Neapolitans against their Spanish oppressors: now it triggered yet another successful revolution, this time giving birth to a new country, Belgium.¹⁰⁷

For six days the situation remained tense, with a stand-off between pro- and anti-Orangists, not just in Brussel, but in other southern towns as well. Then, on 1 September, the prince of Orange, heir to Willem I, went to Brussel, where a decision was made to divide the kingdom into two administrative regions. The young prince had

¹⁰³ Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken etc, "Teksten en documenten. Verzameling. <<Ideeën en Studies>> no. 314". In *Documenten van de Belgische Geschiedenis, Deel I, Van de prehistorie tot 1830*, p. 279.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ In a letter to De Vries of August 1830, Willems wrote that those who spoke French were Frenchmen and that the "Nederlandsche natie is een Nederduitsche natie!". *Rooses Brieven*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁶ The letter is dated Rotterdam, den 21 January 1830. Bols, J. (ed), *Brieven aan Jan-Frans Willems*, p. 198.

¹⁰⁷ Warrack, J. and West, E, *The Oxford Dictionary of Opera*, p. 490. For the Revolution see amongst others Church, C.C, *Europe in 1830* and Logie, J, 1830.



clear southern sympathies and thought he could save the south for his dynasty, but in Den Haag, his father, the king, decided to act to preserve the unity of his realm. On 23 September a large army of 9,000 under prince Frederick, was sent from Antwerpen to Brussel. However, they failed to capture Brussel, and were back in Antwerpen four days later. They left behind them 1,200 dead soldiers and revolutionaries and with those the shards of the United Kingdom. The armed intervention was an unmitigated disaster and what had been a serious crisis turned into full-scale revolt.¹⁰⁸ The prince of Orange left Brussel for Antwerpen with his defeated army, perhaps in the hope of hanging on to the harbour town. There he found a complex situation. The city remained officially loyal to the regime, but its main newspaper, *Den Antwerpenaer*, was blatantly backing the revolutionary regime in Brussel.¹⁰⁹ That September, the future hung in the balance for Willems' dream.

Exile and Redemption: the Eeklo Years.

When the revolution broke in Brussel, Antwerpen remained suspiciously calm. On 27 August, unwilling to do nothing, the authorities created a civic defence force, the *garde urbaine*. With all hope of the Orangists resting on the prince of Orange, the city remained quiet, even after his defeat in Brussel at the end of September. For Willems these were fraught days, and, rather than awaiting events, he immediately joined the *garde urbaine*.¹¹⁰ It proved to be a futile gesture. Initially there was very little for them to do, nothing but stopping drunken brawling and the collection of household refuse. When the situation finally got out of hand, on 17 October, they simply stood by and watched. The eventual collapse of the Orangist regime in Antwerpen was swift. It started with a riot at the *citadel*, in which Dutch troops killed two people, followed by some

¹⁰⁸ Siegenbeek wrote to Willems telling him that the events in Brussel had caused "even groote verbazing als verontwaardiging". Bols, J. (ed), *op.cit.* p. 209.

¹⁰⁹ Prims, F, *Antwerpen in 1830*, 2 vols; and also Prims, F, *Geschiedenis van Antwerpen*, vol. 8, p. 23 and *passim*.

¹¹⁰ Roemans, R, "Jan-Frans Willems en de Belgische omwenteling", *De Vlaamsche Gids*, Nieuwe Reeks, no. 7, 16 (April 1928), pp. 289-304.

desultory movements of armed columns on both sides. Two days later, the director of the Antwerpen police, a fervent Orangist, left, and on the 21st the Belgian *tricolore* was hoisted. Except for the military presence in the *citadel*, the city had gone over to the new regime without any significant resistance. The United Kingdom was no more.

One can well imagine the effect that the events of August to October of 1830 must have had on Willems. Gone was the security provided by the house of Orange, gone the possibility of making Dutch the sole language of a united Netherlands, gone the ascendancy of the last fifteen years. Hovering in the background, like the ghost from an evil past, was the threat of annexation to France. Unlike the director of the police, unlike some of his literary friends like Prudens van Duyse and Potgieter, and unlike his mentor, Georg Bergmann, and his family, Willems decided not to flee to the north.¹¹¹ Obviously he could not conceive of making an alternative home in the north. He was born in the southern Netherlands, and there he would stay, irrespective of which regime was in power. This does not mean that he was happy with the turn of events: in fact he was devastated. Not only had he been surprised by the extent of anti-Orangist sentiment in the south, he was also disgusted with the blindness of the unionists in the north.

Anger and sorrow fought for control over his passions, which he went on to express in a bitter poem, entitled *La séparation des Rats et des Souris*. It was published in a propaganda letter, after the collapse of Orangist rule in Antwerpen, strangely enough in French.¹¹² The title reflects his anger. Referring to Dutch-speakers in north and south as rodents was hardly complimentary. Like so many passionate nationalists, Willems, too, had to drink deep from the cup of despair, unable to stomach his people's apparent unwillingness to follow his own utopian dreams for them. The poem's content is a mirror of his own sadness: his people could no longer bear to live in one country. That they could not was to have dire consequences for Willems. He was one of the most prominent Orangists to remain in the city after its adherence to the revolution, a city, moreover, still very much threatened by northern troops. Within months the new regime made up its mind to remove this potential danger: Willems was sent into internal exile,

¹¹¹ *Rooses Brieven*, pp. 102-3.

to the Oostvlaamse village of Eeklo. When told by the new regime he had to leave Antwerpen, Willems had inquired as to the reason. The reply was simple,

“cela s’entend de soi-même”.¹¹³

Willems arrived in Eeklo on 12 February 1831. It was a fairly lonely experience. Initially at least, he had had to leave his family behind in Antwerpen. Most of his friends had fled north, and, most distressing of all, he had lost all he had worked for since arriving in Lier. Unable to come to terms with what had occurred, and plagued by a succession of personal disasters, he was to remain in Eeklo until 1835.¹¹⁴ In this semi-exile, Willems not only had to carve out a new role for himself, he was also forced to reinvent his people’s identity. This was not made any easier by the hostility initially expressed by the Belgian regime towards Dutch, in spite of an official policy of bilingualism confirmed by the constitution. Willems had also invested too much in the Orangist regime to accept the changes immediately. For some years to come he was to hope against hope for a restoration. The new regime’s discrimination of what he held dearest – the Dutch language – made this position much easier to maintain. In addition, following close upon his arrival in Eeklo, there was news to gladden the hearts of any diehard Orangist: the north had finally decided to act.

In August, exactly half a year into Willems’ internal exile, king Willem I belatedly launched a concerted effort to re-impose his authority on the rebellious south.¹¹⁵ As the northern army pushed south during the *Tiendaagse Veldtocht*, however, it soon became clear that it was fighting a lost cause. Unionist expectations were quickly dashed, as the spectre of French annexation appeared on Flemish soil: France would not tolerate re-occupation, and sent its own forces into Belgium. Willems and the other southern

¹¹² Willems, J.F, *La séparation des Rats et des Souris*, quoted in full In Prims, F, *Antwerpen in 1830*, vol. 2, pp. 253-4.

¹¹³ Willems sent a letter from Antwerpen on 26 January to his friend K.A Vervier – who was living in Eeklo – describing how he had been sent into exile and asking him if he could find a suitable house to rent. *Rooses Brieven*, pp. 108-110. Willems’ exile is described by Rijnvaan, J, “Jan-Frans Willems in ballingschap”, *De Vlaamsche Wacht*, no. 5, (31.8.1879), pp. 34-5.

¹¹⁴ Several of his children died during this period.

language activists were fortunate that Britain shared their fears of a French annexation of Belgium, which would have extinguished their cause forever. The superpower intervened diplomatically, preventing France from establishing control in the southern Netherlands, whilst, on the other hand, ensuring the departure of northern troops. With the dashing of French hopes also disappeared any chance of an Orangist restoration.¹¹⁶

To the Great Powers, the survival of Belgium now became an essential part of the balance of power through which they sought to prevent renewed conflict in Europe. Consequently, on 14 November 1831, Britain, France and Prussia guaranteed the country's independence and neutrality.¹¹⁷ The treaty made it clear to all that Belgium was here to stay; the revolution had triumphed. It proved a body blow to all but the most convinced Orangists in the new state. Those with a career to think of realised that compromise had become inevitable, and many did seek a compromise with the new regime. Not so Jan Frans Willems and similar diehards, some of whom were, coincidentally, also living in Eeklo at that time.¹¹⁸ Many of these just had too much to lose by compromising. These losses came in tangible as well as intangible form. Willems, for example, would have had to forego all the privileges he had accrued from his support for the Orangist state, and give up his strongly held convictions on the organic unity of all Dutch-speakers. He was prepared to do neither, at least not in 1831. His intransigence was mirrored by that of Willem I, who was to oppose any compromise until as late as 1839, when he would finally recognise the new kingdom in the south.

Willems and his fellow language activists were caught between hammer and anvil. During the previous fifteen years, politics and culture had become intertwined to such an extent, that few could now contemplate their divorce. Yet a divorce was just what was required under the circumstances. They were faced by a stark choice: if they wished to

¹¹⁵ For the atmosphere in the north during this episode, see Nepreu, R.M., "Utrechtse studenten op veldtocht", *Spiegel Historiae*, vol. 14, no. 1, (Januari, 1979), pp. 45-52.

¹¹⁶ On hearing that a Dutch army had marched into Belgium, the British Prime Minister Palmerston exclaimed angrily: "Is the King of the Netherlands gone mad ... Does he suppose he will be allowed to conquer Belgium?" Sas, N.C.F. van, *Onze Natuurlijkste Bondgenoot*, p. 332. Sylvain Van de Weyer, who was now 'minister Van België' in London, had alerted the British.

¹¹⁷ Volmuller, H.W.J., *Nijhoffs Geschiedenislexicon*. S.v. "Vierentwintig artikelen, Verdrag van".

¹¹⁸ Amongst these were Ph. Blommaert, K.A. Vervier, K.L. Ledeganck and F. Rens. Crick. J, *op.cit.* p. 64 and passim; and Heremans, J.F.J., *op.cit.* pp. 207-8.

protect the interest of their language and culture in a Belgian context, they would have to cease being Orangists. It was not an easy decision. Willems still regarded the House of Orange as the guarantor of the survival of Dutch in the south. At the same time things were not made any easier by the new state, which regarded any expression of Dutch culture as a statement of pro-Orangism. This dilemma was to continue for as long as the north posed a threat to Belgium's survival.

Inevitably, the political stalemate proved detrimental to Dutch culture in the new state.¹¹⁹ The result was a sharp reduction in all the cultural activities of the Dutch-speaking community, from literature and theatre to the visual arts. It was a self-fulfilling prophecy: the demise of the Orangist state spelled doom for Dutch in the south. Of course, the whole process was directly abetted by the preoccupation with politics by those who had been the engine of the Dutch renaissance in the south, prior to 1830. Unable to plump for a divorce, they failed to emulate Willems' own achievements with Dutch during the French Empire. Willems' position illustrates the effects that the change of regime had on the cultural activities of the Dutch community in the south. In a letter written to Van Hengel in Amsterdam on 21 May 1832, he complained that,

“Alle schriftelyke correspondentie met Holland is hier ten strengste verboden, en men houdt my, meer dan een ander, in 't oog”.¹²⁰

The champions of language and culture were confined in the new state, forcefully separated from their natural community. Although Willems was loathe to acknowledge the fact, Dutch-speakers were no longer one people.

That Willems' letter reached Amsterdam at all, is evidence that repression was not as effective as one would expect. In an epoch in which political repression was the norm – including all forms of judicial persecution – and in which cultural repression common fare, Belgium was already proving to be more enlightened than most other European

¹¹⁹ Verbeke, M, “Typologie van de Vlaamse auteur omstreeks 1860”. In A. Deprez and W. Gobbers (eds), *op.cit.* p. 210.

¹²⁰ Vroede, M. de, “Willems, Potgieter en De Gids”, *VM KVATL*, vol. 2, (1952), pp. 221-2.

nations.¹²¹ Its clampdown on Dutch culture was consequently not as thorough as it could have been. Willems managed to publish his *Voorzeggingen van de heylige Hildegarde, omtrent de Belgische omwenteling* at the same time as he wrote his letter to Van Hengel.¹²² An early printed version appeared in Gent in 1831, but only twenty-five copies were made.¹²³ Nevertheless, that they could be printed at all is surprising enough. Wider distribution came after a southern exile, Brest Van Kempen, printed an anonymous copy in Amsterdam.¹²⁴ Willems' enforced stay in Eeklo made this more feasible, for the authorities could hardly have chosen a less secure place of internal exile. Around Eeklo there was a long tradition of cross-border smuggling, which simply resumed as the border reappeared. What could be smuggled out could also be smuggled back into Belgium.

The work, which interprets a medieval prognostication as predicting the restoration of the United Kingdom in a great revolution in the year 1835, attests to Willems' continued hope for an Orangist restoration. Ironically, the religious text was also a sharp indictment of those Willems held most responsible for the current state of affairs: the restoration would be a punishment by God of the clergy, for their perfidy. It is perhaps appropriate that the text is imbued with utopian hope, for, by the end of 1831, hope was all that was left to the Orangists. The Belgian Revolution reached its violent conclusion in October, when a French army, with international permission, laid siege to the Antwerpen *citadel*. The Dutch garrison held out for a month, and subjected the city to a heavy bombardment, which caused a great number of civilian casualties.¹²⁵ This was followed by a Franco-British blockade of the Dutch coast, which lasted until May 1833.

It is indicative of just how far Willems had come to live in a fantasy world, when he offered his services to the Dutch minister Van Maanen, an offer that was not even

¹²¹ One need not necessarily be thinking of Russia in this period. See chapters two, pp. 134-5 and four, pp. 243-4.

¹²² Willems, J.F, *Voorzeggingen van de heylige Hildegarde, omtrent de Belgische omwenteling*.

¹²³ Rooses, M, "Levensschets van Jan Frans Willems". In Het Willemsfonds, *Jan Frans Willems*, p. 50, n1.

¹²⁴ Deprez 1993, p. 34. See also, Duyse, P. van (ed), *Dicht- en Tooneelkundige Nalatenschap van J.F. Willems*, pp. XCIX-CIV.

¹²⁵ Bridge, F.R and Bullen, R, *The Great Powers and the European States System 1815-1914*, pp. 2-3. For Antwerpen during this period see Prims, F, *Antwerpen in 1830*, vol. 1, pp. 216 and following.

answered. Willems *still* believed that he could assure the minister of the continued loyalty of the people in the south to the House of Orange, an incredible claim after the Dutch bombardment of Antwerpen.¹²⁶ If this was not enough for Van Maanen to ignore the offer, then the memory of the unflattering *La séparation des Rats et des Souris* would have been: Willems with his impressive track record of criticising the north, was just another dissatisfied southerner. The collapse of the last Orangist forts in Belgium probably served as a wake-up call to Willems. It made it abundantly clear that an Orangist revival was not going to be imminent. Even if he believed the medieval prophecy, a possibility that cannot be discounted, there was still work to be done. It was obvious that without immediate action, the demise of Dutch in Belgium was only a matter of time. Drawing on his experiences from the Napoleonic era, Willems began his last campaign to bolster the language and thereby the culture he loved.¹²⁷

Naturally this was supposed to be a temporary measure; as soon as the Orangist restoration had occurred, attention could be focused once more on making Dutch the language of state of the United Kingdom. Gradually it dawned on those employed in this new stop-gap rescue attempt, that, far from holding the fort until the advent of a bright new dawn, they were involved in something infinitely more far reaching. They had actually started the movement that was to define Dutch-speakers in the southern Netherlands as Flemish. From the beginning, it was a movement born out of desperation, hoping against hope. It also had a strong sense of being persecuted, of standing alone against the overwhelming might of French culture. It was, nevertheless, not without its strengths, strengths personified by the man who soon was to become the embodiment of the new movement. To fight the corner of Dutch in the new kingdom, Willems could draw on two important assets. He had an unrivalled knowledge of the history of the new state. As will be seen, the regime drew heavily upon Brabantine history to legitimise its existence. It regarded the old duchy as central to their new entity, as the essence of

¹²⁶ *Deprez 1993*, p. 35.

¹²⁷ Willems' years at Eeklo were particularly fruitful: he copied well over 100,000 verses from the Middle Ages. *NBW*, vol. 11, S.v. "Willems, Jan Frans".

Belgium, and this ensured that Willems had something to offer the new government: knowledge.

A second weapon came in the unlikely guise of the anarchic *Reinaert de Vos*. Its importance to Willems' conversion to a Romantic medievalism has already been discussed, but it did more, much more. The fable of the irrepressible fox enjoyed widespread academic attention in early nineteenth-century Europe. As a story it had never disappeared from the public domain, and was even read in schools. Goethe had bestowed ultimate literary respectability on 'Reinaert', when his *Reineke Fuchs* appeared in 1794.¹²⁸ Possibly as a result of this publication, the text had become very much the preserve of German scholars. It was one of these German scholars, Franz-Josef Mone, who provided the link between this German tradition and Willems. The two had co-operated when Mone held a professorial chair at Leuven prior to the break-up of the United Kingdom, and it was the latter's Latin edition of 1832 – *Reinardus Vulpes* – that ignited Willems' own *Reinaert* research.¹²⁹ It was undoubtedly Mone, steeped in the German scholarship surrounding *Reinaert*, who told Willems about its importance.¹³⁰ One may imagine Willems turning to the *Reinaert* for consolation. In 1832 he bought copies of Goethe's *Reineke Fuchs* and of Mone's Latin edition. Bolstered by the respectability lent to the text by all the famous German and, indeed, French scholars, Willems decided to prove that *Reinaert's* roots lay in the medieval county of Flanders.¹³¹

The result of his research was an article that appeared the following year: *Reinardus Vulpes – Reinaert de Vos*. Ostensibly it was just another nineteenth-century academic article, but on a personal as well as on a cultural-political level, it was a milestone in the development of a Flemish identity. The article was not, however, an attempt at populism, and its scholarship is remarkable. It proved beyond question that the *Reinaert*

¹²⁸ Willems, J.F, *Reinaert de Vos, naer de oudste beryming*, pp. III-IV. See also Wenseleers, L, *De pels van de vos*, pp. 227-229, and Appendix.

¹²⁹ Willems, J.F, *Reinardus Vulpes*, p. 2; Mone, F.J, *Reinardus Vulpes*.

¹³⁰ Mone was not just instrumental in firing the imagination of Willems; he also kindled Jacob Grimm's interest in the *Reinaert*. Franke, C, *Die Brüder Grimm*, p. 109.

¹³¹ The 'county' refers here to the medieval and early modern county of Flanders, originally an autonomous principality in the kingdom of France, and, from the sixteenth century, a far less autonomous principality in the German empire. Like the other principalities in the southern Low Countries, it was abolished by the French.

story did indeed originate in Flanders, and was based on extensive research. A comparison between an inventory of Willems' library and the works mentioned in his article, reveal that Eeklo was not the isolated 'exile' it has sometimes been made out to be.¹³² He managed to procure most of the 'required reading', some of which was far from easy to come by. As noted, his work on *Reinaert* also radically altered his opinion of the value of Middle Dutch literature. Rather than being of historical or philological interest, *Reinaert* was,

“l'un des plus beaux monuments de notre gloire littéraire au moyen-âge”.¹³³

It was a discovery which allowed Willems to present the *Reinaert* as one of the great iconic texts of his people.

Reinforced in his long-standing belief that Dutch culture in the southern Low Countries was superior to any, his research provided comfort in many ways. Here he had a sword with which to fight the Francophone ascendancy in Belgium, a shield to hide from the blows inflicted by the separation between north and south. It was also an olive branch, which he could hold out to the new regime in Brussel. His indication that he was willing to compromise was made in the subtlest academic way. Willems published the tract in French, the only medium through which he was going to get the fruits of his research published. He furthermore opted to use a Belgian periodical, and not just because this was an easy choice. In several passages in the article, Willems openly acknowledges the new state, even identifies with it.¹³⁴ As in many of his post-revolutionary works, there is a subliminal message in the *Reinardus*. He makes it quite clear that this *Dutch* text, which originated in the old county of Flanders, forms part of the new Belgium's heritage. It was to become a recurrent theme.

As early as 1833, then, and certainly with the greatest reluctance, Willems was contemplating the inevitable result of the Belgian Revolution: there were now two Dutch

¹³² His Antwerpen library was in storage so he must have collected his *Reinaert* books in Eeklo. For Willems' 'Reinardiana', see *Bibliotheca Willemsiana ou Catalogue de la Riche Collection de Livres délaissés par M.J.F. Willems*, vol. 2, pp. 159-161.

¹³³ Willems, J.F., *Reinardus Vulpes*, p. 2.

¹³⁴ For example: “qu'en Belgique nous”; “l'idée ... appartient à la Belgique”. Ibid, pp. 1 and 23.

'nations'. That such a 'nation' could exist within the new state is tentatively suggested in his conclusion about the "inventeur de cette fable", for whom he claims a dual nationality,

"était belge, était flamand".¹³⁵

Strangely, and fortuitously, Willems' treatment of the origins of the *Reinaert* chimed with the developing notions of a Belgian nationality amongst the new government in Brussel. In the *Reinardus*, Willems further develops his thesis of an autonomous culture in what, since 1830, had been Belgium: autonomous from, but also older and therefore superior to, the surrounding countries. The *Reinardus* 'proved' that this 'Belgian' cultural artefact predated the French versions, and it claimed precedence over the German texts. This type of justification of one's culture, firmly rooted in the hallowed Middle Ages, coincided with that provided by the revolutionaries for the modern state. Willems could not have chosen a better subject.

It has to be remembered that in the *Reinardus* article Willems presented his public face. In private his willingness to accept the new order was markedly absent. In a letter addressed to his friend Potgieter of 9 October of the same year, he wrote,

"Franschen en Walen heerschen. Overal werken Jezuïeten en monniken ... De Orangisten, schoon de groote meerderheid bij de fatsoenlijke lieden uitmakende, moeten zwijgen, en in stilte den ouden staat van zaken betreuren ...".¹³⁶

As seen, events were not favouring the Orangists in the south in 1833, and things were to get worse the next year: Willem I agreed to a cease-fire, *de facto* if not *de jure*, recognising the Belgian state. Jan Frans Willems must have realised that there was to be no Orangist restoration within the foreseeable future.

Once more he turned to the *Reinaert* to give back some pride to a people that had been badly shaken by the recent revolution. His 1834 *Reinaert de Vos, naer de oudste beryming*, was a rhyme-translation of the ancient text. Appearing in the same year as

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 23.

editions by Jacob Grimm and Hoffmann von Fallersleben, it further cemented the international importance of the 'Flemish' epos.¹³⁷ The fact that the publication was in Dutch this time, indicates that Willems had a different constituency in mind than with his 1833 article. Once more he carefully balanced his view of the new Belgian state. This was certainly not the battle cry that some contemporary and later observers have perceived it to be.¹³⁸ This was not the time for battle cries; 1833 had been an inauspicious time to rouse the Orangists, 1834 even less so. The careful statements in his 1833 *Reinardus* article were reinforced again here.

It is obvious Willems no longer believed in the restoration of the Orange dynasty by 1835. It would take a miracle, in which the staunch anti-clerical Willems was unlikely to place his trust. He, therefore, made sure that his *Reinaert de Vos* clearly expressed his acceptance of the new state. Such was his wish to compromise, that he even stated that there were no restrictions on the use of Dutch in Belgium, which was blatantly not true.¹³⁹ His *Reinaert de Vos* was an exercise in shifting the paradigms of his struggle, heralding the new parameters within which he was to work from now on. French is still identified as the main threat to the status of Dutch in Belgium, but he is careful not to equate this with the new regime. In many respects, Willems reverted to his stance under Bonapartist rule: once more the struggle was one for the survival of the language as a cultural medium on a higher level. The dream of a Dutch-speaking nation-state had been quietly buried in Eeklo. Just how refined Willems' thinking had become during the past few years, becomes apparent when one considers the line of his argument in the *Reinaert*. The new state *needs* its Dutch-speakers, it urges, just look at the antiquity – and therefore the value – of its artistic products. Here we have an internationally

¹³⁶ *Rooses Brieven*, p. 125.

¹³⁷ Jacob Grimm in his foreword to his *Reinhart Fuchs* of 1834 reminded the Belgians that "diese alte dichtung" was of special importance to them, and asked who was really interested in their "muttersprache" in that "schönen gegend, wo im mittelalter auch die poesie wohnte". Grimm, J, *Reinhart Fuchs*. Jacob Grimm and Willems were to conduct a regular correspondence from 1834. Vreese, W. de, "Briefwisseling van Jan Frans Willems en Jacob Grimm". In A. Bömer and J. Kirchner (eds), *Mittelalterliche Handschriften*, pp. 264-295.

¹³⁸ Jef Crick for example, following Willems' contemporary, Snellaert, regarded the introduction as a 'wapenkreet', but failed to spot the fine balance struck by Willems. Crick, J, *op.cit.* pp. 74-5; Snellaert, F.A, *op.cit.* p. 468.

¹³⁹ Willems, J.F, *Reinaert de Vos*, p. XII.

recognised great literary work, acknowledged by no less an authority than Jacob Grimm, born on Belgian soil, created in a Dutch-speaking imagination.¹⁴⁰ Surely that would be of interest to the new government? It was.

Willems was fortunate that his publications coincided with a relaxation of the official attitude towards Dutch culture in Belgium, undoubtedly influenced by the favourable external political climate. His careful self-portrayal as language activist with no political motivations further enhanced his chance of rehabilitation.¹⁴¹ His insistence that the *Reinaert* was a great Belgian text also paid off. In 1836 the Belgian government, at the suggestion of Willems and Serrure, bought the largest extant medieval *Reinaert* manuscript at an auction in London. They clearly believed Willems' argument for the need to consider the Dutch past in Belgium. The government paid Willems to prepare an edition, which was read and liked by the king.¹⁴² The German-born monarch, who would have appreciated the endorsement of Willems' work by Jacob Grimm and Mone, played a significant role in Willems' rehabilitation. He shared the latter's view that Dutch was an important constituent of his new country, which set it apart from France. This awareness of the centrality of Dutch in differentiating the new kingdom caused the government to tolerate Dutch and act to prevent its extinction, even if with noticeable reluctance.¹⁴³ Willems' knowledge was becoming important to the new government. Three years later, Willems was to produce a school edition of the text, which ensured that the medieval fox was to become one of the first iconic figures in the Flemish national pantheon.¹⁴⁴ Was Willems aware that his fox is a rather anarchical, even subversive hero? This can, unfortunately, not be proven, but if he was, there may well

¹⁴⁰ Willems summarised his 1833 conclusions in the prologue. He even went as far as placing the *Reinaert* next to Dante's *Divina Commedia* in literary importance. Ibid, pp. III and XI.

¹⁴¹ "Om harentwil [the Dutch language] ben ik van Antwerpen naer Eecloo verbannen", thus carefully omitting the Orangist dimensions of his exile. Willems, J.F., *Reinaert de Vos*, p. XII.

¹⁴² Willems, J.F., *Reinaert de Vos. Episch fabeldicht van de twaelfde en dertiende eeuw*. The government embraced the *Reinaert* eagerly. So much so, that in a letter to Jacob Grimm Willems complained that a few mistakes had crept in the result of pressure to publish. Deprez A. and Smedt, M. de, "Drie nieuwe brieven van Jan Frans Willems aan Jacob Grimm (1836-1837)", *VM KANTL*, no. 1, (1990), p. 67.

¹⁴³ Mone, F.J. (ed), "Reinhart Fuchs", *Anzeiger für Kunde der teutschen Vorzeit*, vol. 5, (1836), column 437. Leopold I read Willems' *Reinaert* in three days. Deprez, A., "Jan Frans Willems en Ferdinand Augustijn Snellaert. Een vriendschap", *Verslagen en Mededelingen van de Leiegouw*, vol. 14, (1972), p. 120.

¹⁴⁴ Willems, J.F., *Reinaert De Vos, naer de oudste beryming, ingerigt tot schoolgebruik*.

have been an even deeper motivation on his part when he chose the text. The seemingly powerless fox had no problems in outwitting his monarch and other rivals: the equation with the Flemish is easily made. The text added a rather *piquant* element to the growing sense of martyrdom amongst Dutch-speakers in Belgium. Reinaert allowed them to think of resistance, which made martyrdom easier to bear; it also held out the possibility of success.

In 1835, the increasing tolerance towards Dutch-speakers by the Belgian state allowed Jan Frans Willems to leave his enforced residence in Eeklo for the more attractive surroundings of Gent. As far as the Belgian government was concerned, Willems' 'exile' had served its purpose: it seemed to have cured him of any wish to make overt political statements.¹⁴⁵ Upon his arrival in Gent there was plenty of pressure on Willems to rejoin the fray. His considerable prestige would have given respectability to any cause, but he chose to fight with different tools, in a more covert way. Perhaps he had studied his furry hero closely, and had come to much the same conclusion: no point in fighting a fight you cannot win. This came as a bitter disappointment to all who hated the new state. To many, the cultural struggle and Orangism were still one and the same.¹⁴⁶ Language activists in Gent, where, as Elias pointed out, Orangism was still very much alive, and especially the radicals in Antwerpen, were soon to become rather critical of Willems' unwillingness to indulge in overt political agitation.¹⁴⁷

Snellaert, one of the leading lights at Gent, would even accuse Willems of *arrivisme*. In Antwerpen, De Laet despaired of those like Willems who wanted "een uitgestorven volksgeest [...] doen verrijzen [and] ene nationaliteit scheppen", but refused to do so in a pro-active fashion.¹⁴⁸ De Laet's quote is a revealing one. Clearly he had not travelled the same distance as Willems, and nor had many others. Also of interest is the

¹⁴⁵ His main biographer, Ada Deprez, also noticed Willems' aversion to direct political action. *Deprez 1993*, p. 44.

¹⁴⁶ Vroede, M. de, "Het Orangisme in de Vlaamse Beweging", *Nieuw Vlaams Tijdschrift*, vol. 2, (Maart 1948), pp. 964 and forward.

¹⁴⁷ Some of the main figures in the Gent group were Van Duyse, Blommaert, Serrure and Snellaert. Elias, H.J, *op.cit.* vol. 2, p. 46 and passim; Poortere, A. de, "Figuren om en rond J.F. Willems". In A. de Poortere, *op.cit.* p. 74.

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in Elias, H.J, *op.cit.* vol. 2, p. 46. De Laet, Van Rijswijk, Van Kerckhoven and Conscience were the main names in the Antwerpen group.

disparaging remark about the “uitgestorven volksgeest”: obviously there were many activists who did not really believe in the existence of a mystical, common cultural mindset in the way that Willems did. For them, the old certainties of the Orangist years of one Dutch-speaking people in one political entity had gone, and it had not been replaced by a new concept.

At the same time, De Laet identified exactly what Willems was doing. Willems was indeed actively engaged in the attempt to reactivate the extinct ‘*volksgeest*’, except that he did not regard it as extinct! He was most specific about this in his introduction to the *Reinaert*. The majority of Belgians spoke Dutch, and this was not going to change; the only thing they lacked was awareness. The *volksgeest* was, in other words, far from extinct, merely dormant. The problem, according to Willems, lay in the status and valuation of that language, an issue that he had been addressing for decades. Obviously, events over the past decade and more had proven beyond doubt that north and south could not live together, and the pragmatic Willems had bowed to the inevitable during his Eeklo years. With regret certainly, but without flinching. Again De Laet could not have been more correct: Willems was indeed *creating* a “nationaliteit”. This time he would have to think an identity for one segment of Dutch speakers, an identity that would come to be called Flemish. Unlike Willems, the radicals could still not divorce political power from cultural and linguistic emancipation. By contrast, Willems had come to the pragmatic conclusion that, like it or not, the Belgian state was here to stay. Cultural emancipation would have to occur within its framework. What mattered to him in the mid 1830’s was the same as what had mattered to him during the Napoleonic and Orangist periods in his life: the elevation of Dutch as the vehicle for a ‘high-brow’ culture.

By now, Willems knew the tools for his mission of cultural elevation and of imagining a nation well: he never doubted the effectiveness of philology and linguistics. His skills in these fields had been well honed prior to the Revolution, and his Eeklo ‘exile’ had only served to increase his intellectual achievements. Not only did he publish his article and edition of the *Reinaert*, but he also copied manuscripts lent to him by Charles van

Hulthem, who had been his colleague in the *Commissie*.¹⁴⁹ His work was to attract criticism from more radical circles: why bother with all this medieval material, which surely is not very useful for the modern age? This is unsurprising, seen that most of his critics were Orangists. Their own mythological golden age was to be found elsewhere, in the uprising against Spain, to be precise. In spite of this criticism, Willems correctly identified which part of the past was best suited to be mythologized as the ‘history of the nation’. This should cause little surprise: the nation he was thinking and writing was a different one from that of his Orangist critics.

Unlike in the years immediately before and after the Belgian Revolution, Willems was now in tune with reality again. This time he would follow his instinct and nurture the medieval past as a mirror for his people. Subsequent events were to prove him right. In 1838, Conscience’s historical novel on the Battle of the Golden Spurs appeared, and took Flanders by storm.¹⁵⁰ The Middle Ages was destined to become *the* past of Flanders, a past that unified the diverse Dutch-speaking people who, after 1830, had found themselves living in Belgium. Willems’ own contribution to this process was academic rather than populist; he unearthed the sources that the later historical novelists were to use.

Two more events were to mark the new regime’s wish to find common ground with Willems. The first was his appointment in July 1834 to the *Commission royale d’histoire*, Belgium’s successor to the *Commissie tot uitgave van de oude vaderlandsche kronijken*. The second came in August 1834, when prime minister De Theux sent him an invitation to judge a national poetry competition.¹⁵¹ The competition intended to celebrate the new state, and at first one begins to wonder whether there was just a little truth in Snellaert’s accusation of *arrivisme*. On closer consideration, however, the echoes of an earlier poetry competition, held to celebrate the birth of a Napoleonic prince, may clearly be heard. The competition was to be held in both French and Dutch, a fact that must have made Willems aware that there was indeed a chance to rescue his

¹⁴⁹ Duyse, P. van (ed), *Dicht- en Tooneelkundige Nalatenschap van J.F. Willems*, p. xxv. Van Hulthem’s collection of 32,000 works was unrivalled in his day.

¹⁵⁰ Conscience, H., *De Leeuw van Vlaenderen*. For its impact see Driessche, F. Van, “Feestrede”. In E.E. Stroobant et al, *Conscience-Feest 25 September 1881*, p. 19.

culture in a Belgian context.¹⁵² The poetry competition was, of course, incidental. Willems' appointment to the *Commission* was of a rather more permanent nature, and its consequences more far reaching.¹⁵³ It not only heralded the recognition on the part of the Belgian state of his academic abilities, but also provided Willems with an opportunity to re-enforce the notion that Belgium without Dutch-speakers would become a mere extension of France. As this idea was prevalent at court and amongst certain circles in government, it probably played an important role in his appointment.¹⁵⁴

Willems' first two publications for the *Commission* were editions of Jan van Heelu's *Rymkronyk* and Jan van Boendale's *De Brabantse Yeeften*, both of which he had worked on prior to the Revolution.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, Van Heelu's epic history of the Battle of Woeringen was all but finished in 1830, and its publication gave the *Commission* its first, fast, and, above all, cheap result.¹⁵⁶ There is something peculiar about these medieval Brabantine chronicles. Content wise, there is nothing remarkable at all. Within the context of the writing of nations in the nineteenth-century Netherlands, on the other hand, they were surprisingly versatile. It has already been noted that researchers frequently had to force medieval artefacts into a nineteenth-century sense of nationhood. With these two texts there was little need. To the United Kingdom they symbolised the organic unity of north and south; to Belgium they furnished proof of the heroic past of the new state. It was a glorious history which Belgium was not going to find amongst her French-speaking provinces. Liège's past consisted mostly of revolts against its ruler, and the other Walloon provinces' former heartlands had been lost to France during the seventeenth century.

¹⁵¹ Bols, J. (ed), *op.cit.* p. 272.

¹⁵² A letter from his friend De Vries suggests that Willems in part accepted the invitation, as it would benefit his position, even hinting that it would be best for his family. Whilst this undoubtedly played a role, there were certainly other, more political motives on Willems' part too. Quoted in Crick, J, *op.cit.* p. 76.

¹⁵³ The members included De Gerlache, De Reiffenberg and Gachard, who between them laid the foundation for the history of Belgium. Académie Royale de Belgique, *op.cit.* pp. 14-17.

¹⁵⁴ See in this respect Leopold I's endorsement of Hendrik Conscience's *De Leeuw van Vlaenderen*.

¹⁵⁵ It completed the reconciliation between Willems and the state. The government even financed Willems to travel to the site of the Battle of Woeringen in the Rhineland. *Rooses Brieven*, p. 133.

¹⁵⁶ In addition, it gave both the *Commission* and Willems further international repute: Jacob Grimm was particularly impressed by the work. Vreese, W. de, *op.cit.* pp. 270-1.

Brabant, and soon Flanders, were the only candidates who could provide a glorious 'Belgian' history, and it was Willems who made this history accessible. As a result, Brabant became the meeting point between Willems and the Belgian state, and between Dutch culture and the Belgian regime. The revolutionary movement of 1830 had transformed the symbols of the old duchy into those of Belgium. According to patriotic mythology, the colours of the Belgian tricolore – black, yellow and red – were based on the old flag of Brabant, taking the gold and red from the lion rampant and its claws respectively, and the black from its background. It was also supposed to have been deployed in the *Etats Belgique Unis* episode of 1787-89, which was retrospectively given the name of 'Brabantse Omwenteling'.¹⁵⁷ Symbolically, then, Belgium was imagined as the continuator of both the *Etats Belgique Unis* and the old Brabantine duchy.

One important result of this was that, for the first few decades of the new country's existence, Brabantine history provided a meeting ground for the government with Flemish activists. The medieval period of the southern Low Countries would prove to be a particularly happy hunting ground for the mythology factory of the Belgian state and incipient Flemish movement alike. Probably the most striking example for this is the reception of Conscience's *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen* and *Jacob van Artevelde*. Both came to exemplify the Flemish emancipation struggle, but at the time of their publication were also warmly received by the Belgian establishment, which regarded them as statements of Belgian independence vis-à-vis France, and ancient Belgian democracy respectively.¹⁵⁸ In this atmosphere of shared mutual requirements, Willems set out to construct a Flemish identity.

¹⁵⁷ Morelli, A, "Het ontstaan van "patriottische" symbolen in België, in de gewesten en de gemeenschappen". In A. Morelli (ed), *De grote mythen uit de geschiedenis van België, Vlaanderen en Wallonië*, pp. 177-89.

¹⁵⁸ For the mythology around the Van Arteveldes, see Nicholas, D, *The Van Arteveldes of Ghent*, preface.

Embracing Belgium: the Gent Years.

The years between his arrival in Gent in 1835 and his death in 1846 were in many respects Willems' most productive. He not only managed to publish some of his best research, but also used the time left to him to concentrate fully upon what had now become his life's task: the definition of his people's identity in the new Belgium. His relationship with the regime in Brussel was friendly but distant, and he twice refused professorial chairs, one at Gent, and one at Liège.¹⁵⁹ It is doubtful he would have passed over such an honour under the United Kingdom, but then times had changed. As seen, the realities of the post-Revolutionary period caused him to abandon the notion of a Dutch-speaking nation-state. He understood that now was the time to rethink, time to ponder on what made the Dutch-speakers of Belgium a nation. In the process, the idea of Flanders was born. In spite of his newly-found pragmatism, Willems did not alter his long-standing idea that northern and southern Dutch-speakers were essentially part of one culture.¹⁶⁰ He had been able to think this prior to the annexation of the Kingdom of Holland to the French Empire, and he could conceive of it now, after renewed separation. This new notion of two Dutch-speaking nations in two different states, who were, nevertheless, fundamentally one, was both subtle and new. It also took some time to formulate. The Gent years would see Willems attempting to square this circle of political division and cultural unity.

His first year in Gent was marked by two projects, both published in 1836. The most important of these was *Over het gedrag der Belgen*, his 1829 speech that had not been published before.¹⁶¹ As already seen, the speech condemned the north for the separation in the sixteenth century, and by implication also for the more recent one. Such strong criticism was most welcome to the Belgian government. The publication of *Over het gedrag der Belgen* is symptomatic of the awkwardness of the relationship between the Belgian state and Willems. Every time it seems that an uncomfortable balance was

¹⁵⁹ *Rooses Brieven*, p. 136.

¹⁶⁰ In the letter from De Vries already mentioned, his northern friend affirms that it is indeed possible for a cultural unity to exist above political division. Crick, J, *op.cit.* p. 76.

struck: here the Belgian authorities ostensibly accepted that the separation of 1830 was 'unfortunate', whilst Willems was 'happy' to give weight to the charge that it had been inevitable, in the light of the north's attitude. His second publication of that year, the *Lettres de Marguerite de Parme*, is equally indicative of the new willingness to find a *modus vivendi*.¹⁶² The letters combined Willems' love for history and philology, but it is the subject matter that is revealing. Dating to the troubles preceding the separation of north and south in the sixteenth century, they repeat the theme of *Over het gedrag der Belgen*. In addition, Margaret of Parma was one of the villains in the historiography of the north, ensuring that a study of her letters was a political statement. All in all, the underlying sentiment of his work in his first year in Gent served to publish his newly-signed peace with the Belgian state. It also unequivocally stated his support for the government's historiographical project, which openly aimed at creating a national Belgian past.

Parallel with this official career in the service of the new state, Willems managed to find time to work on his *grand project*, the definition of a Flemish identity. A permanent platform was set up in 1837 that would allow him to present his vision of his people's past and future in a coherent way. It took the form of an academic periodical, the *Belgisch Museum voor de Nederduitsche Tael- en Letterkunde en de Geschiedenis des Vaderlands*, of which Willems became the editor and chief contributor.¹⁶³ The name of the periodical contains its most significant overt message. The idea of the national museum, whether as a collection on display, a library, an institution, or, as in the case of *Belgisch Museum*, as a periodical, was one that had gained currency throughout Europe by the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁴ Its origins were rooted in Enlightenment

¹⁶¹ Willems, J.F., "Over het gedrag der Belgen", In J.F. Willems, *Mengelingen van historisch-vaderlandschen inhoud*.

¹⁶² Willems, J.F., *Lettres de Marguerite de Parme et du Sire de Montigny sur les troubles de Tournai de l'an 1563*.

¹⁶³ Willems, J. F. (ed), *Belgisch Museum voor de Nederduitsche Tael- en Letterkunde en de Geschiedenis des Vaderlands*. The publication could be found in libraries such as that of the Grimm brothers. Denecke, L. and Teitge, I. (eds), *Die Bibliothek der Brüder Grimm*, p. 282. For a specific study of the publication see Brys, M, Carlier, M, and Vanacker, H, *Belgisch Museum 1837-1846, Vaderlandsch Museum 1855-1863*.

¹⁶⁴ Willems made the link between his paper museum and one of stone in his opening article: "Om tot vaderlandsche letteroefeningen op te wekken hebben wy voor onze medeburgers dit *Belgisch Museum*

notions of cataloguing and collecting, which, by the end of the eighteenth century, had fused with the ideas of a communal, national past. The national museum became the place where individuals could contemplate the objects that bonded them into a community.¹⁶⁵ It was Willems' intention that his periodical would provide a similar service to Belgium's Dutch-speaking community.

At the same time, Willems wished to emphasise his reconciliation with Belgium's existence, and the need to create a communal identity within its frontiers. The "Belgisch" in the title served that purpose.¹⁶⁶ It underlined the tacit understanding between the Belgian government and Willems, an understanding that easily transferred to the periodical. It could serve to highlight Dutch culture in the southern Low Countries, and at the same time strengthen the distinctiveness of Belgium. It also affirmed that its editor, and the other contributors, ruled out the option of a political union of all Dutch-speakers at the expense of Belgium. This acceptance of the permanence of political separation made it possible for other language activists to start to think of themselves as belonging to a distinctive cultural group, set apart, not just from the French-speakers in the south and in their midst, but also from those other Dutch-speakers in the north. As such, Willems' periodical was important in transforming Dutch-language activists from Orangists into *Flaminganten*.¹⁶⁷

The *Belgisch Museum*'s title reveals even more: it was, after all, a periodical *voor de Nederduitsche Tael- en Letterkunde*. Indeed, the publication originated in a linguistic issue, and one that was to dominate the last years of Willems' life: the intricate complications surrounding the 'correct' spelling of Dutch, both in the northern and southern Low Countries. This was not just an academic exercise; if Dutch was to be *one*

opengesteld. Willems, J.F., "Over den oorsprong, den aert, en de natuerlyke vorming der nederduitsche tael", *Belgisch Museum*, vol. 1, (1837), p. 6.

¹⁶⁵ These need not necessarily be historical, of course. Natural history, the fine arts, music, indeed *anything* served to create the bonds of nationhood.

¹⁶⁶ The purpose of the *Germanisches Museum* in Nürnberg has been described as follows: "die Kenntnis der deutschen Vorzeit zu erhalten und zu mehren, namentlich die bedeutsamen Denkmale der deutschen Geschichte, Kunst und Litteratur vor der Vergessenheit zu bewahren und ihr Verständnis auf alle Weise zu fördern". This encapsulates precisely what *Belgisch Museum* set out to achieve. *Brockhaus' Konversations-Lexikon*, vol. 7, 1893 ed. S.v. "Germanisches Museum".

language, it should, or so Willems and others argued, step away from particularist spelling. His interest in this matter led to a renewed acquaintance with Jan Baptist David, who, with Willems, came to be regarded as one of the most important figures in the early Flemish movement.¹⁶⁸ The two had known each other a long time, indeed had been friends in Antwerpen. That friendship had turned sour in the acrimonious debate over the *Collegium Philosophicum*.¹⁶⁹ Although both men were passionate about the role of Dutch, politically they stood on opposite sides of the fence. David attended the seminary at Mechelen, and was destined for a career in the Catholic Church; Willems, Orangist and anti-clerical, was a leading proponent of the northern regime.¹⁷⁰ Their paths diverged even further when David was drawn into the Ultramontane opposition against the regime, which was organised by vicar-general Sterckx from Mechelen. It was, therefore, unsurprising that when the Belgian Revolution broke out in 1830, the two men stood in opposite camps, with David giving the new regime his support.¹⁷¹ Lesser men would have found these differences insurmountable, but not so Willems and David. As a canon, David was very much part of the Catholic hierarchy, whose support had been crucial to the 1830 Revolution. This did not, however, preclude him from having a passionate love for Dutch. It was this shared enthusiasm, coupled with Willems' open reconciliation with the new state, which allowed a strong bond to grow between the two. Nothing contributed as much to this as their common crusade for a standardised spelling of Dutch in Belgium and the Netherlands.

David had already gained his laurels in the field of Dutch before he embarked on what was to become known as the *Spellingoorlog*. During the first four years after the Revolution, when Willems was quietly working away in Eeklo, David published several books and education manuals in Dutch, often against much opposition from

¹⁶⁷ A name little used now, but for a long time the collective name for all those involved in the struggle for the emancipation of Dutch in Belgium. Of course, thinking of oneself as a *Flamingant* also implies believing in the *idea* of Flanders.

¹⁶⁸ Wils, L, *Kanunnik Jan David en de Vlaamse Beweging van zijn tijd*, Gitsberg, R.C, *Twee Pioniers van het eerste uur. J.F. Willems. J.B. David*.

¹⁶⁹ Aubert, R, *op.cit.* pp. 118 and forward.

¹⁷⁰ Wils, L, *Kanunnik*, p. 25; Mierlo, J. van, *Jan Frans Willems*, p. 21. Their falling out is not without irony, as Willems actually opposed Willem I's policy towards the seminaries.

Francophone educationalists, but with the support of the Church.¹⁷² Then, in 1834, he was given the chair of Dutch language and literature at the Catholic University, which in 1835 moved to Leuven. This was the most senior teaching post in Dutch in the new state, and conferred instant status on David. It was the canon who initiated contact: on 6 December 1835, a letter reached Willems in Gent that was to change the course of Dutch language activism in Belgium, indeed, that was to influence the creation of a Flemish identity beyond measure.¹⁷³ In it, the professor of Dutch at Leuven invited the country's most senior scholar in the field to give his opinion on the problems surrounding the lack of a standardised spelling, as well as of a standard grammar for Dutch. David insisted that the Dutch-speakers of the north should be included in these deliberations, and told Willems that this had the support of prime minister De Theux.

The invitation was, needless to say, highly flattering. Once more Willems was to play a key role in the development of Dutch culture, taking his place amongst the most learned men of the age. It did more, much more. David's insistence on a pan-Dutch solution to the spelling question offered Willems a unique opportunity to salvage something of his old dream of one Dutch people. If he had to reconcile himself to political fragmentation, he could at least help ensure that there would be a cultural unity, based on a shared language.¹⁷⁴ The fact that the initiative had the support of the government must have confirmed to him that he had been right in seeking reconciliation, as the new state seemed, after all, to wish to protect his beloved language. The normally staid style of his letters was for once abandoned, and, gushing with enthusiasm, Willems accepted David's invitation to join him in seeking a solution to the problem.¹⁷⁵ The co-

¹⁷¹ Wils, L, *Kanunnik*, pp. 34-40, doubted this, but his judgement was influenced by an *a priori* assumption that the language 'fighters' of the later period were always in agreement.

¹⁷² Weghe, J.-L. van den, "De Werken van David". In R. Moroy and J.-L. van den Weghe, *J. David's Leven*, vol. 2.

¹⁷³ David's new position gave him the authority and confidence to approach his old friend. *NBW*, vol. 11, S.v. "David, Jan-Baptist". The full letter is quoted in Nieuwenhuis, B, *op.cit.* pp. 29-31.

¹⁷⁴ As has been argued throughout this chapter, cultural unity, for Willems and many others in the nineteenth century, was confined to linguistic unity. Divisions on historical or religious grounds were supposed to be secondary to this. The concept was expressed most succinctly by Prudens van Duyse, who summarised it in a poem as 'De Tael is gantsch het Volk', which was to become the war cry for the more radical Flemish activists. Duyse, P. Van, "Aen België". In Fl. van Duyse (ed), *Prudens van Duyse's Nagelaten Gedichten*, vol. 1, pp. 201-204.

¹⁷⁵ Nieuwenhuis, B, *op.cit.* p. 31.

operation between Willems and David brought together not just two eminent scholars, but also the two strands of the identity of the incipient Flanders: liberal and Catholic. To these two men, the demands of their common struggle overrode anything: it helped consign their past differences to oblivion, and overcame their different visions for the identity of the Flemish people. Just as a Liberal-Catholic pact had given birth to Belgium, so now a liberal-Catholic partnership was to be instrumental in giving birth to Flanders.¹⁷⁶

The two men quickly turned to the matter in hand, and the following year witnessed the foundation of what became the main organ for Dutch language and literature in Belgium: the *Maetschappy tot bevordering der Nederduitsche Tael- en letterkunde*. Naturally, Willems and David became its key figures.¹⁷⁷ The epoch-making impact of the *Maetschappy* is difficult to exaggerate. It brought together for the first time all leading Dutch-speaking intellectuals in Belgium. Even more importantly, it also had cells in the three ancient regions of Belgium where Dutch was spoken, in Flanders, Brabant, and in Limburg, and it had its seat in the Belgian capital.¹⁷⁸ As such, it was the first institutionalised acknowledgement that there was an inherent unity amongst the Dutch-speakers in the new state, a first step to recognise, if not yet to define, the Flemish and Flanders. It furthermore cemented the unwritten agreement of mutual tolerance between the Belgian state on the one hand, and the leading Dutch-speaking intellectuals on the other. As seen, king Leopold I, was well aware of the need for Dutch in creating a distinct Belgian identity, an awareness shared by his prime minister, De Theux. The latter also agreed with David and Willems that foreign interest in the Dutch culture of the new country, particularly amongst German scholars, made the whole project even

¹⁷⁶ As with Belgium, the partnership would not survive too long. Within years of Willems' death, liberal and Catholic Flanders were at each other's throats. By the last quarter of the century, this dislike had become so strong that it almost destroyed the reputation of those, like Rodenbach, who wished to bridge the gap between the two.

¹⁷⁷ *EVB*, vol. 2, S.v. "Maetschappy tot bevordering der Nederduitsche Tael- en letterkunde".

¹⁷⁸ Crick, J, *op.cit.* p. 86.

more desirable.¹⁷⁹ Defining Flanders, then, originated in part in a desire to define Belgium.

The publication of *Belgisch Museum* became the most noticeable manifestation of the *Maetschappy's* activities. Read by the intellectual elite of the period, it reached those who were to have the most influence on the development of a new, Flemish identity. As such its influence is almost impossible to exaggerate. It was also very much Willems' project. He was the editor and main contributor, and his name lent it the prestige it required to be taken seriously by the academic community. Its widespread influence also meant that Willems' newly-found wish to find a *modus vivendi* with Belgium would carry much weight in the years to come. In spite of the more radical, younger element amongst the language activists who were far from satisfied with what they considered to be Willems' and David's indolence, the notion of a Dutch-speaking Belgian as propounded by the periodical was to hold sway until the First World War.¹⁸⁰

Although throughout the *Spellingoorlog* Willems was to defend the *a priori* unity between north and south, he never shied away from disagreeing with his northern colleagues. He could not, however, accept the notion of some in Belgium, who wished to emphasise their distinct identity by adopting a spelling that differed markedly from the north. For all his distaste for a separate southern Dutch language, he always insisted on the rights of his compatriots to influence the outcome of any move towards standardisation. He had first published on the divergences within Dutch back in 1824, and even then had been unprepared to adopt the recently standardised spelling from the north; it had not allowed southern Dutch-speakers to have their say first.¹⁸¹ His book on the question, *Over de Hollandsche en Vlaemsche schryfwyzen van het Nederduitsch*, was

¹⁷⁹ Smedt, M. De, *De literair-historische activiteit van Jan Frans Willems (1793-1846) en Ferdinand Augustijn Snellaert (1809-1872)*, p. 182. The interest which Willems and David noted came from, amongst others, from Hoffmann von Fallersleben, Jacob Grimm and Franz Josef Mone.

¹⁸⁰ And beyond, although more and more questioned. The call for independence was not really heard until the First World War; union with the north became the preserve of a small group of ineffectual Orangists and *Groot-Dietsers*. It would receive attention before and after the Second World War, when championed by the eminent historian Pieter Geyl.

¹⁸¹ Wils, L, "Vlaams en Hollands in het Verenigd Koninkrijk". In L. Wils, *Vlaanderen, België, Groot-Nederland*, pp. 55-64.

an uncompromising statement of his position.¹⁸² At times, it even appeared that northern pressure was forcing him into the particularist camp. In the introduction to his 1834 *Reinaert*, for example, he wrote that he had tried to defend the integrity of ‘Flemish’ against northern ‘Hollandse’ spelling rules.¹⁸³ In retrospect, it seems odd that the United Kingdom provided such limited scope to turn Willems’ ideal of one standardised spelling into reality. As Lode Wils pointed out, the language policy of king Willem I was anything but gracious to Dutch-speakers in the south of his kingdom.¹⁸⁴ Like so much else in Orangist policies, Willem I’s linguistic strategy had been far from subtle. Even in Willems it appears to have caused more than a little distaste. In the end, it took the Revolution of 1830 and the subsequent support from the *Belgian* government, before a serious debate on a standard spelling got underway. As soon as it did, Willems reverted to his basic premise: northern and southern unity was to be achieved, but only through compromise.¹⁸⁵

The varied and often obscure conflicts that took place amongst scholars during most of the *Spellingoorlog* need not detain us here.¹⁸⁶ Its final phase was launched on 6 September 1836, shortly after the birth of the *Maetschappy*. On Willems’ suggestion, the De Theux government launched a competition to determine the final spelling rules for Dutch.¹⁸⁷ A letter written to Jacob Grimm at this time reveals Willems’ underlying motivation for his involvement,

“Men ziet op den duer dat de veslaefdheid aen het fransch de nationaliteit zou onder den voet helpen”.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸² Willems, J.F., *Over de Hollandsche en Vlaemsche schryfwyzen van het Nederduitsch*.

¹⁸³ Willems, J.F., *Reinaert de Vos*, pp. xi-xii. ‘Hollands’ and ‘Vlaams’ was used here by Willems to denote spelling usages, and did not refer to nationality. He also referred to ‘Brabants’ on several occasions, and seems to have based his notions of the varieties in Dutch on medieval dialects. Willems himself used the system devised by Deroches in 1761, which was based on the Brabant dialect. He was to jettison it later on. Bock, E. de, *Verkenningen in de eerste helft van de negentiende eeuw*, p. 56.

¹⁸⁴ Wils, L., “Vlaams en Hollands”, pp. 60-2.

¹⁸⁵ An illustration of Willems’ instinct for compromise may be found in a letter to his northern friend De Vries, in which he questions both the Holland and Brabant spelling systems. Bock, E. de, *op.cit.* p. 56.

¹⁸⁶ The best concise overview of the ‘Spelling War’ is in *EVB*, vol. 2, S.v. “Spellingoorlog”.

¹⁸⁷ Elias, H.J., *op.cit.* vol. 2, p. 34; Coopman, Th. and Scharpé, L., *Geschiedenis des Vlaemsche Letterkunde van het jaar 1830 tot heden*, p. 63; Bock, E. de, *op.cit.* p. 57 and *passim*. Deprez, A. en Smedt, M. de, *op.cit.* p. 69.

¹⁸⁸ Deprez, A. en Smedt, M. de, *op.cit.* p. 69.

Which “nationaliteit” did he have in mind in his letter to Jacob Grimm? Probably two, Belgian and Flemish – Belgian as this chimed with the government’s hopes, and Flemish as this continued the central theme of his life.

To adjudicate the contributions to the competition, a panel of experts was appointed, with Willems as its chairman, and J.H. Bormans, professor of modern languages and Dutch, first at Gent and then at Liège, as its secretary. From the outset the process was bedevilled by problems. The twelve submitted papers all failed to satisfy the commission, which then decided to take the matter into its own hands: Bormans was to have the final say. It is indicative of Willems’ trust in his secretary that he gave him this task. His relationship with Bormans was even closer than that with David. The professor of Dutch had learned most of his skills in Willems’ private library, before he was appointed at Gent in 1835.¹⁸⁹ It is obvious that here was a man who thought like Willems, and whose final decision on the standardised spelling would echo his wishes. Bormans’ appointment did not end Willems’ involvement in the process. He continued to use his editorship of *Belgisch Museum* to impress his own vision on the question, mainly through a large number of linguistic articles. Bormans was to take his time coming to a decision, and a final conclusion was not reached until 1841. The delay caused all sorts of opposition to rear its head, not in the least in Catholic circles. With the exception of Brugge, however, where opposition to the reform was cultural instead of political, most criticism disappeared with the publication of Bormans’ report.¹⁹⁰

Bormans’ extremely erudite 644 page tome was too much for the opposition. They did not have the intellectual clout to mount a challenge, and few were willing to risk their reputation by publicly disagreeing with its pro-northern conclusions. There may be little doubt that the learned Bormans, David and Willems were far more concerned with the intrinsic value of their project, than with its direct political ramifications. This ultimate statement of the organic unity of the Dutch language appeared in a tumultuous political climate. In 1839 Willem I had finally extended recognition to the Belgian state, and the

¹⁸⁹ Bock, E. de, *op.cit.* p. 57.

northern threat disappeared. Within Belgium, the Liberal-Catholic coalition which had given birth to the state, melted away as soon as the northern threat had gone. Instead of De Theux's unionists came a Liberal cabinet, with much less regard for its Flemish public. In this context, the fact that Bormans' decisions had faced so little opposition may be readily understood. In every way, it chimed with the prevailing climate.

Besides his work as editor of the *Belgisch Museum* and his efforts on behalf of the *Maetschappy*, Willems also found time to publish an edition of *Van den Derden Edewaert, Coninc van Engelant*, a medieval chronicle on the expedition of England's fourteenth-century king to Flanders, which appeared in 1840.¹⁹¹ This busy schedule did not, however, prevent Willems from keeping a close eye on the political situation. Yes, he was, by now, totally convinced that compromise created better possibilities to preserve and nurture his beloved language in Belgium, and he certainly refused to be drawn into any open confrontation. This did not prevent him from resorting to direct action when he thought it necessary. For three to four years, he had tenaciously fought the Orangist corner, strong in the conviction that only that dynasty could safeguard Dutch culture. He had stepped away from this position, reluctantly, and his compliance was only to last as long as the Belgian state stuck to the unspoken agreement that it would honour its Dutch cultural heritage. When it reneged, Willems climbed back onto the barricades.

Reneged it did, for by 1840 the government had still failed to found a Flemish Academy. In reaction, more radical Flemish activists decided to voice their displeasure, a move which resulted in the *Petitionnement* of 1840. The public face of the *Petitionnement* consisted of Snellaert and De Laet, men whose criticism of Willems has already been encountered. This time they found him on their side. There has long been controversy as to Willems' involvement in the *Petitionnement*.¹⁹² That this has been the

¹⁹⁰ The result of Bormans' conclusions is to be found in Bormans, J.H., *Verslag over de Verhandelingen ingekomen bij het Staetsbestuer van België etc.*

¹⁹¹ Willems, J.F., *Van den Derden Edewaert, Coninc van Engelant*.

¹⁹² Max Rooses was one of the first to assume that Willems must have composed the text. Rooses, M., *Levensschets*, p. 65. That Willems had a backstage role is suggested by both A. Deprez and by M. De Smedt. See further Lernout, G., "Het Vlaams petitionnement van 1840 en de reakties van de Belgische pers". In L. Wils (ed), *De houding van de politieke partijen tegenover de Vlaamse Beweging in de 19e eeuw*, pp. 17-20.

case is odd, for in a letter to Jacob Grimm of 18 May 1840, Willems could not have been more specific,

“Ik stelde eene petitie aen de kamer der volksvertegenwoordigers op”.¹⁹³

He went on to state his motivation, “hof en hoofdstad zijn maer al te fransk”; his fear, “dit [is] niet zonder gevaer van demissioneering”; and his hope, “koning Leopold is goed-gezind”.¹⁹⁴ In spite of the monarch’s sympathies, Willems was right in being fearful of repercussions. He simply could not afford to lose his income, for his personal circumstances were not those of a scholar of private means. It was perhaps for that reason that his friend Blommaert signed the letter that accompanied the *Petitionnement*.¹⁹⁵

Radical the *Petitionnement* may have been, it was also supremely ineffective. A government in crisis correctly assumed it could ignore the *Flaminganten* with impunity.¹⁹⁶ The first outing of political *Flamingantisme* went down like a lead balloon. Willems must have been sorely disappointed. He had held high hopes for what might be achieved through the sympathetic Leopold I. These were now dashed. The *Petitionnement* episode confirmed to him the uselessness of direct action. In a letter addressed to Mertens in the following year he wrote,

“Het is niet altijd zeker, dat men met *veel* te vragen *iets* bekomt. Integendeel, men ziet dagelijks, dat de man, die *veel* vraagt, *nietmetal* bekomt”.¹⁹⁷

It was a bitter lesson. The failure showed just how unimportant Flemish cultural demands were on a wider Belgian scale, and emphasised the extent to which his ideals were vulnerable. Much more needed to be done to raise the language’s status and many

¹⁹³ Vreese, W. de, *op.cit.* p, 284.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ The aristocratic Blommaert did have an independent income and was less vulnerable to reprisals.

¹⁹⁶ A full explanation of the events, although highly coloured, is given in *EVB*, vol. 2, S.v.

“Petitionnement”. See further Elias, H.J, *op.cit.* vol. 2, pp. 61-67.

¹⁹⁷ The letter is dated 10 July 1841, and the remark refers directly to the failure of the *Petitionnement*. *Rooses Brieven*, p. 175.

more converts had to be made, before direct action would be worth its while.

Henceforth, Willems would stick to the weapons he had found most effective.

The following year, aided by David, he turned these thoughts into action. The two friends organised a congress in Gent, with the aim of finally settling the spelling question. The *Taalcongres* was convened on 23 October at the university. The next day a *Vlaamsch Feest* took place, yet another step on the road to designating Belgium's Dutch-speaking community as 'Flemish'. Unlike the *Petitionnement*, the congress was an outstanding success. The vast majority attending approved Bormans' spelling, a move that effectively emasculated the remaining opposition. In addition, several ministers also attended, some of whom even addressed the assembled crowd in Dutch.¹⁹⁸ All this proved to Willems and David the validity of their approach. Direct action had failed in 1840; indirect action was demonstrably successful in 1841. At the *Vlaamsch Feest*, Willems gave a keynote speech in which he summarised his thoughts on Flemish identity as they had developed since the Revolution of 1830.¹⁹⁹ The speech gives a good indication of just how far the pan-Dutch activist of the 1820's had moved, and indeed how far the Belgian Dutch-speakers had come since then.

The Revolution of 1830 had left them stranded in a state, which, if not actively hostile to their culture, was at least ambivalent about its existence. Within a decade, not only had the intellectuals of this community managed to organise resistance against the perceived threat of French, but also had struck upon an, admittedly vague, identity for their people. Standing before this people, Willems signalled where he felt they were travelling to. Addressing them as 'Vlamingen', even though many of the delegates came from outside the medieval county, he cast in concrete their new name. He also left them in no doubt as to what constituted the core of their identity: to be Flemish meant supporting the Flemish language.²⁰⁰ Coming from the mouth of the chairman of *De Tael is Gantsch het Volk*, the cultural society that organised the festival, this will have caused

¹⁹⁸ Snellaert, F.A, *Schets eener geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Letterkunde*, p. 253.

¹⁹⁹ The speech is printed in Rooses, M, *Keus uit de Dicht- en Prozawerken van Jan Frans Willems*, vol. 2, pp. 171-177.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 174.

little surprise.²⁰¹ What would have come as a surprise to many, was the idea that Willems, the acknowledged champion of pan-Dutch unity, here admitted that they were a different people from Dutch-speakers in the north.

For all his pan-Dutch sentiments, still very evident at the conference of the previous day, Willems had turned a corner. He accepted that the south was indeed different. His extensive research had convinced him that his people had a unique genius, which, as he noted in his speech, was contained in their language.²⁰² The old caution was still there, however, and his acceptance that the south was different was far from unqualified. He used ‘Vlaams’, ‘Nederduitsch’, and even ‘Nederlandsch’ as interchangeable concepts throughout his speech.²⁰³ The birth of a Flemish identity was a haphazard and hesitant affair. This was partly caused by the difficulties of defining such an identity, a task Willems avoided in his speech. There may have been a growing sense of a common identity amongst Belgium’s Dutch speakers, but what this entailed would bedevil the community’s internal relations for a long time to come. Liberals, Free Masons and Roman Catholics, later augmented by socialists and extreme nationalists, all had their own version of a Flemish identity. It would have been too much to ask anyone to come up with some hard and fast definitions at this early point.

On one element alone there *was* agreement: a Flemish identity was the result of a historical process, and this process had martyred the Dutch language as much as it had created the Flemish people. There was also agreement on who were responsible for this state of affairs. In the first lines of his speech, Willems made this abundantly clear: nowadays, he argued, life was awash with French, enforced by a French legal system, and,

“Wat onze voorouders gedaan hebben komt weinig meer in aanmerking”.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ The society was named after a line in a poem by Van Duyse. See note 174.

²⁰² Rooses, M, *Keus uit de Dicht- en Prozawerken*, p. 174.

²⁰³ Ibid, pp. 175 and 176.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 171.

Unwittingly, Willems' speech betrayed the fact that this last complaint was becoming outdated as he spoke. The first two historical novels of Conscience were seeing to this, for here were the heroes and the achievements of the past, readily accessible to all who could read. In addition, there was the phenomenal growth of interest in the great Gent civic leaders of the High Middle Ages, the Van Arteveldes. They had been placed in the spotlight as far back as 1813.²⁰⁵ In Willems' speech they reach their full maturity as the symbolic leaders of the cause: here was the great Philips van Artevelde, the Flemish hero who had dared to stand up against French pretensions.²⁰⁶ The subliminal message was easy to understand: what he did we can do too.

The congress also shows how far the Middle Ages was already providing some of the central themes of a separate Flemish identity. The separation from the north had made this all the more likely. Whereas they had their seventeenth century, the south was now increasingly harking back to the great figures and events of the Middle Ages. Most of these heroes came from the old county of Flanders, the past of which now became the past of the region. In the process, the names Flanders and Flemish were transferred to the wider, Dutch-speaking regions of Belgium. Naturally, this was a very selective past, driven by the need to find antecedents for the anti-French struggle. Almost inevitably this caused the golden age to be placed in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.²⁰⁷ Thus, around the time of the congress, a historical canon was born that fed into the contemporary feeling of cultural and linguistic repression by outside forces. The intellectuals of the first half of the nineteenth century bequeathed to Flanders a history of martyrdom and victimisation.

That this had been a remarkable gathering bears repetition. It marked a wide acceptance of a new 'nation' amongst the Dutch-speaking intellectuals of Belgium; a nation called Flanders, with its own language, own literature, and, above all, own past.

²⁰⁵ Cornelissen, E.N, *De l'origine, des progrès et de la decadence des Chambres de Rhétorique, établies en Flandre*.

²⁰⁶ Rooses, M, *Keus uit de Dicht- en Prozawerken*, p. 172.

²⁰⁷ This was to leave a pernicious legacy. In modified form it has influenced popular and at times academic history writing in Flanders to this day. A good example of the Willems' version of history impacting on contemporary history writing may be found in Lamberty, M. et al, *Twintig Eeuwen Vlaanderen*.

This was how far the assembled men were prepared to go; an independent Flanders was not on the agenda at all, indeed, not even imagined. They had travelled far enough. Back in 1837, Flanders still referred first and foremost to the old county.²⁰⁸ After the congress, it simply meant Dutch-speaking Belgium.²⁰⁹ Such contrast with neighbouring Germany. There, at the time of the congress in Gent, the nationalist temperature was beginning to reach boiling point. By the later 1840's, it would spill over into the streets, and demand German unification, a German nation-state. However, the difference is merely one of degree; in Flanders as in Germany, the process of thinking a nation – the basic expression of national identity – was well under way by 1841.

The events at Gent mark the apogee of Willems' active role in his people's emancipation struggle. Although he was to speak at the conference's follow-up, the *Algemeene vergadering der Belgische Maatschappijen van Vlaamsche Letteroefening* in Brussel in 1844, he was not directly involved in its organisation.²¹⁰ His speech in Brussel was in many respects a repetition of that of 1841, with the same emphasis on southern distinctiveness through history, and the same call to fight the influence of French.²¹¹ He also returned to a theme dear to his heart. Willems launched an appeal for a national literature, which he saw as vital to the creation of a national identity. This was new in as far as what Willems asked for was *modern* creative writing. To date, his concern had been mainly with the construction of a literary canon of *past* achievements. The call to start writing literature had already gone out in an article in *Belgisch Museum*. Flanders, Willems argued, needed new literary figures, adding to the literary achievements of the past, which he had chronicled in his *Verhandeling over de Nederduytsche Tael- en Letterkunde*. Borrowing a German concept, Willems suggested

²⁰⁸ See for example Lansens, P, *Geschiedenis van Vlaenderen*.

²⁰⁹ In 1843, the radical Antwerpen poet Theodoor van Ryswyck used *Vlaemsche* in juxtaposition to *Waelsche* when referring to all Dutch-speakers in Belgium. Ryswyck, Th. van, "Aen den koning der Belgen". In Th. van Ryswyck, *Politieke Refereinen*, 1844, pp. 47-50. This ethnic concept finds its geographical counterpart in the use of 'Vlaemsch België' in 1840, by Karel August Vervier, a member of the Gent Group and friend of Willems. Vervier, C.A, *Letteroefening*, p. viii.

²¹⁰ *EVB*, vol. 2, S.v. "Met Tijd en Vlijt"; *EVB*, vol. 2, S.v. "Taelverbond, Het".

²¹¹ Rooses, M, *Keus uit de Dicht- en Prozawerken*, pp. 178-188. See also Vlasselaers, J, *Literair Bewustzijn in Vlaenderen 1840-1893*, pp. 106 and 110-111.

that now Flanders had found its feet, it should become a *cultuurnatie*, which it could achieve only through the letters. All this is unsurprising. After all, literature was widely seen during the nineteenth century as the most sublime expression of language, and language was, of course, Willems' favourite topic.

Willems was to survive the meeting at Brussel for slightly over two years. His death was unexpected, and the last two years of his life were as productive as any. These final years also show that Willems had become an all-round *Germanist*. Amongst his publications was an etymological work entitled *Mémoires sur les noms des communes de la province de la Flandre Orientale*. In addition, he worked in the field of folklore by collecting Flemish songs, which were to be published posthumously by Snellaert in 1848.²¹² In addition to these, there appeared the unusual edition of *De eerste bliscap van Maria*.²¹³ The publication of this mystery play was a new departure. It seems that towards the end of his life, Willems had discarded his distaste for religious works. His had always been a flexible mind, pragmatic and incisive. *De eerste bliscap van Maria* shows that this remained the case right to the end. First he had accepted the new Belgian state, and then he had diluted his idea on the organic unity of all Dutch-speakers. There can be little doubt that this willingness to change his mind if the 'evidence' required him to do so, also lies behind the last great 'conversion' of his life.

Finally overcoming his traditional anti-clericalism, and finally swallowing his dislike of later medieval piety, he had come to accept that Catholicism was indeed a core element in the identity of Flanders. This was a significant change of heart. To move from the anti-clericalism found in the letters of the earlier 1830's, to the statements at the end of his life, represents nothing less than his personal road to Damascus. Although a liberal version of Flemish identity was to persist with enormous vigour, there can be little doubt that from the beginning it always played second fiddle to a Catholic one. Towards the end of his life, the perceptive Willems appears to have understood this all too well. He must have seen the unstoppable tide washing over Flanders, and he was not

²¹² Willems, J.F., *Mémoire sur les noms des communes de la province de la Flandre Orientale*; Willems, J.F., *Oude Vlaemsche Lieder ten deele met de melodiën*, F.A. Snellaert, (ed).

²¹³ Willems, J.F., "De eerste Bliscap van Maria. Misteriespel van het jaer 1444", *Belgisch Museum*, vol. 9, (1845), pp. 37-140.

about to play king Canute. Hendrik Conscience's very Catholic novels were helping to ensure that Flanders was to retain its Catholic faith and culture for two generations and more. In addition, there was a particularly vigorous Catholic revival going on, which was to turn Belgium, and Flanders in particular, into a bastion of Ultramontane Catholicism.²¹⁴ Finally, since Willems had come to the conclusion that the medieval period was fundamental to the identity of the Flemish, he had been unable to escape the importance of Catholicism. By 1844, he was ready to acknowledge all of this. In his speech in Brussel he put it in the simplest terms: 'religion' he said, is 'the sister of our nationality'.²¹⁵

Acknowledging the intrinsic importance of Catholicism to a Flemish identity was Willems' last major contribution to his people's journey of discovery. He had travelled a long road, on which he had to adapt to changing circumstances more than once. Yet for all his pragmatism he never lost sight of his core belief, that Dutch was a *Kultursprache*, and that it should enjoy the liberty to develop fully. Towards the end of his life, this belief had come to be expressed in a Flemish context, which he had done much to invent. One has to wonder what would have happened had Willems lived longer. His acknowledgement of the role of Catholicism came too late to influence a larger audience. Could he have swayed fellow liberals into accepting what for them was the unacceptable? We will never know, but, as the example of Albrecht Rodenbach will illustrate, it would certainly have made Flemish nationalism a more unified and less embittered force.

Willems' death of a heart attack on 24 June 1846 came as a huge shock to the Flemish activist community. *De Eendragt*, the mouthpiece for *De Tael is gansch het Volk*, carried the story as headline news: "Willems is dood!", which Willems did not have to be explained. The editorial commented that,

"Een pletterende slag heeft onze zaak getroffen".²¹⁶

²¹⁴ See in this respect chapter three, pp. 184-6.

²¹⁵ Rooses, M, *Keus uit de Dicht- en Prozawerken*, pp. 180-1.

²¹⁶ Editorial, "Willems is dood!", *De Eendragt, veertiendaegsch tydschrift voor letteren, kunsten en wetenschappen*, no. 3, (5 July 1846), pp. 9-10.

Reflecting on the events in 1871, J.F.J. Heremans reminisced that ‘the news of Willems’ death was thought of as a disaster in all of Gent, in Flemish Belgium, in all the Netherlands and caused sadness to the academics in Germany’.²¹⁷ Allowing for some hyperbole, it is unmistakable that the death of the man, who had done so much to define the identity of the Dutch-speakers of the southern Low Countries as Flemish, was indeed experienced by many as a personal loss. Amongst the Germans in particular, many were shocked. They had been robbed of a chance to meet him, as Willems was supposed to have attended the first *Germanistenversammlung* in Frankfurt-am-Main in September of that year.²¹⁸ An appearance at the conference would certainly have put the crown on Willems’ international reputation as a scholar. As it stands, his prestige was significant by any count. During his life he corresponded with no fewer than 445 people, many of them leading intellectuals, amongst whom were Germans, Russians, French, Danes and Englishmen.²¹⁹

Willems’ status as a leading academic from the first half of the nineteenth century, both in Belgium and in the rest of Europe, is beyond question. The same can be said about his contribution to the identity that was ultimately assumed by the Dutch-speakers in the southern Low Countries. There can be no doubt that, with the exception of the novelist Hendrik Conscience, nobody did as much to help shape this identity than Willems. Indeed, he had formulated the notion of multiple layers of identity, of being Flemish *and* Belgian, of being Flemish *and* a Dutch-speaker. His impact was such that upon his death he was immediately proclaimed father of the Flemings, which was only a slight exaggeration: he was certainly their leading midwife.

He was, of course, also a child of his time. As an intellectual developing a nationalistic worldview, Willems was prone to some of the less pleasant aspects of nationalism. As

²¹⁷ Heremans, J.F.J., *op.cit.* p. 201.

²¹⁸ The invitation had come from Jacob Grimm, whom Willems had failed to meet on a previous occasion. Vreese, W. de, *op.cit.* pp. 294-5.

²¹⁹ These included *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* contributor L.C. Bethmann; leading Dutch author Willem Bilderdijk; Jacob Grimm; Hoffmann von Fallersleben; Prussian king Frederick Wilhelm III; later Belgian prime minister and his opponent during the United Kingdom days, Sylvain van de Weyer, and many others. Deprez, A, “Algemene Inleiding”. In A. Deprez, *Brieven van, aan en over Jan Frans Willems*, vol.1, p. 35.

seen, he could be hostile to those of a different cultural background, and in his attempts to elevate his own cultural inheritance showed the inherent contradictions of nationalistic sentiment. He glorified the achievements of his people, whilst at the same time reducing their status to that of victims. His opinion of the French, and of French-speakers, was frequently crude and, at times, violent. In his prologue to the *Reinaert*, for example, he referred to French-speakers as 'uitschot'.²²⁰ Yet some understanding is required: his father's dismissal by the French authorities, the trauma of Napoleonic occupation, and the very real disadvantages Dutch-speakers lived under in Belgium, all go a long way to explain Willems' antipathy. He furthermore made a fine distinction between French as a threat to Dutch and the language itself; we have eyewitness reports that he used French at home.²²¹

Unsurprisingly, Willems was never truly concerned with the plight of the growing urban proletariat, but he was worried about their education. Education was an abiding passion in Willems' life. In 1812 he had joined the Antwerpen society *Tot Nut der Jeugd*, which had as its aims the discussion of problems surrounding education, and the publication of primary school manuals. Willems followed this by the publication of his *Verhandeling over de Nederduytsche Tael- en Letterkunde*, although its highbrow style suggests a limited audience, far smaller than that which made use of the manuals of *Tot Nut der Jeugd*. Nevertheless, this eagerness to contribute to the knowledge of his people, even if driven by a typically contemporary desire to lift 'the lesser classes' up through the arts, was genuine and lasting. Not only did he write a schoolbook edition of the *Reinaert*, he also helped to make song sheets available to a wider audience, incidentally contributing to the importance of songs amongst later Flemish societies, such as the student body led by Albrecht Rodenbach.²²²

At the final count, Willems' life was that of a scholar: most of his time was preoccupied not with struggle, but with study, although he probably did not make a distinction between the two. If he was to prove that Dutch was indeed worth preserving,

²²⁰ Willems, J.F, *Reinaert de Vos*, pp. xii-xiii.

²²¹ German visitors in particular were surprised by Willems' use of French at home. See for example Luise von Plönnies' 1845 account of 'Eine Soirée bei Willems'. Plönnies, L. von, *Reise-Erinnerungen aus Belgien*.

he would have to provide reasons. As a result he became a prodigious scholar, as well as a rather less accomplished poet. In both roles he stood at the heart of a renaissance of Dutch culture in the southern Low Countries. It was engaged in this monumental task that most contemporaries remembered him, and undoubtedly how he wished to be remembered. As the large turnout on 4 June 1848 for the unveiling of the commemorative monument attested, it had made him into a national figure, 'De Vader der Vlaamse Beweging'.

²²² *Deprez 1993*, p. 41.

2. Between Politics and Academia. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm and 'Das Wesen der Deutschen'.

Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859) and Jacob Grimm (1785-1863)



Drawing by Ludwig Emil Grimm, 1843.

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2. Between Politics and Academia. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm and 'Das Wesen der Deutschen'.¹

Youth and University.

The German society into which the brothers Grimm were born was one of high intellectual achievement, accompanied by a morbid political stagnation, and enormous fragmentation. Germany at the end of the eighteenth century was not so much a country, rather a world. German intellectuals had been engaged for some considerable time in a search for the soul of this German world, for *das Wesen der Deutschen*. It was a search that was mirrored by similar endeavours in other countries. In Britain, for example, identity had been forged around a common Protestant heritage.² In the newly-born United States of America, the core notion focused on the equality of the individual American under God; and in Russia, with the oldest identity of them all, national identity, for as far as it was understood, revolved around the idea of the Holy nation favoured by God.³ It was the French version of a national identity, however, that was to ignite an all-consuming wave of national soul-searching in the German lands. In Revolutionary and Bonapartist France, the state was seen as being coterminous with the nation. Here, the state apparatus reflected the cultural priorities of one people, defined primarily by their common language: *La France* was unthinkable without French.⁴

The contrast with the German lands could hardly have been greater. There, political considerations took a back seat to the more urgent question of ethnicity: nation, in other words, took precedence over state. Hobsbawm maintained that the idea of ethnicity is

¹ This expression is taken from a letter written by Jacob to Savigny on 1 June 1809. *Savigny*, p. 72. The brothers were convinced that they could discover the essence of the Germans through their research.

² Colley, L, *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707-1837*.

³ Wright, E, "American Independence in its American Context". In A. Goodwin (ed), *The New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. VIII, pp. 509-536; Obolensky, D, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, pp. 321 and 467-72.

⁴ A useful survey may be found in Forrest, A, *The French Revolution*. See also Minogue, K.R, *Nationalism*, chapter 2.

“fuzzy, shifting and ambiguous”.⁵ In Germany, that was exactly the point. The whole thrust of the German intellectual effort concentrated on defining this “fuzzy” and “ambiguous” figment of the imagination: the German *Volk*. It is this search, which is central to much of this essay. The centrality of the *Volk* in the Germans’ quest for a national identity had long antecedents. Herder, in his *Über den Ursprung der Sprache* of 1772, defined it most succinctly.⁶ There, he proposed the idea of a ‘cultural community’ or *Volk*, a cultural community, moreover, which did not need to be coterminous with one state.⁷ Herder drew from a deep well; central Europe was a patchwork of cultures, peoples and ethnicities, long accustomed to living together in a single country. Multi-cultural empires and kingdoms were its norm rather than exception.⁸ All too soon, this long-standing ethno-cultural mixture was overrun by the French idea of the nation-state, travelling on the coat-tails of the armies of the Revolution and Napoleon. As French aggression begot assertiveness, the Herderian notion of the *Volk* proved an irresistible tool of resistance. Mixed into Central Europe’s ethnic cocktail, it proved to be a lethal combination. Very soon, German thinking on cultural and national identity was caught in a dilemma: how could they combine their fragmented ethnic group into one nation-state? The answer was, of course, that they could not. It was not until their defeat in 1945, however, that this became clear to all.

In the meantime, the idea of ethnic unity allowed Germans to think of themselves as being one people, even if divided by a myriad of frontiers. This much was accepted *a priori*. What exactly delineated this ethnicity, what, in other words, constituted the

⁵ Hobsbawm, E.J., *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, p. 6. For the equation between ‘ethnic’ and ‘culture’, see Smith, A.D., *Theories of Nationalism*, p. 180. The centrality of ethnicity to a people’s national identity has been given a variety of names. *Volksnation* and *Kulturnation* are amongst the most appropriate. Nipperdey, Th., *Deutsche Geschichte 1800-1866*, pp. 302-3. The *Kulturnation* is frequently contrasted with the *Staatsnation*, which had its origins in seventeenth-century France. The terms were coined by Meinecke. Lemberg, E., *Nationalismus*, vol. 1, pp. 16-17.

⁶ Herder, J.G., “Über den Ursprung der Sprache”. In W. Dobbek (ed), *Herders Werke*, vol. 2, especially pp. 171 and forward. Goethe acknowledged Herder to be the man who ‘made current’ the notion of the German *Volk*. McEachran, F., *The Life and Philosophy of Johann Gottfried Herder*, p. 86.

⁷ Fulbrook, M., *A Concise History of Germany*, p. 94. That Herder was not political in his outlook may be illustrated by Gellner’s summary of nationalism: “In brief, nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones”. This is diagonally opposed to the writings of Herder. Gellner, E., *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 1.

⁸ For an excellent introduction to the ethnic complexities in Central Europe, see Th. DaCosta Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister and City*, chapter one.

'national', was a different matter. This question caused a great scholarly crusade to define what Jacob Grimm called *Das Wesen der Deutschen*, a crusade in which the brothers Grimm were to play a leading role. The political constellation of the period in which these ideas materialised facilitated their development and acceptance. Prior to the French Revolution, most – but not all – Germans found themselves living in the Holy Roman Empire, a loose confederacy of principalities, cities, knights' fees, Church lands, and kingdoms.⁹ As a political unit, it was unique in Europe, a state that was not a state. Ramshackle though it was, it had survived for centuries, and what finally did for the Empire was not German dissatisfaction, but French intervention. Even then, it was not a speedy demise, rather a slow crumbling. In 1798, with the Empire severely pressured by the French republican troops, the legal structure of the Empire was abolished at the same time as the German princes accepted the loss of the west bank of the Rhine to their old enemy.¹⁰ In the lives of many, Revolutionary France became a reality rather than a vague threat. The Empire was further weakened by the territorial hunger of the larger princes, when, between 1801 and 1803, they finally moved against their smaller neighbours. The integrity of these had rested upon the legal protection they enjoyed under the Empire; this now disappeared. The end came in 1806, a full eight years after the first threat to the Empire's existence had first emerged. The Empire was no longer, with the non-Habsburg and Prussian lands gradually incorporated into a French-controlled confederation.

The whole French reorganisation of the political constellation in the German lands paradoxically reinforced the notion that intrinsic German unity lay in its people and their culture. French reforms of the law, their abolition of local systems of measurement, feudal privileges, and internal toll barriers all enhanced this German sense of unity.¹¹ As the Empire collapsed, as Prussia was reduced to a second-rate power, and as the Habsburgs were marginalised, political life in the German lands suffered terrible blows to its prestige. The same was true for German arms. Prussia had had a reputation as a

⁹ Heer, F, *Das Heilige Römische Reich*. See also Blackbourn, D, *The Fontana History of Germany, 1780-1918*, pp. 1-44.

¹⁰ Ramm, A, *Germany 1789-1919*, p. 44 and passim.

¹¹ Rudé, G, *Revolutionary Europe 1783-1815*, pp. 257-8.

military power second to none; French victories destroyed that reputation. As princes and generals took a tumble, artists, philosophers and professors, already highly respected, rose in estimation. It was to them that Germans looked for leadership, to them that they turned for new paradigms of identity. According to the nineteenth-century historian, Treitschke,

“Die Dichter und Gelehrten waren gewohnt, vor einem idealen Deutschland zu reden, über die Grenzen der Länder und Ländchen hinweg”.¹²

Unsurprisingly, in the nation of Kant, the mantle of leadership of German resistance to France fell onto the shoulders of a philosopher. In 1807, Fichte delivered a series of lectures entitled *Reden an die deutsche Nation* at the university in Berlin.¹³ Steeped in Herderian thoughts, these became the first iconic statements of the German *Volk*'s right to self-determination.¹⁴ Three years later, urged on by his minister of culture, Wilhelm von Humboldt, brother of the famous naturalist and explorer, the Prussian king established the University of Berlin. Fichte became its first chancellor, and Hegel, another iconic philosopher, was amongst its foremost teachers. This move institutionalised cultural resistance to France. Humboldt was a great believer in the cultural unity of Germans, and saw culture as an important cement of the German *Volk*, itself an interesting signal that culture and identity were not yet seen to be the same thing.¹⁵

Cultural resistance was not restricted to Prussia alone. All over the German lands, intellectuals and artists struggled to cope with recent events. The great writer, Schiller, a good friend of Wilhelm von Humboldt, wrote an unpublished poem on what should really matter to Germans: it was not the endangered Empire or political freedom, but their culture.¹⁶ Why Schiller decided against publication is not clear; perhaps he shared his friend Goethe's dislike of political nationalism. Like Goethe, though, Schiller was

¹² Treitschke, H. von, *Deutsche Geschichte im 19. Jahrhundert*, p. 81.

¹³ Fichte, J.G., *Reden an die deutsche Nation*.

¹⁴ The lectures have been referred to as “an essay in identity”. Kelly, G. A. (ed), *Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Addresses to the German Nation*, p. xxvii.

¹⁵ Koch, H.W., *A History of Prussia*, pp. 172 and 177.

¹⁶ Hertz, F., *Nationality in History and Politics*, p. 332.

concerned about the well-being of German culture, and this, to many, was enough to make the pair leaders in the search for an identity. Goethe was to survive Schiller by several decades, long enough for Wilhelm Grimm to have an audience with the great man.¹⁷ The two met in Weimar in 1809, where they discussed the *Nibelungenlied* and Nordic poetry. Goethe was famously a man of European culture, unrestricted by German national sentiment. In many ways, the brothers Grimm echoed this, working on Serbian and Russian folklore, Spanish romances, Scottish ballads and Nordic material; they, too, were imbued with a regard for European culture as a whole.¹⁸ It would, nevertheless, be a grave mistake to suggest that the one excluded the other, at least in this period. Just as the Grimms were deeply intrigued by the antiquity of their own culture, so Goethe, on several occasions, expressed his love for the culture in whose language he wrote.¹⁹ Jacob and Wilhelm grew up, then, in a heady cocktail of cultural activism and resistance to French political and cultural dominance, and all this against a background of German political and military collapse. It was a world that was both unstable and daunting, but at the same time full of new opportunities for those with an interest in their own culture. As culture and politics grew closer in the French-occupied German lands, those involved in shaping culture came to the political forefront, in spite of Goethe's misgivings.

The brothers Grimm were born towards the end of the eighteenth century in Hanau, the agrarian centre of the *Landgrafschaft* Hessen-Kassel. Hanau, but more particularly Hessen-Kassel, was more than just a place of birth to the Grimms: all of their lives they remained deeply attached to their native land. Originally, Hessen-Kassel was both their *Heimat* and their country. As their careers took them to Hannover, and subsequently to Prussia, Hessen would undergo a metamorphosis into a more mystical place, the benchmark for all they encountered throughout the German lands. What, then, was the

¹⁷ *Jugendzeit*, p. 203.

¹⁸ For the 'international' side of their work, see for example Grimm, J, "Volksmärchen der Serben". In *JGKS*, vol. 8.1, pp. 386 and forward; Grimm, J, "Russische Volksmärchen". In *JGKS*, vol. 8.1, pp. 145-147; and Grimm, W, *Drei altschottische Lieder*. Heidelberg, 1813.

¹⁹ Goethe, J.W. von, "Von Deutscher Baukunst". In *Von Deutscher Art und Kunst*, p. 89, where he claimed – incorrectly! – that Gothic architecture was German in origin, "das ist deutsche Baukunst, *unsre* Baukunst". The italics are mine.

environment that shaped much of Jacob and Wilhelm's subsequent ideas? Neither their family nor their 'country' was either spectacularly important or desperately insignificant. Hessen-Kassel stretched to just 10,000 square kilometres with the *Landgraf* ruling over about half-a-million subjects.²⁰ Economically it was amongst the least developed of the German lands. Forestry played a role of some importance, but most of its people were engaged in the "most backward agriculture in all Germany".²¹ What it lacked in prosperity it made up for in scenery, important with respect to the outlook of the young Grimms. Travellers delighted in Hessen-Kassel's extensive woodlands and hills, a landscape that would feature prominently in the stories collected by the Grimms for their fairytales.²² There can be little doubt that the brothers shared the travellers' delight in the beauty of their native land. Reporting to Wilhelm about his journey to Paris in 1805, Jacob wrote that,

"im Ganzen habe ich nie eine Gegend gefunden, die der Marburger gleich käme".²³

The agrarian nature of Hessen-Kassel was emphasised by the insignificance of its towns, of which only Hanau and Kassel were of any importance. Both town and country were relatively isolated from the rest of the world, enveloped in a rigid social structure with the absolutist ruler at its pinnacle. Even if Hessians had some notion about the wider German-speaking world, their attachment to their *Heimat* was almost invariably the stronger.²⁴ This, in turn, reinforced the authority of the *Landgraf*, who came to personify this small land.²⁵ A strong devotion to ruling monarchs, imbued in this enclosed world, as well as a fierce love for their *Heimat*, was to colour the life of the brothers Grimm. In his *Selbstbiographie* Jacob wrote,

²⁰ Losch, Ph, *Geschichte des Kurfürstentums Hessen 1803 bis 1866*, p. 8.

²¹ Ohles, F, *Germany's Rude Awakening*, pp. 13-14.

²² William Jacob, travelling from England in 1819, marvelled that the "whole country is romantic beyond description". Quoted in *Ibid*, p. 13.

²³ *Jugendzeit*, p. 11.

²⁴ This sentiment is often referred to as particularism, but it was only after 1848 - and more specifically 1859 - that particularism came into use as a political 'Schlagwort'. Schieder, Th, "Partikularismus und Nationalbewußtsein im Denken des deutschen Vormärz". In W. Conze (ed), *Staat und Gesellschaft im deutschen Vormärz 1815-1848*, pp. 9-38.

²⁵ Mann, G, *Deutsche Geschichte des neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, pp. 22 and forward.

“wir hielten unsern Fürsten für den besten, den es geben könnte, unser Land für das gesegnetste unter allen”.²⁶

Into this world of peasants and small towns, the main external influence came from France, an influence that had commenced well before the Revolution. *Landgraf* Friedrich II (1760-1785) was an ardent Francophile, and this was mirrored by his architectural taste: he gave Kassel a distinctly French flavour. The outbreak of the Revolution in France was to change all this radically. As the French threat increased, both rulers and ruled gradually turned their faces away from French politics and culture. In 1790, *Landgraf* Wilhelm IX (1785-1821) chose the election of the emperor Leopold II to proclaim his allegiance to the *Reich* by raising an army to protect the coronation near Frankfurt-am-Main. Wilhelm Grimm was much impressed with what he saw: the parade from the barracks and the artillery salutes were amongst his earliest memories.²⁷ The French Revolutionary army invaded the Empire two years later, but was resoundingly defeated by the *Landgraf's* army, which bundled the French back across the Rhine. They soon returned. The victory at Fleurus of June 1793 resulted in their occupation of the west bank of the Rhine. As one would expect from a seven-year-old child, Wilhelm's memories were of a particular kind; he recalled that he saw “vil Franzosen ... die hölsem bein haben”, part of a stream of refugees fleeing the conflict.²⁸ Implied Prussian support, and a peace treaty with France in 1795, deferred a French penetration across the Rhine for several years, but the threat of a renewed French invasion remained.

The events of the last years of the eighteenth century destroyed much of what their family believed in. For as far back as there are written records, the Grimm family had lived in and around Hanau, where Jacob and Wilhelm were born.²⁹ On their mother's side, the Zimmer family hailed from Kassel itself. The longevity of their ancestors'

²⁶ *JGS*, p. 6.

²⁷ Wilhelm remembers how “ich, zum Kutschenfenster herausschauend, die Regimenter mit den im Sonnenscheine blitzenden Gewehren vorübermarschieren sah”. *WGS*, p. 3.

²⁸ Six days later he saw the *Landgraf* and also some “Türken”!! *Briefwechsel*, pp. 27 and 28.

²⁹ Seitz, G, *Die Brüder Grimm*, p. 9; and Bott, H, “Die Vorfahren die Brüder Grimm im Hanauer Land”. In *BGG*, vol. 1, pp. 23-47.

connection with Hessen-Kassel was deeply felt by both brothers, and was poignantly expressed much later on by their return to the graveyard where their father was buried.³⁰ As noted, a love of *Heimat* coincided with a reverence for the ruling dynasty. Once more, family tradition served to enhance this facet in the brothers Grimm: both Grimm and Zimmer families had long served the Hessian ruling house. A later letter from Ludwig Grimm – Jacob and Wilhelm’s brother – to the monarch, emphasises this association. Ludwig states that he was from,

“einer Familie, welche schon sehr lang und in vielen Gliedern dem allerhöchsten Hause und dem Vaterland treu und eifrig gedient hat”.³¹

He was not exaggerating. Their grandfather, Johann Hermann Zimmer, had been *Kanzleirath* to Wilhelm VIII. His loyalty endured in defeat, for he accompanied the *Landgraf* into exile during the Seven Years’ War. His daughter, Henriette, was *erste Kammerfrau* to princess Wilhelmine-Karoline, and would also share the exile of the ruling house, this time during the Napoleonic occupation. On their father’s side, the family’s status was less elevated, but still well above the Hessian average, and they, too, served the ruling house. Philipp Wilhelm Grimm was *Amtmann* in Steinau, to where the family moved in 1791. To complement this picture of an establishment family, the brothers’ father and grandfather had both been ministers in the Reformed Church, a fact that was to influence Jacob in particular.³²

Their ancestry had not only ensured their undying love for Hessen-Kassel and Jacob’s religiosity, it also gave them a firm social foundation from which to launch their subsequent careers. Their family was not noble, but did belong to that group which was to dominate much of German history in the first half of the nineteenth century: the *Bürgertum*. The rise of this class had been a feature of the German lands in the period between the end of the Thirty Years’ War and the outbreak of the French Revolutionary

³⁰ The visit upset Jacob, for his father’s gravestone had “bei dem französischen rückzuge 1813 ... gestört worden”. Wilhelm’s was more serene, a romantic solitary wander around a sunlit church and graveyard. *Lachmann*, vol. 1, p. 400; *WGS*, pp. 7-8.

³¹ Koolman, E. (ed), *Ludwig Emil Grimm. Briefe*, vol. 1, pp. 23-4.

³² Denecke, L., *Jacob Grimm und sein Bruder Wilhelm*, p. 40.

Wars, and both the Grimm and Zimmer families were part of this phenomenon.³³ The German bourgeoisie had proven to be remarkably resilient, in part through their strong sense of family. The Grimms' story personifies this resilience. When Jacob and Wilhelm's father died on 10 January 1796, leaving behind a widow and six children, there was a ready-made support structure.

At home in Hanau, their father's sister, aunt Schlemmer, taught them to read and write. Two years after their father's death yet another aunt, this time from the Zimmer side of the family, volunteered her help. The aforementioned Henriette Zimmer, the *erste Kammerfrau*, paid their bills when they attended the Lyceum at Kassel.³⁴ It was within this strong *bürgerlich* background that the brothers began their climb on the academic ladder. At the same time, the political world in which this climb commenced was poised to descend into turmoil. As they began their university education, Napoleon's successful coup d'état took place in Paris.

In spite of the revolutionary upheavals of the last thirteen years, and the very real threat to the regime posed by neighbouring Napoleonic France, Hessen-Kassel retained its intricate social structures until the very end. This meant that the brothers were not automatically entitled to attend university at Marburg, as within Hessen-Kassel's absolutist structure, only the *Kurfürst* had the power to grant them dispensation.³⁵ In 1802, their mother, Dorothea, applied for a permit to enrol Jacob, which she received. Wilhelm followed him the next year, although the latter's entry into university was delayed by the onset of an illness that was to trouble him for the rest of his life.³⁶ Henriette Zimmer's close connections to the dynasty must have eased the process considerably. At the same time, French pressure on Hessen-Kassel mounted. In October 1803, a few months after Wilhelm started university, the French demanded large sums of money from the *Kurfürst*, who refused, and then added insult to injury by declining to

³³ Fulbrook, M, *A Concise History*, p. 85.

³⁴ Seitz, G, *op.cit.* p. 15. Wilhelm IX had received the title of *Kurfürst* upon the dissolution of the old Reich.

³⁵ Michaelis-Jena, R, *The Brothers Grimm*, p. 26.

³⁶ Stockmann, H, "Wilhelm Grimm und sein Herzleiden". In *BGG*, vol. 2, pp. 246-262.

attend Napoleon's *Triumphzug* in Mainz, where he celebrated his proclamation as emperor.³⁷

The slow demise of the world in which the Grimms grew up contrasted radically with the new opportunities provided by attending university. Marburg was the place where they made connections that were to last a lifetime, and introduced the brothers to the subjects they were to study until their death; subjects that would help them define a German identity. The single most important event in their university careers was their meeting with Friedrich Karl, Freiherr von Savigny. Savigny was to become their mentor in every aspect of their personal and university lives.³⁸ Just how much of an impact he made can be gleaned from Jacob's *Selbstbiographie*,

“Was kann ich aber von Savignys Vorlesungen anders sagen, als daß sie mich aufs gewaltigste ergriffen ...”.³⁹

His gift to the Grimms was twofold. Through him, they met crucial friends, and at his home, in his private library, they discovered the books that sparked their passion for German language and literature. The latter event is one of those amusingly ironic twists in the academic development of the Grimms at the time. Before attending university, Jacob in particular had developed a passion for the natural world.⁴⁰ A child of his time, he managed to marry a romantic vision with the cool, scientific analysis of nature, as espoused by Enlightenment figures like Linnaeus.⁴¹ However, to please his mother and honour his father's memory, he, like Wilhelm, opted to study law at Marburg.⁴² There, whilst being taught by one of the greatest juridical minds of the age, and in his library, they both conceived an enduring passion for German literature.

³⁷ Losch, Ph, *op.cit.* p. 22.

³⁸ For Savigny see Stoll, A, *Friedrich Karl von Savigny*, 3 vols.

³⁹ *JGS*, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Jacob would later refer to the influence of botany on his work, describing how “Man hat das sprachstudium vielfach und auch nicht ohne grund dem der naturgeschichte an die seite gestellt”. Grimm, J, *Über den Ursprung der Sprache*, pp. 7-8.

⁴¹ For their childhood interests see, Michaelis-Jena, R, *op.cit.* pp. 15 and 23.

⁴² Höck, A, “Die Brüder Grimm als Studenten in Marburg”. In *BGG*, vol. 1, p. 69. See also Jacob's own testimony in *JGS*, p. 9.

Savigny's home was also the location where the most important of their early friendships began, that with the Brentano family. The Brentanos were descended from a wealthy merchant family of Italian stock, but, more important to the brothers Grimm, they also belonged to the German cultural elite. One of the Brentano sisters, Gunda, married Savigny in 1803.⁴³ Her brother, Clemens, was married to Sophie Mereau, who enjoyed a considerable reputation as a poetess, a reputation nurtured under Schiller's wings. Their mother had been Goethe's childhood friend, and a third sister, Bettine, was to become the Grimms' most ardent and loyal friend. Clemens ignited Jacob and Wilhelm's interest in the collection of folklore, an academic pursuit that furthered the definition of a German national identity like few others.⁴⁴ The Brentanos brought into their lives a window onto the wider German culture of the day. This new vista was enhanced after they left university. In 1807, they co-operated with Clemens on a collection of folklore, which was published under the title *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*.⁴⁵ In the process, they met Achim von Arnim, yet another influential friend. In Marburg, Savigny also introduced the Grimms to Georg Friedrich Benecke, librarian, and subsequently professor at the University of Göttingen.⁴⁶ Benecke's interest in historical grammar would come to be shared by Jacob and Wilhelm. He sent them books and manuscripts on old German literature, and they started a correspondence on methodology and literature. The friendships established at university in Marburg would later be of vital importance to the Grimms.

Underpinning the teaching the Grimms received at Marburg University was the solid foundation of the methodology of the German Historical School, of which Savigny and

⁴³ For this and what follows see, Feilchenfeldt, K. (ed), *Brentano Chronik*, pp. 41 and following.

⁴⁴ In a letter to Arnim, Clemens claimed that it was he who stimulated the Grimms' interest in "die alte Poesie". Steig, R, *Achim von Arnim und Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, p. 3. Jacob, however, in his *Selbstbiographie*, claimed it was Bodmer's *Sammlung von Minnesingern aus dem schwäebischen Zeitpuncte* and Tieck's *Minnelieder aus dem schwäbischen Zeitalter*, which they found in Savigny's library that first aroused his interest. *JGS*, p. 10. See further Benz, R, *Die deutsche Romantik*, p. 282.

⁴⁵ Steig, R, *Achim von Arnim*, pp. 3-4. Also Kinskofer, L. (ed), *Clemens Brentano. Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 31, Briefe III, pp. 568 and 621.

⁴⁶ Lutz-Hensel, M, *Prinzipien der ersten textkritischen Editionen mittelhochdeutscher Dichtung. Brüder Grimm – Benecke – Lachmann*, pp. 11-12. Benecke was to become the first to teach historical grammar at the university.

Leopold von Ranke were the major exponents.⁴⁷ Through it, Savigny provided the Grimms with a set of principles upon which all their subsequent research was based. It is here that one should look for their faith in the sanctity of ancient texts. Nothing, or so the School's pupils argued, could be claimed without recourse to a written testimony. The School's disciples had an implicit trust in the *Urquell*, in the oldest written document, a trust based upon the notion that the older the text, the more accurate its information.⁴⁸ Such an *Urquell* alone could reflect the *true* character of a culture.⁴⁹ The real treasures found amongst the literature of the past lay not so much in its inherent beauty, or even in its artistic accomplishment, but in the truth it contained. It was here that the essence of culture, and therefore of ethnicity, could be discovered. From what they found there, the brothers Grimm, and others like them, would be able to reconstruct just what made Germans German, or Flemings Flemish. Transmitted to their readership, this would contribute to the creation of a communally-acknowledged package of identity for the present; create, in other words, a national identity.

The whole ethos of the quest for the original was motivated by a perceived need to restore that which had been, or was being, lost. In this perception, Ranke and Savigny's principles fused with the writings of Chateaubriand, with their almost wistful longing for a pre-Revolutionary culture.⁵⁰ Once wedded, these two intellectual ideas combined to fertilise the search for national identities all over Europe. It taught that through the past a relevant present may be constructed, free from all pollution from the intervening years. In Willems' case, we witnessed this through his work on the *Reinaert*.⁵¹ In Sir Walter Scott's oeuvre it may be found in his idealistic notion of honour, for example in *Ivanhoe*,

⁴⁷ Rothacker, E, "Savigny, Grimm, Ranke", *Historische Zeitschrift*, 128, vol. 3, 1923, pp. 415-445. The concept of a 'Historical School' is used here to denote the development of what in German is referred to as *Historismus*, the growth of a distinct understanding of past and present during the early nineteenth century. Its centrality to German thought has been explored by Nipperdey, Th, *op.cit.* pp. 498-504. See also Meinecke, F, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, p. 307 and *passim*.

⁴⁸ See amongst others letters to the Grimms by Benecke and by Wilhelm to Hammerstein. *H-E*, p. 41; for more details, Lutz-Hensel, M, *op.cit.* p. 216.

⁴⁹ Lutz-Hensel, M, *op.cit.* p. 130. See also Ehrismann, O, "Die alten Menschen sind größer, reiner und heiliger gewesen als wir". Die Grimms, Schelling; vom Ursprung der Sprache und ihrem Verfall", *ZLL*, vol. 16, no. 62, (1986), pp. 29-57.

⁵⁰ Chateaubriand, F.R, *Génie du christianisme*.

⁵¹ See chapter one, pp. 59-63.

or *Waverley*.⁵² It can equally be seen in the neo-gothic fantasy that is the Houses of Parliament in London, or in the Gregorian chant from the abbey of Solesmes.⁵³

With the Grimms, a romantic longing to discover the essence of the past, a “utopian nostalgia”, gave birth to something more fundamental: the search for the immutables of history.⁵⁴ They believed that by collecting enough *Urquellen* they could actually find these immutables. Soon, this caused them to conclude that the essential German immutable was its ethnicity, that it could be based only in the *Volk*. Drawing on their training in the German Historical School, Jacob and Wilhelm began to search for the *Urquell* of every single aspect of German culture. These they wished to present to a wider audience as signposts on the road to a deeper comprehension of the identity of the German people. From 1809, the brothers made it their life’s task to educate a wider audience in this love for Germany, to give them an understanding of a German identity: it is no exaggeration to call this their cultural-political manifesto. This manifesto was to be written over the next decades; indeed, their whole oeuvre may be regarded as forming part thereof.⁵⁵

This need to educate echoes Fichte’s *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, where he had argued that through education the Germans could be brought to a sense of “Gesamtheit”.⁵⁶ Moreover, they never doubted the power of the pen to influence public opinion, at least the opinion of the public they believed counted, the *Bürgertum*. In 1820, Jacob was to write to Lachmann that if they both continued on this path, there would soon be,

“ein philologisches Fundament ... welches dem Publicum mehr Zutrauen einflößen soll”.⁵⁷

⁵² Scott, W, *Ivanhoe*; Scott, W, *Waverley*.

⁵³ See Bergeron, K, *Decadent Enchantments*, p. 94.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 131.

⁵⁵ A letter to Savigny reveals that it was indeed a deliberate attempt. *Savigny*, p. 72.

⁵⁶ Fichte, J.G, “Reden an die deutsche Nation”. In J.H. Fichte (ed), *Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s sämtliche Werke*, vol. 7, p. 276.

⁵⁷ *Lachmann*, vol. 1, p. 80.

This is a revealing sentence. Through philology, or folklore, or mythological research, a “Fundament” was to be created, more solid than the usual vague acceptance of the existence of a German identity. This would be *proven* by the excavation of its *Urquellen*, which, taken together, would provide the public with sources which they could trust. Research would help spread the ‘truth’ of a German identity to those who had not yet heard of *Deutschland*.

It was in France that Jacob had his first taste of what was to come. He travelled to Paris in 1805, where he joined Savigny to research medieval Roman law in the *Bibliothèque Impériale*.⁵⁸ There he was inducted into the sometimes-esoteric crafts his mission required, such as palaeography. He even had time to indulge in some research of his own. In a letter, Wilhelm encouraged him to look for “alten deutschen Gedichten und Poesieen”, a letter which heralds the beginnings of the fraternal partnership.⁵⁹ In 1810, Jacob would write that,

“Damals schon hatte ich das Vorhaben gefaßt, unsere herrliche altdeutsche Literatur ... gründlich zu studieren”.⁶⁰

In these heady months in Paris, it must have appeared to Jacob that he was well on his way to making a career as a researcher.⁶¹ The idyll of this first taste of research was to be short-lived, however. When, in September 1805, Savigny and Jacob wanted to return to Hessen-Kassel, war had broken out. Just as Jacob had embarked upon the conquest of old German literature, Napoleon had embarked upon the conquest of the Germans. Although the French army marched through Hessen-Kassel, the *Kurfürstentum* evaded direct involvement in the conflict. Savigny and Grimm managed to reach home on 16 October, a month and a half before the cataclysmic Battle at Austerlitz, where the power of the Habsburg emperor was destroyed. French success blighted the green shoots of

⁵⁸ Savigny’s foreword would recognise Jacob’s contribution. Savigny, K.F. von, *Geschichte des Römischen Rechts im Mittelalter*, p. 6.

⁵⁹ *Jugendzeit*, p. 30. Wilhelm asks Jacob if he could perhaps send him “etwas ... merkwürdig und unbekannt”

⁶⁰ Quoted in Gerstner, H, *Die Brüder Grimm*, pp. 50-1.

⁶¹ To aunt Zimmer he wrote that “Vielleicht ist dies einer der wichtigsten Augenblicke meines Lebens”. Moritz, W, “Jacob Grimm in Paris”. In Stadt Hanau, *Hanau 1985-1986*, p. 122.

Jacob's academic career. In its wake came the *Code Napoleon* and the abolition of the legal system studied by the Grimms under Savigny. The law no longer offered career prospects. Jacob's new passion for philology held few job prospects either; it was taught only at Göttingen where a post had just been created especially for Benecke.⁶² The Grimm family's situation was by now such that Jacob *had* to find employment.⁶³ Relief came in the form of a job as *sekretär* in the *Kriegskollegium*, the Hessen-Kassel War Office. For the moment, though, it must have seemed to Jacob that the grand scheme of defining what it meant to be German had shuddered to a halt.

Jerome Bonaparte and the French Years.

The blow caused by the Habsburg defeat at Austerlitz on 3 December 1805 fatally undermined both the *Reich* and Hessen-Kassel's future.⁶⁴ Things were about to get even worse. In a secret communiqué to Napoleon in May 1806, Talleyrand proposed to create a new client kingdom out of some of the central German principalities, including Hessen-Kassel.⁶⁵ All that prevented the implementation of this draft was Prussia. Bonaparte's first step was the initiation of the *Rheinbund*, a new confederation of German states intended to replace the old *Reich*. The Battle of Austerlitz had ensured that the Habsburg emperor Franz II was in no position to resist, and, on 6 August 1806, he resigned the imperial crown: the Holy Roman Empire had ceased to exist. The severely-alarmed Prussians mobilised their troops and entered Hessen-Kassel late in September.

It was now just a question of time before Hessen-Kassel became embroiled in the conflict. To cap his victory at Austerlitz, the emperor destroyed the Prussians at the

⁶² Müller, J.J., "Germanistik – eine Form bürgerlicher Opposition". In J.J. Müller (ed), *Literaturwissenschaft und Sozialwissenschaften*, vol. 2, p. 96. The law was no longer an option anyhow, and Jacob would write to Savigny in March 1807 that other, more interesting subjects such as the history of poetry and literature had utterly removed any notion of practising law. *Savigny*, pp. 28-30.

⁶³ Wilhelm was too ill to work.

⁶⁴ See further Dwyer, P.G., *Napoleon and Europe*, pp. 204-8.

⁶⁵ Wierichs, M., *Napoleon und das "Dritte Deutschland" 1805/1806*, p. 92.

Battle of Jena on 14 October. Two weeks later, on the last day of the month, the French army encamped outside the Hessian capital. Wilhelm would remember the night vividly,

“Ich hatte ... die französischen Wachfeuer in der Ferne mit einiger Bangigkeit gesehen”.⁶⁶

The next day the French army rode into Kassel unopposed, extinguishing its independence for the next seven years. Initially, little seems to have changed for the brothers Grimm in the aftermath of occupation: even Jacob's job at the *Kriegskollegium* continued. Very soon, however, the French started to implement their long-term plans for the region. Within the Talleyrand plan, Hessen-Kassel played a pivotal role. It was to form the centre of a new kingdom, with Napoleon's brother, Jerome, as king. Kassel became the capital of the Westphalian kingdom and, ostensibly, the old order was swept away. The new Bonapartist kingdom differed considerably from its predecessor, with Jerome favouring a more democratic form of government.

For the Grimms the first major change came when Jacob decided to leave his job. In addition to holding the almost defunct position at the *Kriegskollegium*, he also worked as a member of the *Verpflegungs-Kommission*, which took up much of his time. He found the tedium more than he could take, and tried, unsuccessfully, for a job as *Oberbibliothekar* of the Kassel public library.⁶⁷ Eventually, in July 1808, Jacob, aided by Johannes Müller, Jerome's new minister of education, succeeded in attaining a post as librarian to the new king.⁶⁸ Jacob's appointment raises the difficult question of collaboration, fundamental to any study of a nationalist scholar in this era: he had entered Jerome Bonaparte's service with alacrity. Moritz remarked that he made, “im französischen Königreich sogar noch Karriere”, serving the French king as *Staatsratsauditor*, which job he started in 1809.⁶⁹ It may be clear that Jacob Grimm was deeply involved with the occupying administration. His acceptance of a job under

⁶⁶ WGS, p. 11.

⁶⁷ Schoof, W, *Die Brüder als Bibliothekare*, p. 199.

⁶⁸ Zoepf, L, “Die Brüder Grimm als Bibliothekare”, *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen*, vol. 45, (1928), p. 125. Jacob had been introduced to Müller by Arnim.

⁶⁹ Moritz, W, *op.cit.* pp. 129.

French auspices becomes even more noticeable when one considers the fact that he turned down a chance to work in Bavaria, where Savigny offered to procure a job for him.⁷⁰ What is more, he had made the offer *before* Jacob was even introduced to Müller. Unlike Jacob, his mentor wanted no contact with the Bonapartist regime, and refused to take the oath of allegiance to Jerome. Savigny's stance caused Jacob the necessary headaches: frequently his letters to him have the character of apologies.⁷¹ In the autumn of 1812, Savigny, by now Fichte's successor as Rector at the University of Berlin, offered both his old protégés jobs in the library there. Once more Jacob refused.

In spite of his unwillingness to leave Hessen-Kassel, and notwithstanding Jacob's services to Jerome, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that neither brother was particularly happy with the occupation of their *Heimat*. Wilhelm's dislike of the French was, perhaps, the more genuine. In his *Selbstbiographie*, he expressed it in strong terms,

“Ich habe stets die Schmach gefühlt, welche in der fremden Herrschaft lag; an harten, unerträglichen Einrichtungen, an Ungerechtigkeiten aller Art fehlte es nicht”.⁷²

Jacob was also to claim that he felt saddened by the French occupation.⁷³ Two elements must have influenced the Grimms' decision to stay in Kassel. Clemens Brentano had moved there in 1807, and his brother-in-law, Jordis, was *Hofbankier* to Jerome.⁷⁴ It was a move that brought the centre of the German *Romantik* from Heidelberg right into the heart of the Grimms' world. This sense of being part of the German cultural heartland must have weighed heavily with Jacob and Wilhelm.

In addition, Jacob's job also had its advantages, including plenty of freedom to indulge his passion for research. Jacob recalled in his *Selbstbiographie*,

⁷⁰ Savigny, p. 32.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 55.

⁷² WGS, p. 12.

⁷³ Grimm, J, “Über meine Entlassung”, p. 38.

⁷⁴ The move delighted Jacob, who wrote to Wilhelm that not only was Clemens settling in Kassel, but his extensive library too. The latter excited Jacob more than the former: “Da werden wir unzähligen Stoff zu allen Arbeiten finden, zu meiner großen Freude”. *Unbekannte*, pp. 31-2.

“Dabei war mein Amt als Bibliothekar keineswegs lästig, ich hatte mich bloß einige Stunden in der Bibliothek oder im Kabinett aufzuhalten ... Die ganze übrige Zeit war mein, ich verwandte sie fast unverkümmert auf das Studium der altdeutschen Poesie und Sprache”.⁷⁵

The “angefangene Arbeiten” which Jacob quoted to Savigny in 1812 as a reason not to come to Berlin was a genuine excuse: the *Arbeiten* were considerable.⁷⁶ Between 1807 and 1813, the brothers published a continuous stream of material, including the first volume of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. This intense burst of scholarly activity also lends weight to the remark that Jacob “bewahrte aber unter dem französischen Rock sein deutsches Herz”.⁷⁷ However, their work was certainly not some *overt* anti-Bonapartist statement. Rather, it was a covert “Gegenreaktion zu den Ereignissen und Folgen der Französischen Revolution”.⁷⁸ Like Jan Frans Willems, Jacob and Wilhelm appear to have been able to accept French political, but not French cultural domination.⁷⁹ As for Willems, the bottom line for the Grimms was not who governed, but the defence of the sanctity of their language and culture. In addition, the past provided some comfort against the distress of the present. As Jacob wrote to Sir Walter Scott, his work provided him with “schmerzlicher Trost aus der Vergangenheit über die Gegenwart”.⁸⁰

Clearly, the brothers Grimm do not fit into theoretical systems of the growth of nationalism.⁸¹ They most certainly did not regard their research as part of an all-encompassing resistance to French rule. In addition, they had started their work prior to any occupation: it was not sparked off by foreign oppression. It can even be argued that

⁷⁵ *JGS*, p. 15.

⁷⁶ *Savigny*, p. 138.

⁷⁷ Hirzel, S, “Ein Lebensabriss Jacob Grimms”, *ZfDP*, vol. 1, 1869, p. 489.

⁷⁸ Lauer, B, “Die Brüder Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm im europäischen Kontext”. In *GW*, p. 146. Denecke and Oberfeld, who called the notion that Jacob and Wilhelm’s research was somehow an anti-French activity “ein oberflächlicher Topos”, also reached this conclusion. Denecke, L. and Oberfeld, C, “Die Bedeutung der ‘Volks poesie’ bei Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm”. In C. Oberfeld et al, *Brüder Grimm Volkslieder*, vol. 2, p. 7.

⁷⁹ See Willems’ *Geboortezang*, in the previous chapter, pp. 31-2.

⁸⁰ Brill, E.V.K, “The correspondence between Jacob Grimm and Walter Scott”. In *BGG*, vol. 1, p. 492. Scott had several of the Grimms’ works in his library. The Bannatyne Club, *Catalogue of the Library at Abbotsford*, p. 394.

⁸¹ Minogue’s contention that “The work of the brothers Grimm ... illustrates the fact that this is a time [i.e. of foreign oppression] when intellectuals develop the nationalist movement” does not stand up to scrutiny. Minogue, K.R, *op.cit.* pp. 26-7.

French occupation facilitated research. Napoleon's wars had swept away the manifold borders of the *Ancien Regime*, which had led to a more unified Europe. This provided scholars such as the Grimms with enhanced access to sources. At the same time, Jerome did nothing to obstruct Jacob's research, indeed encouraged him whilst employing him as his personal librarian. The brothers not only fail to fit into the traditional account of the development of national identities, they also cause problems for other over-generalisations about the growth of a German national awareness. Culturally their contribution is beyond doubt; politically one can be less certain. One may safely dismiss Wilhelm's assertion that his historical and cultural research had been caused by French occupation as fanciful hindsight.⁸² Of course, the brothers were worried about the French occupation, but it was its cultural implications that caused them the greatest heartaches. The sense that the indigenous culture was under threat proved to be as much of a spur here as in Flanders.

One of Wilhelm's first publications offers the perfect example of the Grimms' cultural fight-back around this time. In 1807, he had set out to defend the German origins of the *Nibelungenlied* against claims for its French roots.⁸³ In 1812, the brothers followed this with "Die beiden ältesten deutschen Gedichte aus dem achten Jahrhundert", the *Lied von Hildebrand und Hadubrand* and the *Weissenbrunner Gebet*.⁸⁴ Like the *Nibelungen*, these were deliberate choices, through which they intended to prove the depth and antiquity of German culture. Jacob was to emphasise this in 1815, when he wrote,

⁸² Grimm, W, "Antrittsrede in der Akademie gehalten am 8. Juli 1841". In *WGKS*, vol. 1, p. 506. The speech feels at times almost like an apology.

⁸³ Grimm, W, "Über die Originalität des Nibelungenlieds und des Heldenbuchs". In *WGKS*, vol. 1, pp. 34-5.

⁸⁴ Grimm, J. and W, *Die beiden ältesten deutschen Gedichte aus dem achten Jahrhundert: Das Lied von Hildebrand und Hadubrand und das Weissenbrunner Gebet zum erstenmal in ihrem Metrum dargestellt und herausgegeben durch die Brüder Grimm*. This was their first co-written work. It was dedicated to Benecke.

“Als historisches Denkmal hat es [the *Lied von Hildebrand und Hadubrand*] für die Geschichte der germanischen Poesie unschätzbaren Werth”.⁸⁵

Antiquity was equated with value, and these texts were as old as one could get. They also furnished evidence for the “intimate relationship [between] history, *Sage*, and myth”.⁸⁶ In addition, it was in this relationship that Jacob and Wilhelm believed they could discover more of the essence of *das Wesen der Deutschen*. All these publications formed part of a wider project, a project with a vast scope. The brothers were determined to delineate the parameters of *das Wesen der Deutschen*, which quest can be traced back to June 1809, when they signalled its start to Savigny.⁸⁷ Throughout their lives, they would dedicate themselves to it. The results may be found in their oeuvre, in which their definition of *das Wesen der Deutschen*, of a German national identity, is to be found.

Jacob and Wilhelm were not the only Germans whose dislike of French cultural dominance expressed itself in research. Freiherr Hans Georg von Hammerstein-Equord, for example, also actively worked for the Westphalian kingdom, and equally displayed “ein außerordentliches Interesse am Mittelalter”.⁸⁸ All three shared a passion for German literature, and they struck up a close friendship. Hammerstein-Equord’s posting to Copenhagen gave him access to the treasures of Scandinavia, and his role as the conduit between the Grimms and the literature of Scandinavia is of particular interest with regard to the brothers’ role in constructing a German identity. A letter written by Wilhelm to Hammerstein in January 1811 shows his awareness of the centrality of the Scandinavian letters to German identity.⁸⁹ He asked the ambassador for a copy of the *Edda*, adding that,

⁸⁵ Quoted in Dick, E.S, “The Grimms’ Hildebrandslied”. In E.H. Antonsen et al, *The Grimm Brothers and the Germanic Past*, p. 75. The *Merseburger Zaubersprüche*, although older, were only discovered in 1841. Jacob would publish these in 1842. Frenzel, H.A. and E, *Daten deutscher Dichtung*, pp. 14-15.

⁸⁶ Dick, E.S, *op.cit.* p. 77.

⁸⁷ Savigny, p. 72.

⁸⁸ H-E, p. 7.

⁸⁹ The literary relationship between the *Edda* and the *Nibelungenlied* was already well known at the time of Hammerstein’s posting in Copenhagen. Vries, J. de, *Edda*, pp. 11-23.

“außerdem aber hat es [the *Aldänische Heldenlieder*] noch das Interesse, daß es unsere altdeutsche Nationalpoesie namentlich das Nibelungen Lied berührt”.⁹⁰

The Germanic past was a German past, as Wilhelm later confided to Rasmus Nyerup, librarian in Copenhagen and literary historian. Hammerstein, he wrote, was interested in,

“unserer Vorzeit, und da er von dem Zusammenhang derselben mit der nordischen überzeugt ist, auch an ihrer alten Literatur”.⁹¹

This train of thought underpins his publication of the *Aldänische Heldenlieder* of 1811.⁹² One finds strong evidence here that the German national identity to which the brothers Grimm were veering was an ethnic one, an inescapable fact for those who looked to the pan-Germanic past for guidance. Of course, this fitted in well with the cultural resistance in which the brothers were involved during this period: a German national identity shorn of political considerations offended none. Cultural resistance took on other forms besides writing and research. An example of this comes from 1813, when Jacob was ordered to value manuscripts in the royal library as part of a drive to gather valuable treasures from across Europe in Paris. To prevent these *German* artefacts from being exiled, Jacob deliberately undervalued many. He even hid those with a particular Hessian interest.⁹³ Political co-operation was one thing, cultural betrayal another.

As seen, the brothers could lean upon a wide circle of friends in Jerome's Kassel centred on Clemens Brentano. In this respect at least, little had changed with the occupation. Like Jacob, many of these failed, or did not wish to see, the dichotomy between political collaboration and cultural patriotism. It should be borne in mind that Bonapartist government would have appeared as a permanent fixture to many contemporaries. As with Willems in Antwerpen, there would have been no reason for Jacob and Wilhelm to think of Jerome's rule as being the temporary intermission that in the end it would prove to be. Safely ensconced in their circle of friends, trusted by the

⁹⁰ *H-E*, p. 30. The *Edda* originated in Iceland, which in the nineteenth century was part of Denmark. As such, it came to represent a common, Scandinavian cultural source.

⁹¹ Schmidt, E. (ed), *Briefwechsel der Brüder Grimm mit nordischen Gelehrten*, p. 32.

⁹² Grimm, W, *Aldänische Heldenlieder, Balladen und Märchen*.

⁹³ Michaelis-Jena, R, *op.cit.* p. 65.

king whose liberalism they approved of, and able to indulge in their passion for German language and literature, this was probably a tolerable arrangement in their eyes.

The Grimms' travels during this period reveal how comparatively lightly the hand of the Bonapartes rested on Germany. Wilhelm, for example, went to Gotha in 1807, where he visited *Kurfürstin* Karoline, who was living in exile at the court of her youngest daughter. Also living in Gotha was that pivotal figure of the Grimms' youth, their aunt, Henriette Zimmer. The Danish-born *Kurfürstin* was flattered by his work on the Nordic influence on German poetry, which would soon be published as *Über die Entstehung der altdeutschen Poesie und ihr Verhältnis zu der Nordischen*.⁹⁴ Two years later, after leaving Berlin, Wilhelm visited his aunt and the *Kurfürstin* again, this time on the advice of Jacob.⁹⁵ It is curious that Jerome either did not know about these visits, or did not care. Underneath ostensibly solid French rule, the old networks were still intact, and this *should* have worried the French. By the end of the decade, these networks allowed the association between cultural research and political resistance to grow stronger. Before his second visit to Gotha, Wilhelm had joined Clemens Brentano and Von Arnim on a trip to Berlin. There they met the eminent *Germanist* Von der Hagen, with whom they discussed the *Nibelungenlied*. In addition to this, Wilhelm also went to pay his respects to the wife of the Hessian heir, Prussian princess Auguste.⁹⁶

In combination with the subsequent visit to Gotha, a pattern emerges that would be difficult to ignore, particularly in the light of the subsequent friendship between the Grimms and *Kurfürstin* Auguste. Whatever their regard for Jerome, and whatever their liberal preferences, the Grimms were born Hessian patriots. On this patriotic fire was poured the oil of their love for German culture. When French rule did collapse, after Napoleon's venture against Russia, these two aspects of their character ensured that Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm welcomed the end of French rule with open arms. Their publications had, in the meantime, ensured their status as German patriots.

⁹⁴ Grimm, W, "Über die Entstehung der altdeutsche Poesie und ihr Verhältnis zu der Nordischen". In *WGKS*, vol. 1, pp. 92-170.

⁹⁵ *Unbekannte*, p. 25.

⁹⁶ Feilchenfeldt, K, *op.cit.* pp. 71-2; Michaelis-Jena, R, *op.cit.* p. 43.

Writing a German Identity.

The *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* are, without doubt, the Grimms' most famous work by some length and, consequently, the one with the largest impact on the national awareness of Germans.⁹⁷ It is also the apogee of their cultural resistance to French occupation, and contains much of their vision of a utopian Germany.⁹⁸ As such, it is of vital importance to this chapter. The book has been the subject of more studies than all other works by the brothers combined, much of it focused on the validity of their approach and the value of its content. This is not the place to enter the debate on whether or not this is a proper work of folklore research. It is sufficient to say that the brothers would not pass the test of the contemporary professional.⁹⁹ To concentrate on this aspect is to miss the work's point entirely.¹⁰⁰ Wilhelm and Jacob set out to discover the traces of popular poetry, a poetry they felt to be under threat. They had no wish to use rigid parameters to accomplish this rescue mission, nor did they feel constricted to refrain from using non-oral sources. Like nineteenth-century architects, theirs was an attempt to 'restore' a tradition, but, like the architects, their ideas of 'restoration' were radically different from those of present-day scholars. The historical 'truth' did not concern the brothers. As Jacob was to write in 1850,

“es liegt nichts daran, dasz Achilles und Siegfried nie gelebt haben, ihre thaten zünden das gemüt an, als ob sie wirklich geschehen wären”.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ This was already the case shortly after Wilhelm's death, when Franz Pfeiffer wrote that “Kein anderes Werk der beiden Brüder hat solche Verbreitung und solchen Einfluß auf das Deutsche Volk gewonnen wie die Märchen”. Pfeiffer, F, “Nachruf auf Wilhelm Grimm”. In G. Breuer et al, *Briefwechsel der Brüder Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm mit Karl Bartsch, Franz Pfeiffer und Gabriel Riedel*, p. 220.

⁹⁸ Grimm, J. and W, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen. Gesammelt durch die Brüder Grimm*, 2 vols. They appeared between 1812-1815.

⁹⁹ For the debate on whether or to what degree the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* are a *Bearbeitung* see amongst others, Ginschel, G, *Der Junge Jacob Grimm 1805-1819*, pp. 214, 242 and 265-266; Rölleke, H, “Sprichwort und Märchen”. In H. Rölleke (ed), <<*Redensarten des Volkes, auf die ich immer horche*>>, p. 11. John M. Ellis goes too far by saying that the Grimms “consciously and deliberately misrepresented what they had done, and deceived their public”. Ellis, J. M, *One Fairy Story Too Many. The Brothers Grimm and Their Tales*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ More relevant is a point made with regard to Sir Walter Scott's collection of Border Ballads, which the brothers Grimm possessed, and which has been referred to as “a patriotic endeavour”. Henderson Scott, P, *Walter Scott and Scotland*, p. 70.

¹⁰¹ Grimm, J, “[Hessenlied]”. In *JGKS*, vol. 8.1, p. 453.

Just as they could ignore the question about the historicity of Achilles or Siegfried in their search for an essence, so they could alter the parameters of their research to discover the essence of folkloric transmission.

The *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* were meant to convey to a wider, literate audience, *what* the German soul had produced in an unidentified and unidentifiable past. As part of their cultural resistance, it also intended to create a utopian vision of Germany, to kindle hope for the future. The first element that strikes one is the sheer enormity of the stories' reach. In an age when the majority of people were only semi-literate, the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* achieved almost universal penetration.¹⁰² This did, however, take some considerable time; the fame of the books had to grow. Although a popular genre at the time of publication, the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* were marked by a severe academic tone and appearance. In competition with more accessible volumes, they suffered in popularity. In the end, their target audience gained the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* their immortality. Wilhelm's choice of title leaves us in no doubt that he published the books with children in mind. The dedication of the book also reveals that children were his intended audience: he inscribed it to Johannes Freimund, Bettine von Arnim's son.¹⁰³ It is unlikely that Wilhelm had the old Jesuit edict of 'catching them young' in mind, but in essence that was what the tales set out to do. Later authors have suggested that the book is more for adults than for children, which, in terms of content, may be true. It is, however, useful to remember that different ages have different perceptions on what is appropriate for children and what is not.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, Jacob seems to have agreed with some of the later commentators. He even quibbled about the title of the book. In a letter to Von Arnim he wrote, "Das Märchenbuch ist ... garnicht für Kinder geschrieben".¹⁰⁵ The public proved him wrong and Wilhelm right.

¹⁰² For all the editions the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* went through during the lives of the brothers, see Rölleke, H, *Märchen aus dem Nachlaß der Brüder Grimm*, p. 3.

¹⁰³ *KHM* (1812/1815), vol. 1.

¹⁰⁴ Drewermann, E. and Neuhaus, I, *Der goldene Vogel*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Bastian, U, *Die "Kinder- und Hausmärchen" der Brüder Grimm in der literaturpädagogischen Diskussion des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, pp. 25-6. It is perhaps significant that it was Wilhelm and not Jacob who edited the subsequent editions.

Naturally, the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* would not reach all children, only those whose bourgeois mothers could afford to buy the books and who could read. By reading them aloud and listening to them, both mothers and children came to know the tales, which in turn were passed on to the next generation. Through the education system, the tales became accessible to children from working class or peasant backgrounds. It was the bourgeoisie who taught and who determined the curriculum. As a result, the tales percolated through all layers of German society during the decades leading up to German political unification in 1871. In the brothers' own words, the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* became "ein eigentliches Erziehungsbuch".¹⁰⁶ By the end of the century, the work was the second most sold book in German after the Bible, a position it has maintained until the present.¹⁰⁷ At the final count it does not really matter that it took a more child-friendly version to appear before this happened.¹⁰⁸

As argued, chief amongst the academic impulses behind the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* was the wish to preserve that which was perceived to be under threat. It was a common theme amongst folklorists of the period, from Elias Lönnrot to John Francis Campbell.¹⁰⁹ Jacob Grimm summed this motivation up in an article in the *Algemeene konst- en letter-bode* from 1811.¹¹⁰ This call to Dutch academics to collect folklore material was based upon the assertion that,

"een schat van overlevering, zeden en spreekwyzen by het volk, is verloren gegaan *of op het punt daarvan*, ten gevolge der onrustige tyden".¹¹¹

Here speaks a *Zeitgeist* with which we are by now familiar. Modernity is sweeping away all cultural inheritance, and in the process it is destroying the identity of peoples. It is up to academics to prevent this from happening.

¹⁰⁶ *KHM (1812/1815)*, vol. 2, p. viii. The so-called *Kleine Ausgabe* of 1825 was adapted especially for children, with fewer stories and lavish illustrations.

¹⁰⁷ Zipes, J, *The Brothers Grimm. From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁸ For the child-friendliness of the tales and the style in which the tales have been written see Rölleke, H, *Die Märchen der Brüder Grimm. Eine Einführung*, pp. 25, 42 and passim, and 85.

¹⁰⁹ Lönnrot, E, *The Kalevala*, 2 vols; Campbell, J.F, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, 2 vols.

¹¹⁰ Grimm, J, "Aan kenners en liefhebbers der oude nederlandsche letterkunde en dichtkunst". In *JGKS*, vol. 7, pp. 584-90.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 584. The italics are mine.

That other *Leitmotiv* of the period, certainly amongst academics, the perennial quest for the *Urquell*, is also easily distinguishable. By collecting these stories, the brothers hoped to find the “Ursprung unserer Poesie”.¹¹² Which necessarily leads us to the Grimms’ end goal, the construction of a national identity: for as it says in the introduction to the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*,

“in diesen Volks-Märchen liegt *lauter urdeutscher Mythos*, den man für verloren gehalten”.¹¹³

It is useful at this juncture to call to mind the date on which the first volume appeared: 1812. This was cultural resistance at its most virulent and effective. For all its roots in the late Napoleonic epoch, however, one should not lose sight of the fact that the tales were the first major contribution to their life-long campaign to promote what could be called the Grimm version of German identity.

The impact of the work on core notions about German national identity may be seen at its most acute in two fields: that of the ideal German society, and that of the German landscape. In the former case, it can be argued that the Grimms set out to create a German identity in their own image. The fairy tales are effectively an idealised mirror of Hessen, full of happy peasants, foresters, artisans, and monarchs.¹¹⁴ Their vision of a utopian German identity rests largely on the wish to restore and improve upon the conditions of the pre-French Revolutionary epoch. The *Ancien Regime* shines through most clearly in the social structures within the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. This should not surprise us too much. A brief glance at the informants of the Grimms shows that many were elderly, that most came from Hessen, a region which as indicated previously, was comprised mainly of peasantry, foresters and artisans.¹¹⁵ Of the non-oral sources, many were of medieval origin, re-enforcing the *Ancien Regime* aspect of the *Kinder-*

¹¹² *KHM (1812/1815)*, vol. 2, p. viii.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, pp. vii-viii. The italics are mine.

¹¹⁴ The Hessian input into the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* was noticed by Isidor Levin. Quoted in Bottigheimer, R.B, *Grimms’ Bad Girls & Bold Boys*, p. 16.

¹¹⁵ Leyen, F. von der, *Das deutsche Märchen und die Brüder Grimm*, vol. 2, pp. 9-10; Lüthi, M, *Märchen*, pp. 45-6.

und Hausmärchen.¹¹⁶ Finally, one may detect the input of the editors, whose own family traditions had conditioned them to view the rigid hierarchy of the *Ancien Regime* as normal. All this shines through in the stories. There is a singular lack of any factory workers; a virtual absence of an urban population, indeed, an absence of any aspect of the social changes that were affecting many parts of the German lands by the early nineteenth century.

Let us briefly consider some of the typical non-aristocratic characters of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Amongst the artisans, there is the *tapfere Schneiderlein*, and the two allegorical brothers, the rich bad *Goldschmied* and the poor good broom maker.¹¹⁷ Perhaps most illuminating in an era when weaving was rapidly being industrialised, we also encounter the *faule Spinnerin*.¹¹⁸ Most of the characters are, however, not urban dwellers. The emphasis of the tales is firmly on village and country living, which exactly replicates the situation in Hessen. Again, some of the typical figures are worth mentioning. The whole gamut of pre-industrial rural life is present in the tales. There is, for instance, the *Bauer* taking his cow to market, the *Jäger* who “ging in den Wald auf Anstand”, and, naturally in the heavily afforested Hessen, the *Holzacker*.¹¹⁹ These are the timeless figures of the pre-industrial world, the figures whom George Mackay Brown called – with a curious echo of the Grimms – the essence of the world.¹²⁰ The tales not only lack a proletariat or obviously urban population, they also lack a distinct bourgeoisie or any other manifestation of the post-Medieval world.

There is no doubt as to who stood at the pinnacle of the Grimms’ ideal society. In the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* the time-honoured social pyramid lives on unchallenged. Needless to say this was *not* the case in the reality of early nineteenth century Germany. The utopian vision once more reigns supreme, and reflects Jacob’s own determination to uphold the monarchical system.¹²¹ Nowhere is this traditional hierarchy more clearly represented than in the tale of *König Droßelbart*. The king is seeking a suitor for his

¹¹⁶ Rölleke, H, *Grimms Märchen und ihre Quellen*.

¹¹⁷ *KHM (1819)*, vol. 1, tales 20 and 60.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, vol. 2, tale 128.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, vol. 1, tale 7; vol. 2, tale 122; and vol. 1, tale 3.

¹²⁰ Mackay Brown, G, *An Orkney Tapestry*, p. 2.

¹²¹ See below, p. 158.

daughter and invites possible candidates to his castle. The reader is then regaled with a procession of peers,

“in eine Reihe, nach ihrem Rang und Stand geordnet; erst kamen die Könige, dann die Herzoge, die Fürsten, Grafen und Freiherm, zuletzt die Edelleute”.¹²²

Not a merchant nor an industrialist, not a banker in sight. The point here is not to criticise the Grimms for the world they created by compiling and editing the tales, although others have done so. Rather, it is the impact they made that concerns us here. In line with many other nineteenth century cultures subjected to the ravages of rapid industrialisation and immense social and political change, Germans embraced an idealised vision of what they believed to have been lost in the recent past. Wistfulness permeates the tales: one only has to recall the first line of *Der Eisen-Ofen*, “Zur Zeit, wo das Wünschen noch geholfen hat”, to realise the depth of this *Sehnsucht*.¹²³ It also underpinned much of the work carried out by the Grimms. An example from a review which Jacob wrote on an edition of the *Edda* makes this clear. There he admits to,

“ein unbewusstes, ahnendes gefühl in unserer brust” when reading the stories in the *Edda*.¹²⁴

The idealised social hierarchies and lifestyles from the past were at the very least semi-deliberate attempts at influencing ideas of national identity. Jacob and Wilhelm also created the perfect imaginary German landscape. Once more, there is a strong echo of the Hessian world in which the work was conceived. The first noticeable element is the virtual absence of any description of a coast. It is not completely absent; there is, for example, the story of *Von dem Fischer un siine Fru*, but this is an exception.¹²⁵ On the whole, the world of the tales is one of forest, farmstead and hills, an inland world. It was the landscape of Hessen, recalling the Grimms’ passionate love for their *Heimat*. A

¹²² *KHM (1819)*, vol. 1, tale 52.

¹²³ *Ibid*, vol. 2, tale 127.

¹²⁴ Grimm, J, “Edda Saemundar hinns fróða”. In *JGKS*, vol. 4, p. 117.

¹²⁵ *KHM (1819)*, vol. 1, tale 19.

letter, written by Jacob to Paul Wigand from Marburg in 1802, in which he describes a walk he took in the countryside, reveals this personal input in the fairytales,

“O eine prächtige Gegend. Mit jedem Schritt romantischer u. schöner ... links das Schloß auf dem Berge von der Abendsonne vergoldet. Vor mir ein Dörfchen, das man vor Bäumen nicht würde sehen können, verriethe es nicht der aufsteigende Rauch”.¹²⁶

The description could have been lifted straight out of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, except that these had not yet been published! It would appear that the Grimms deliberately collected stories which reflect this type of landscape, as may be gauged from a letter written by Wilhelm to one of his collectors, Jenny von Droste-Hülshoff, in which he asks her to collect,

“sowohl ... Märchen als Sagen von besonderem Orten, von Bergen, Wäldern, alten Schlössern und dergl.”.¹²⁷

As a result, a remarkable number of the tales have woodland settings, including the most famous ones, such as *Hänsel und Gretel*, *Rothkäppchen* and *Schneewittchen*.¹²⁸

Another dominating feature of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* landscape, and subsequently of the German landscape, are the castles.¹²⁹ These come in all forms and shapes, ruined and magnificent. The most potent symbol of their impact on the German psyche is arguably *Neuschwanstein*, the never-never world of king Ludwig II of Bavaria.

The landscape is not just populated by peasants and kings. It is also crowded with animals of all shapes and sizes: animals that talk, are hunted, farmed, that change shape, that live in forests, on farms, and even in houses. Indeed, so powerful is the presence of animals in the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* that at times even people metamorphose into

¹²⁶ Wigand, p. 6. Some features of the landscape of their Hessian youth, like the ‘half-timbered houses’ and ‘old moated castle of the counts of Hanau’, are reminiscent of stories included in the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Michaelis-Jena, R, *op.cit.* pp. 13-14.

¹²⁷ Schulte-Kemmingshausen, K. (ed), *Briefwechsel zwischen Jenny von Droste-Hülshoff und Wilhelm Grimm*, p. 26.

¹²⁸ *KHM (1819)*, vol. 1, tales 15, 26 and 53. There are many other tales set in woods or forests, for example *KHM (1819)*, vol. 1, tales 3, 28, 69 and vol. 2, tale 123.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, vol. 1, tales 1 and 50, and vol. 2, tale 97, and many others.

them. In reality, this all-pervasive presence of animals was a disappearing feature of German life. With considerable speed, the growth of the urban population was outpacing that of the rural one, augmented by a 'flight from the land'. In cities and towns, humans and animals no longer lived cheek-by-jowl. In the German imagination, however, courtesy of the brothers' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, cohabitation remained the order of the day.

Taken together, the various elements of the tales presented the reader with a ready-made version of the German landscape. Never mind that, in the words of Golo Mann, "die deutschen Länder [are] verschiedenartig", and that "wer sich im Schwarzwald, am Main und Neckar, in den Alpenländern zu Hause fühlt, der wird sich fremd vorkommen in der Lüneburger Heide".¹³⁰ Being nurtured on Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, these very real differences melted away before the romantic, imaginary paper version of the fairytales. If one can accept Donald Home's notion of 'nationality through landscape', then this may be regarded as the main contribution of the Grimms to the developing sense of a German national identity in the early nineteenth century.¹³¹ At the final count, the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* can be seen as the subliminal expression of cultural resistance in Napoleonic Europe. They combine the *Urquell* as evidence for a culture's antiquity with the urge to restore what had been lost. The tales went well beyond this, however. They dreamt – and allowed their readers to dream – of a utopian Germany, rooted in the past, untouched by the present, and socially contented. It was also, significantly, a united Germany, with one landscape and one form of society to represent all.

By the time that the first volume of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* appeared, Jerome Bonaparte and his Westphalian kingdom were heavily involved in his brother's Russian campaign, and suffered accordingly. The king had commanded the right wing of the *Grand Armée*, but after the first Battle at Mohilev in July 1812, Jerome and the emperor fell out, and the king returned to Kassel. Unfortunately, the Westphalian army stayed on

¹³⁰ Mann, G, *op.cit.* p. 23.

¹³¹ Home, D, *The Great Museum. The Representation of History.*

in Russia. The details of the disaster that overtook the Bonapartist army are well known: the Russian winter and Russian army decimated the Westphalian contingent, and of the 28,000 soldiers that left for Russia, only about six hundred returned. The Russian campaign caused severe suffering in Westphalia and its after-effects were even more serious. Jerome, ordered by Napoleon to raise a new army, began a recruitment drive, which caused many to flee the country. In addition, a Napoleonic army passed through the kingdom, extorting money and goods.

It is difficult to gauge the reaction of the brothers Grimm to these catastrophic events. It would appear that, at first, Jacob at least sought to capitalise on Jerome's absence. He wrote to Von Arnim on 29 May that he was going to Göttingen, "um allerhand Bücher auf der Bibliothek zu excerpieren", extending the planned fortnight to four weeks!¹³² He returned just before the first battle of the campaign, but tardiness in communication meant that the brothers would not have heard any news for a long time. In October, with Napoleon's invasion in full swing, Jacob wrote to Wigand that the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* "noch zum Weihnachtsgeschenk fertig werden", but did not mention the war.¹³³ The Grimms' correspondence reveals nothing about any anxiety, not a hint that they understood that French rule faced imminent demise. Even after the disaster, it took some time for the news from the Russian campaign to sink in.

All the while, Russian and Swedish troops were gradually pushing into Germany.¹³⁴ They were joined in March by Prussia, which saw an opportunity to regain the status it had lost at Jena and Auerstädt back in 1806. The Habsburgs took a little more convincing, but they, too, joined the coalition in August. Within the immediate circle of the brothers Grimm, this had its effects. One of Hammerstein-Equord's brothers, William, deserted the elite Westphalian hussars for the service of the Habsburgs almost as soon as the latter had declared war on Bonaparte. Jerome imprisoned Hammerstein himself, along with his other brother.¹³⁵ The fate of the Hammerstein family was

¹³² *Unbekannte*, p. 82.

¹³³ *Wigand*, p. 122.

¹³⁴ For a concise description of the events following the Russian campaign, see Ford, F.L., *Europe 1780-1830*, pp. 219-23.

¹³⁵ *H-E*, pp. 15-6.

symptomatic of that of wider Westphalian society. Jacob was to recount the atmosphere in the kingdom in an article that he wrote for *Der preussische correspondent* in November.¹³⁶ Although the retrospective element of this article should be kept in mind, it does, nevertheless, provide some valuable insights into the last days of Jerome's kingdom. Jacob mentions the many deserters, adding that large numbers were caught and executed. The mood-swings as news of French or Allied victories arrived in Kassel are vividly reported. The Russians arrived in Kassel on the last day of September, after forcing the bridge across the Fulda River. With their ranks swelled by volunteers, the Russians then proceeded to extirpate the symbols of the Westphalian kingdom, which was dissolved by the Russian commander, Czernitscheff, on the next day.¹³⁷

The arrival of the Russians caused Wilhelm some understandable excitement, but his joy was to be short lived: the first liberation lasted only a few days.¹³⁸ Jerome retook his capital, and initiated the only period of genuine repression of his reign. It was to be the regime's last act. Between 16 and 19 October, Napoleonic Germany was destroyed in the Battle of Leipzig. With its demise, a similar power vacuum sprang into being as in the southern Netherlands, which forced the brothers Grimm and Jan Frans Willems alike to re-align their entire political worldview. For all the brothers' sympathy for Jerome's liberalism, they were, above all, German and Hessian patriots, and welcomed the arrival of the "frischen wasser der freiheit".¹³⁹

In sharp contrast to the post-Napoleonic mythology, the end of Bonapartist rule, certainly in Westphalia, had not come through the combined efforts of the German people. There had been volunteers to help the Russians, but in Kassel,

"die Bürger [waren] von der Neuheit des Krieges zu sehr überrascht, um selbst Antheil zu nehmen".¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Grimm, J, "Nachträge zu den Berichten aus Cassel", *Der preussische correspondent*, no. 148, December, 1813. In *JGKS*, vol. 8.1, pp. 395-7.

¹³⁷ Losch, Ph, *op.cit.* pp. 72-3.

¹³⁸ Grimm, W, "Nachträge zu den [Kriegs-] Berichten aus Cassel". In *Der Preussische Correspondent*, no. 148, December, 1813. In *WGKS*, vol. 1, pp. 529-35.

¹³⁹ Grimm, J, "Nachträge zu den Berichten aus Cassel". In *JGKS*, vol. 8.1, p. 395.

¹⁴⁰ Grimm, W, "Nachträge zu den [Kriegs-] Berichten aus Cassel", p. 529. For a critical review of the so-called *Befreiungskrieg*, see Whaley, J, "The German Lands before 1815". In M. Fulbrook (ed), *German History since 1800*, p. 32.

In the mean time, the Habsburgs had taken care of *Realpolitik*. Realising that it would be impossible to drive the French out of Germany without the support of the German princes, the Austrian chancellor, Metternich, set out to reassure them of the gains they had made under Napoleon. In addition, he assured those princes deprived of their lands by the French, like the Hessian *Kurfürst*, that they would be reinstated. Against the plans of Stein, the Prussian minister, Metternich's policies allowed the princes to entrench their power. Thus, in one stroke, he had killed any chance of German unification, and of a meaningful restoration of the old *Reich*. The disenchantment amongst the intellectuals was immense. It was expressed in a letter written to Wilhelm in 1815 by Von Arnim, in which he wrote of his fear that,

“eine harte Zeit des Zwangs, der Willkür und Nachlässigkeit über uns eindringt”.¹⁴¹

Foreign rule had at least been liberal, but now the “frischen wasser der freiheit” was seemingly going to be accompanied by oppression. For now, though, liberals like the brothers Grimm still had all to fight for. It would not be until the Congress of Vienna of 1815, that the fate of Germany was sealed.

For Jacob the end of the Westphalian kingdom meant having to find new employment. He applied for the job of *Legationssekretär* to count Keller, the Hessian representative in the Allied headquarters. It was a post in which he would witness the endgame of the Napoleonic Wars from close-up. He followed this up with an appointment to accompany the *Kurfürst* to the Congress. Important friends had clearly influenced the *Kurfürst*, as a letter by Von Arnim reveals.¹⁴² A voice of longer standing must have also been raised in Jacob's favour, that of aunt Zimmer, who had returned with the *Kurfürstin* from exile in Gotha.¹⁴³ Her unswerving loyalty to the dynasty had embedded her family in the heart of

¹⁴¹ Delf, H, “Legendäre Historie – Ungewisse Zeitgeschichte: Literatur der Befreiungskriege (A. v. Arnim, Eichendorff, Tieck)”. In G. Lepper et al, *Einführung in die deutsche Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 2, pp. 246-7.

¹⁴² Steig, R, *Achim von Arnim*, pp. 289 and 298.

¹⁴³ In a letter just before his appointment, Jacob indicated that he saw his aunt Zimmer on a daily basis. *Savigny*, p. 148.

the *Kurfürstin*. Yet another element also played in Jacob's favour when he applied for the job, namely his expertise. Part of his function was the recovery of stolen treasures from Paris, and few knew more about these manuscripts than Jacob Grimm. Finally, one should not discount the very public show of support for the restored dynasty displayed by the brothers: they donated all the income from their edition of Hartmann von der Aue's *Der Arme Heinrich* to fund a drive to recruit soldiers for the *Kurfürst's* army.¹⁴⁴

Jacob briefly considered enlisting in the *Landwehr*, but felt that it would not bring in enough income to support the whole family. Three other Grimms, Ferdinand, Carl and Ludwig, did enlist. Wilhelm explained to Savigny that,

“es wäre für uns fünf eine Schande, wenn keiner dabei wäre”.¹⁴⁵

The choice of text through which the Grimms contributed to the Hessian war effort is an interesting one. In an 1812 review of Büsching's edition of the poem, Jacob had not only praised Hartmann's masterly work, but also called the text a

“kleinere erzählung ... [that] einen einheimischen, in vaterländischer sage überlieferten stoff behandelt”.¹⁴⁶

The word *vaterländisch* refers not only to Hessen-Kassel, but to the whole of Germany, as the call in their introduction to “den braven Hessen und allen Deutschen” to fight the French illustrates.¹⁴⁷ Cultural and political resistance did, indeed, fuse in the dying days of Napoleonic Europe.

Like so many intellectuals, the new Germany that the brothers Grimm wished for was not that

¹⁴⁴ Grimm, J. and W, *Der Arme Heinrich von Hartmann von der Aue*. It is very noticeable that the Grimms do not dedicate their work to the *Kurfürst*, which may have been more conventional. Instead, the dedication is to the *Kurfürstin* and *Kurprinzessin*. The book was advertised in December 1813. Grimm, W, “Aufruf. Pränumeration zum Besten der Hessischen Freiwilligen”. In *WGKS*, vol. 2, p. 504.

¹⁴⁵ Savigny, p. 153.

¹⁴⁶ Grimm, J, “Der arme Heinrich. eine altdeutsche erzählung”. In *JGKS*, vol. 6, p. 64.

¹⁴⁷ Grimm, W, “Aufruf”, p. 504.

“von 4 Monarchien (wie Schlegel) oder von einem Bund der kleinen Staaten mit einem Bundesfeldhern”¹⁴⁸

because,

“wir Deutsche sind ein Leib und alle Glieder verlangen und brauchen nur ein Haupt”.¹⁴⁹

Jacob was soon to witness the destruction of this dream in Vienna. Once at the Congress in the *Kurfürst's* retinue, he grew bored and disenchanted. The whole process appalled him, as did those present. In what was one of his strongest condemnations of the post-Napoleonic German leadership, he wrote,

“es wird so elend und schwach unterhandelt, daß der Erfolg ein klarer Erweis der *Undeutschheit* und Unzulänglichkeit der Staatsmänner sein”.¹⁵⁰

He could not wait to leave Vienna,

“ich verlange und muß bestimmt aus diesem Leben heraus, sobald der Congreß eindigt”.¹⁵¹

When it ultimately ended, Metternich triumphed: there was to be no united Germany. The new, however, was not swept away that easily. Wilhelm von Humboldt observed that there had never been a period where the old and the new had appeared in such sharp contrast.¹⁵² The old came to dominate the surface, but underneath the new seethed on.

In contrast to their acquiescence during the French occupation, the Grimms refused to accept the demise of their dreams of German unity. The brothers have often been called a-political, but there is much evidence that this was no longer the case after 1813. A precocious interest in politics can be traced as far back as a letter written by Jacob in

¹⁴⁸ *Savigny*, p. 152.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Jugendzeit*, p. 387. The italics are mine.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Pinson, K. S., *Modern Germany*, p. 50.

1805, but it grew apace after the collapse of the Westphalian kingdom.¹⁵³ At the basis of the political convictions of the brothers was the same Herderian notion of *Volksgeist* that also underpinned their scholarly thinking; they had studied Herder's philosophy at university, and always maintained their interest in his works.¹⁵⁴ Their research further augmented their convictions that the *Volksgeist* should underpin contemporary politics. In the power vacuum that followed the collapse of Napoleon's Europe, this basis of the brothers' political worldview found ample space for expression. There could be no question as to what formed the bedrock of the German *Volksgeist*. Wherever German was spoken, there the *Volk* was present. In Vienna, the map of Europe was literally redrawn, and for once the brothers were actually excited about the question of which political borders were to delineate a German ethnicity. The Congress' decision to restore France to its pre-Revolutionary borders, including the Alsace, was rejected out of hand. To the Dutch professor of Law, Tydeman, in Leiden, Jacob wrote that,

“wir Deutsche dürfen keine andere Grenzen anerkennen, als die unserer Sprache”.¹⁵⁵

It was a sentiment Jan Frans Willems would have recognised.

The brothers' interest in the *Volksgeist* was more than just a concern over German borders: their belief in the sacrosanctity of the *Volksgeist* translated into a practical belief that all power should derive from the *Volk*. It was a radical idea, rejecting the philosophy of the Congress of Vienna, where an attempt was made to restore the principle of absolutist monarchy. Understanding the importance of the notion of *Volkssouveräniteit* to the brothers Grimm is crucial if one is to make sense of their political activities until the events of 1848. Jacob stated his beliefs to Wilhelm in January 1814, when he wrote,

¹⁵³ Denecke, L, *Jacob Grimm und sein Brüder Wilhelm*, pp. 133 and 142-3.

¹⁵⁴ *Jugendzeit*, p. 122.

¹⁵⁵ The letter was written in December 1813. Jacob was to use some of his strongest language about the Vienna Congress to Tydeman, describing himself as being “verdammt” to witness the “verkehrten und undeutschen Gang und Geist” of the proceedings. *Tydeman*, p. 51. See further Soeteman, C, “Jacob Grimm an L.P.C. van den Bergh und andere Grimm-Briefe in der Universitätsbibliothek Leiden”. In *BGG*, vol. 3, p. 254.

“aber ich gönne doch den Rheinbundfürsten solche Demüthigungen, auf daß sie lernen, was sie sind, *das Volk ist durchgehend beßer*”.¹⁵⁶

Another sentence, once more from a letter to Tydeman, reveals the extent to which this liberal insistence on the people as the basis of sovereignty was intertwined with national sentiment. The diplomats and ministers in Vienna, who were ignoring the boundaries of German ethnicity, were, to Jacob’s mind,

“meistens noch von der alten, dem *Volksgeist* noch nicht zuheimisch gewordenen Generation”.¹⁵⁷

Like all liberals in this period, the brothers resorted to the newspapers to make the case for German unity and *Volkssouveränität*. For Jacob, newspapers echoed the “Meinung und Stimme des Volks”.¹⁵⁸ Wilhelm had already attempted to gain the editorship of a newspaper in Kassel back in December 1813, but had failed.¹⁵⁹ Now a new opportunity to express their distaste at the events in Vienna presented itself in the form of the *Rheinischer Merkur*, under the editorship of their friend, Joseph von Görres. The *Rheinischer Merkur* had a peculiar history. Very much the mouthpiece of a bourgeois circle of academics, it was, nevertheless, widely consulted. Indeed, even the *Kurfürst* and his family read, or had the paper read to them.¹⁶⁰ Yet, the paper’s struggle for a unified *Reich* had little resonance, as it admitted on its own pages. Its constitutional stance was a different matter altogether. It is surely incorrect to equate a lack of interest amongst a wider public for German unity at this time, with a lack of interest in constitutional affairs.¹⁶¹ Indeed, so widespread was this interest, at least amongst the

¹⁵⁶ *Briefwechsel*, p. 262. The italics are mine.

¹⁵⁷ *Tydeman*, p. 54. The italics are mine.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* He was referring to the liberal newspaper, the *Rheinischer Merkur*.

¹⁵⁹ Schäfer, H, “Wilhelm Grimms Bewerbung um die Redaktion der Kasselschen Allgemeinen Zeitung im Jahre 1813. Zwei unbekannte Handschriften Wilhelm Grimms”. In *BGG*, vol. 7, pp. 193-202.

¹⁶⁰ Schoof, W, *Jacob Grimm*, p. 150.

¹⁶¹ Koch is correct when he states that the ‘constitutional movement in the middle classes’ was expanding rapidly from about 1815. Carr’s assumption that the wider public was not interested cannot be applied to those who mattered: the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. Koch, H.W, *op.cit.* pp. 211-2; Carr, W, *A History of Germany 1815-1945*, p. 16.

Bürgertum, that the powers in Vienna feared the paper's ability to arouse anger. As a result Jacob wrote to Wilhelm that, in Vienna, the paper,

“ist nicht verboten, man kriegt ihn aber nicht zu sehen”.¹⁶²

The paper managed to frighten rulers outside Kassel. First the Prussians, and then the Russians put pressure on the *Kurfürst* to ban its publication.¹⁶³ The latter were finally successful, and, in January 1816, having published no fewer than 357 issues, it ceased to exist.

The paper furnishes us with a résumé of the brothers' early liberalism. Wilhelm wrote four articles for the *Rheinischer Merkur*, one of which stands out as a political manifesto.¹⁶⁴ It is also marked by a shrewd insight into how the relationship between ruled and ruler was to develop during the rest of the century and beyond. Entitled *Die Ständeversammlung in Hessen-Kassel*, Wilhelm anonymously addressed the issue of sovereignty, which lay at the heart of liberal ideas for post-Napoleonic Europe. He does not hide his feelings, arguing,

“denn die wahre Kraft des Regenten ist nur die sittliche Macht, die im Volke lebt”.¹⁶⁵

If monarchical power wants to be secure, it requires a constitution linking it to its people. Wilhelm was, therefore, pleased that Hessen-Kassel had passed a new constitution and had inaugurated a parliament, the second German state after Hannover to do so.¹⁶⁶ Since Hannover was ruled by a British king used to the restraints of parliamentary monarchy, this made Hessen-Kassel's achievement all the more striking.

Underlying Wilhelm's arguments were the experiences of the past. The people should legitimise rulers, for only a “Volke, das für Vaterland und eigene Freiheit steht” will resist foreign aggression. It will not fight just to defend its ruler, unless ruler and

¹⁶² *Jugendzeit*, p. 388.

¹⁶³ *Savigny*, p. 208; Carr, W. *op.cit.* p. 16.

¹⁶⁴ Grimm, W, “Die Ständeversammlung in Hessen-Kassel”, *Rheinischer Merkur*, March, 1815. In *WGKS*, vol. 1, pp. 536-43.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 536.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 536.

Vaterland are seen to be the same.¹⁶⁷ Wilhelm's article sums up the entire mental world of many German liberals in the post-Napoleonic era. He expresses their hopes for constitutionally guaranteed freedom, for a strong German nation – as next time there might not be Russian support – and for parliamentary representation. Although the paper, and with it the opinions voiced within its pages, were to disappear from view within a year of the final defeat of Bonaparte at Waterloo, its ideas were to live on. They resurfaced again around 1830, from when they would steadily gain in voice and conviction, until the fateful years of 1848 and 1849.¹⁶⁸

The peace that followed the demise of Napoleon did not satisfy the German liberals: they resented the outcome of the 1815 Congress too much to be content.¹⁶⁹ Instead of a renewed and strengthened *Reich*, they were given a “federated league of states (*Staatenbund*)”.¹⁷⁰ The Napoleonic reorganisation of Germany was more or less confirmed in Vienna. Of those states that had co-operated with France, only Saxony was punished, and even that displeased liberals like Jacob Grimm.¹⁷¹ In Germany, the Congress was followed by fourteen years of subtle repression, and it is against this background that the brothers' lives and publications must be considered.

As we have seen, the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* originated in the Grimms' desire to increase the understanding and accessibility of one of the *Urquellen* of *Das Wesen der Deutschen*. This desire also drove their work in several other fields of literary research.¹⁷² The *Deutsche Sagen* followed closely on the *Märchen*, being published in two volumes in 1816 and 1818.¹⁷³ These saw the light of day in a completely different

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 536 and 541.

¹⁶⁸ Grab, W, “The Struggle for Democracy and Political Freedom in Germany, 1815-1858”. In A. Bonnell et al, *Power, Conscience and Opposition*, p. 125. Grab noticed three distinct waves of opposition: 1817-20, 1830-35, and the culmination of these in 1848.

¹⁶⁹ Nicolson, H, *Het congres van Wenen*.

¹⁷⁰ Ramm, A, *op.cit.* p. 140.

¹⁷¹ For the events surrounding Saxony, see Ibid, p. 139. For Jacob's reaction, see Grimm, J, “[Sachsen]”, *Rheinischer Merkur*, February, 1815. In *JGKS*, vol. 8.1, p. 410.

¹⁷² Savigny, p. 67.

¹⁷³ Grimm, J. and W, *Deutsche Sagen*, 2 vols. Jacob's *Deutsche Mythologie*, which appeared in three volumes in 1835, had much the same purpose as the *Deutsche Sagen*, although with a slightly different content. For this reason, it is not included in this essay, even though it is amongst the brothers' most important publications.

world from that of the fairytales: with the departure of the French, cultural resistance was no longer required. In addition, the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* had provided their oeuvre with a German landscape and an ideal German society. The focus could now move elsewhere. The *Deutsche Sagen* had several merits, but the greatest achievement was undoubtedly the Grimms' redefinition of the historical narrative. By distinguishing between fairy tales and sagas, the brothers had created two categories where previously there had been only one, and in the process elevated the historical importance of the material contained within the sagas.¹⁷⁴ What separated the *Sagen* from the *Märchen* was the former's attachment to locality. In the words of the Grimms,

“Indessen unterscheiden sie [the fairytales] sich sehr bestimmt von den eigentlich *localen Volkssagen*, die an leibhafte Oerter oder Helden der Geschichte gebunden sind”.¹⁷⁵

Jacob was adamant that behind the sagas,

“kein eitler grund, keine erdichtung, sondern wahrhafte dichtung liegt”.¹⁷⁶

In other words, the sagas, or so Jacob argued, were historical sources, providing access not just to the mindset, but also to the events of the past. Carrying this forward with iron logic, Jacob went on to ask,

“Lösen sich alle sagen in einfache, immer einfachere offenbarungen des heiligsten auf?”.¹⁷⁷

The sagas may be rooted in mythology, but they also give birth to history, or, as Jacob put it,

¹⁷⁴ Bottigheimer, R.B, *op.cit.* pp. 7-8. One only has to think of the vital importance of the Icelandic sagas as a source for Scandinavian history to realise the enormity of their achievement.

¹⁷⁵ *KHM (1812/1815)*, vol. 1, p. xiii.

¹⁷⁶ Grimm, J, “Gedanken über mythos, epos und geschichte”. In *JGKS*, vol. 4, p. 74.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

“die geschichte selbst, die überall aus dem schoosz der fabel aufgetaucht ist”.¹⁷⁸

Rarely can one see the contorted path that the brothers travelled to find the *Urquell* as clearly as here.

If the *Märchen* were unplaceable, floating in an idealised German landscape, then the *Sagen* were very much rooted in an existing German landscape. Indeed, the main characteristic of a saga, according to Jacob, was that they “sich unaufhörlich localisieren”.¹⁷⁹ This did not mean that the core of the story could necessarily be equated with one single location: the Icelandic Siegfried from the *Edda* is in essence the same as the German Siegfried from the *Nibelungen*, but undoubtedly lives in a different place.¹⁸⁰ Jacob and Wilhelm, therefore, believed that they could find “Nationale und Provinzielle” within an *Urquell*.¹⁸¹ A large number of the stories which the brothers included in their work did not originate in Germany. Famously, the *Deutsche Sagen* included the story of the *Pied Piper*, which they unambiguously located in Hameln.¹⁸² In reality, it was compiled from a variety of sources.¹⁸³ Non-German sources, however, do not always indicate a non-German setting. The story of *Der Ring im See bei Aachen*, for example, also known as the *Fastrada Legend*, was culled by the brothers from Petrarch.¹⁸⁴ Significantly, this story centres not just on a German location, but also on one of the great ‘German’ emperors, namely Charlemagne.

As an example, this story tells us a great deal about the process through which the *Deutsche Sagen* contributed to the growth of a German national idea. As the original

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Ginschel, G, *op.cit.* p. 282.

¹⁸⁰ The Grimms were closely involved in the study of the two texts. For example, Grimm, J, “Über das Nibelungen Liet”. In *JGKS*, vol. 4, pp. 1-7 and Grimm, W, “Der Nibelungen Lied, herausgegeben durch Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen”. In *WGKS*, vol. 1, pp. 61-91. In 1811, the brothers planned to publish an edition of the as yet unpublished *Edda* manuscript, but were beaten to it. Ginschel, G, *op.cit.* pp. 47 and 49; and Hoffory, J. (ed), *Lieder der Alten Edda. Deutsch durch die Brüder Grimm*, pp. x-xi.

¹⁸¹ Tydeman, p. 42.

¹⁸² Grimm, J. and W, *DS (1816/1818)*, vol. 1, legend 244.

¹⁸³ Ward, D. (ed), *The German Legends of the Brothers Grimm*, vol. 1, note by legend 245, p. 393, and the Grimms’ own notes on their sources, pp. 306-7. The legend numbers in Ward do not correspond to those in the first edition as he based his translation on the third edition edited by Herman Grimm. Ibid, pp. 13-15.

¹⁸⁴ Grimm, J. and W, *DS (1816/1818)*, vol. 2, legend 452; Ward, D. (ed), *op.cit.* vol. 2, note by legend 458, p. 266.

intended, *Der Ring im See bei Aachen* tells the reader something about a great man from the past, but in the version of the brothers Grimm, this man becomes a great *German* from the past. It also explained why a city and its cathedral came into being, thereby creating yet more icons from the German past for the German present, *and* establishing Aachen as being ‘typically German’. Not all the stories are immediately recognisable as ‘German’, reflecting Jacob and Wilhelm’s concern with a wider Germanic past. This explains why the reader encounters stories such as those centred on the (Anglo-) Saxons, which purport to trace the history of the people from their birth in the Harz Mountains, through to their arrival in England, obviously not a German topos.¹⁸⁵ Another story is placed in the silver mines of Kutna Hora, in Bohemia.¹⁸⁶ This may again suggest a completely non-German context, if it were not for the fact that miners in that region were almost solely German speakers.

What the Grimms aimed at then, was both to root the semi-historical past in contemporary German lands, as well as to tell the story of the German-speaking and Germanic peoples. Here one may clearly see the diptych that they were inventing for a German national identity: geographically limited, ethnically expansive. It may well be true that the *Deutsche Sagen* never attained the popularity of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, but their ultimate impact was almost certainly as great.¹⁸⁷ They also mirror their more famous counterparts in another way, namely in the type of Germany that they portray. Just as the *Märchen* painted a Hessian landscape, so the *Sagen* focused very much on western Germany, with many located in Thüringen, another wooded and hilly land. Once more, the *idea* of Germany as contained in the work of the Grimms, diverged from the reality, and, more importantly, provided a utopian vision, based on the past.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Grimm, J. and W., *DS (1816/1818)*, vol. 2, legends 408 to 414.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, vol. 1, legend 1.

¹⁸⁷ Even if this sometimes occurred indirectly, as for example with the story of *Tannhäuser*, which, together with the *War of Wartburg Castle* formed the inspiration for Wagner’s eponymous opera. Millington, B., *The Wagner Compendium*, pp. 165 and 281. See also, Ward, D. (ed), *op.cit.* vol. 1, note to legend 171, p. 366 and vol. 2, note to legend 561, pp. 303-4. For the lack of commercial success of the *Deutsche Sagen*, see Rölleke, H. (ed), *Deutsche Sagen herausgegeben von den Brüdern Grimm*, p. 711.

¹⁸⁸ As noticed in Uther, H.-J. (ed), *Brüder Grimm – Deutsche Sagen*, vol. 2, p. 553. As Uther wrote, curiously, the brothers did not include that archetypal German topos, the river Rhine.

The introduction makes quite clear that some sagas have been left out on purpose, which brings us to some of the other historical literature on which the brothers worked, in particular the *Nibelungen*.¹⁸⁹ The tale of the heroic Burgundian band, and of Siegfried and Brunhilde, had captured the imagination of Germans long before Wagner adapted the story for his epic *Ring Cycle*. Derived to some extent from the *Edda*, it seemed to the scholars of the nineteenth century to contain all they looked for in ancient poetry: antiquity leading them to an *Urquell*, heroism, cautionary exemplars, and romantic drama, in short the essential lecture for the present.¹⁹⁰ The readers agreed. As Jacob wrote to Jan Frans Willems in 1840, in that year alone there had been four or five editions, *not* including translations and research.¹⁹¹

This interest in the heroic past is reflected in yet another Grimm work on sagas, this time with the hero as its central plank. The *Deutsche Heldensage*, written by Wilhelm in 1829, was in many respects the culmination of the brothers' quest for the *Urquellen* of the German soul in historical material. Coming as it did at the end of a process, there was some inevitable repetition. Equally, the motives and indeed intended outcome from the publication are by now familiar companions. Once more, there was the search for the *Urquell*, and the wish to unravel the past for the edification of the present. There *was*, however, a new departure for the Grimms in the *Deutsche Heldensage*, for the hero takes centre stage. As Wilhelm put it in his introduction,

“Dahin gehört die Genealogie und Heimath der Helden, und überhaupt was an ihre Person fest geknüpft erscheint: namhafte Waffen, Rosse, Schildzeichen”.¹⁹²

The search for ‘great heroic’ ancestors was, however, far from new. In the words of Goethe,

¹⁸⁹ *DS (1816/1818)*, vol. 2, pp. xii-xiii.

¹⁹⁰ Although it would appear from a letter by Wilhelm to Lachmann that the brothers did not agree on this Scandinavian input, “Entsprungen ist das Epos in Deutschland, nicht im Norden, das zeigt deutlich der Rhein, welcher unser Fluß ist”. *Lachmann*, vol. 2, p. 795.

¹⁹¹ Vreese, W. de, “Drie Brieven van Potgieter aan J.F. Willems”, *De Gids*, vol. 95, (1931), p. 286. Wilhelm ensured that this wide interest was also fed at university. At Göttingen, he lectured on the *Nibelungen*. Ebel, E. (ed), *Wilhelm Grimm's Nibelungenkolleg*.

¹⁹² Grimm, W, *Die Deutsche Heldensage*, p. v.

“Betrachtet man die einzelne frühere Ausbildung der Zeiten, Gegenden, Ortschaften, so kommen uns aus der dunkeln Vergangenheit überall tüchtige und vortreffliche Menschen, tapfere, schöne, gute, in herrlicher Gestalt entgegen”.¹⁹³

In the mind of the Grimms, twenty-five years of military defeats and French occupation had created an enormous demand for indigenous heroes. This demand was increased by the failure of the Congress of Vienna, where German heroes had been thin on the ground. In addition, the utopian landscapes and utopian society restored by the brothers from ancient sources, needed to be peopled by more than foresters and artisans. This drive to make people more proud of their own culture never did intend to create the monster it eventually did. It may be argued, however, that this work is the most nationalistic of all the brothers' efforts. Wilhelm's nationalism was always more strident than Jacob's, and he was at times prepared to bend the truth, or to ignore it, to prove his point.¹⁹⁴ In the *Deutsche Heldensage* this shows most clearly in the omission of all references to Nordic influences, in marked contrast to some of his earlier works.¹⁹⁵ His heroes are *German* heroes.

The period between 1815 and 1849 was one in which the liberal sentiments outlined in the *Rheinischer Merkur* came to dominate much of the political debate within German society, notwithstanding the dominating presence of the censor. James Sheehan noted the difficulties of defining the movement, and, like the brothers Grimm, German liberals were often riddled with contradictory sentiments.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, several factors characterise the liberal tradition in the German lands in the first half of the nineteenth century. Strangely, liberals, for all their nationalist sentiments, were marked by strong regionalisation. This was certainly the case with the Grimms. Between 1815 and 1830, they were preoccupied with events in Hessen-Kassel. This was followed by a period between 1830 and 1837, when they were living in Göttingen, when their main concern

¹⁹³ Quoted by Wilhelm Grimm, in Grimm, W, “Die Lieder der Alten Edda”. In *WGKS*, vol. 1, p. 227.

¹⁹⁴ See note 190, p. 133.

¹⁹⁵ Grimm, W, *Die Deutsche Heldensage*, p. v.

¹⁹⁶ Sheehan, J.J, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 5.

was with the politics of Hannover. Whatever its fragmentation, German liberalism's emphasis on the *Volk* as the source of all political legitimacy, inevitably turned it into a nation-wide political current.¹⁹⁷ In spite of all the vested interests working against this notion, interests that had prevailed in Vienna, and would prevail again through the use of force in 1849, this idea of *Volkssouveräniteit* was to underpin German political thought until the end of the Second World War and beyond.¹⁹⁸ To German liberals, the means to enshrine the concept of *Volkssouveräniteit* were

“Verfassungen die Grundrechte garantieren und dem gebildeten und besitzenden Bürger die Teilnahme an den Staatsangelegenheiten sichern sollen”.¹⁹⁹

Simultaneously and fatally, many amongst them could not conceive of a political world without monarchs.

The brothers' liberalism displayed many of the characteristics that Carr classified as 'northern German', a 'historical liberalism'.²⁰⁰ The Grimms were indeed much closer to the kind of liberalism espoused by Dahlmann at Göttingen, than to that of Rotteck and Welcker at Freiburg. Like the latter, they never ignored the importance of freedom, and much of their liberal leanings were learnt at the court of Jerome. In this respect, they stood fairly close to Rotteck and Welcker. The main thrust of their liberalism was guided, however, by a respect for Germany's medieval institutions, a respect for the monarchs, and by an unwillingness to borrow too heavily from France.

Whilst protesting his support for freedom of speech and press, the first job Jacob accepted from the *Kurfürst* in the new Hessian government was that of censor. It would seem unlikely that he was ever very active in this post, and, by his own admission, he indulged in a little quiet sabotage by being less than rigorous.²⁰¹ Self-interest lurked behind Jacob's co-operation in a system that he despised; as Ohles noted, it gave him a good vantage point to wait for openings to appear for positions that were more

¹⁹⁷ Sheehan, J.J, *German History 1770-1866*, p. 597.

¹⁹⁸ See in this respect the events following the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

¹⁹⁹ Gall, L. et al, *Fragen an die deutsche Geschichte*, p. 78.

²⁰⁰ Carr, W, *op.cit.* pp. 13-4.

²⁰¹ Ohles, F, *op.cit.* p. 52.

agreeable. Soon the Hessian ruling family provided Jacob with alternative employment. Indicative of his distaste for the new political constellation in Germany, he declined an offer to represent Hessen-Kassel in the new *Bundestag*. Instead, in April 1816, he accepted an offer to become deputy librarian to the *Kurfürst*.

Jacob's appointment, and Wilhelm's continued employment, heralded a period of relative calm that coincided with a tightening of monarchical rule in Hessen-Kassel and all over the German lands. Within a month of Jacob starting his new job, the *Kurfürst* abolished the *Landtag*. The very fact that he thought he could implement closure is indicative of the waning of liberal strength. The Grimms' usual sensitivity to the prevailing wind again shows during this period. They kept their distance from major public manifestations of liberal resistance, even treated them with disdain. The festival at the Wartburg in Sachsen-Weimar organised by the *Burschenschaft* on 18 October 1817 is only touched on briefly by Jacob. Writing to Tydeman, he casually noted that

“Die Studenten haben auf der Wartburg ein schönes Fest gefeyert, in Ordnung und Haltung”.²⁰²

He may have endorsed the festival's ethos to his politically unthreatening Dutch colleague, but openly supporting the Wartburg organisers in Germany itself was a different matter. Even in his letters to Savigny, he retained a guarded silence.

Jacob's silence speaks volumes for his caution, for the Wartburg students expressed a number of issues close to the Grimms' hearts. Firstly, there was the strong emphasis on German culture, language, tradition and history, which the students placed at the heart of their political demands. Secondly, the festival also commemorated the tercentenary of the Reformation. As the brothers descended from a family of Protestant pastors, one would have expected them to have shown some interest. Curiously, when the anniversary was commemorated in Kassel, it drew a note of hostility from Jacob.²⁰³ The brothers did not just keep their distance from the *Burschenschaft*, but also failed to connect with the other major organisation agitating for German unity, the

²⁰² Tydeman, p. 66.

²⁰³ Savigny, pp. 263-4.

Turngemeinden. These were rooted in the attempts to organise volunteers to fight the French in 1813, and had grown into a political movement under the cover of a sport association. One man, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, better known as *Turnvater* Jahn, inspired both the *Burschenschaft* and the *Turngemeinden*.²⁰⁴ The Grimms singled him out for particular ridicule. His seminal work, the *Turnbuch*, was dismissed by Jacob as, “lächerlich und eitel”.²⁰⁵ Not only was all this activity intellectually weak, it was also populist, and far too radical for the taste of the brothers.

Notwithstanding their ambivalent attitude towards the *Burschen*, and in strong contrast to their official distancing from the movement, they were deeply involved in the aftermath of the Kotzebue affair. In March 1819, a radical *Burschenschaftler*, Karl Ludwig Sand, assassinated the dramatist Kotzebue.²⁰⁶ Kotzebue’s name had become synonymous with anti-liberal reaction, and for this he paid with his life. The subsequent purge affected the Grimms directly. They secretly sheltered Savigny’s friend, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and his family, who, because of the crackdown following the murder, were on the run from the Prussian authorities.²⁰⁷ The murder had caused a wave of revulsion, and gave Chancellor Metternich, the Austrian director of the restoration, the ideal excuse to implement a crackdown on the radicals. The result was the *Karlsbader Beschlüsse* of September 1819, which all but crushed open expressions of dissent throughout the *Deutsche Bund*.²⁰⁸ To the Grimms, it felt as if they had returned to a “System von Furcht und Ängsten, Mißtrauen, Beschuldigungen”, worse than that of the Westphalian period.²⁰⁹ Typically, any such misgivings were kept private.

In 1819, both brothers received public recognition for their work from the University of Marburg, in the form of honorary doctorates in philology.²¹⁰ At the same time, an obscure conflict began with professor Christoph von Rommel, one that would contribute

²⁰⁴ Pinson, K.S, *op.cit.* p. 63.

²⁰⁵ *Briefwechsel*, p. 474.

²⁰⁶ Macartney, C.A, *The House of Austria*, p. 40.

²⁰⁷ *Savigny*, pp. 283 and 378. Schleiermacher shared Jacob Grimm’s religiosity. Hayes, C.J.H, *Nationalism: A Religion*, p. 62.

²⁰⁸ Görtemaker, M, *Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert*, p. 74.

²⁰⁹ *Savigny*, pp. 284-5.

²¹⁰ Ohles, F, *op.cit.* p. 54.

much to the Grimms' eventual departure from Hessen-Kassel. The professor had been a staunch supporter of the Grimms, and had been instrumental in persuading Marburg University to grant them their honorary doctorates. This changed when he took great offence at Wilhelm being given preferential access to stones carrying runic inscriptions on the estate of his friend, Fritz von Schertzell.²¹¹ He was avenged in part when he was given the job of archivist, for which Wilhelm had also applied, but plotted further revenge.

On its own, Rommel's enmity would have been a mere inconvenience. However, the archivist enjoyed particularly good relations with the *Kurfürst's* son and successor, and this would prove to be fatal to the Grimms' prospects in Hessen-Kassel. Their chances were dealt a further blow when, in 1820, *Kurfürstin* Karoline died. The following year her husband followed her to the grave. The new *Kurfürst* presided over a divided house. In one camp stood those supporting his wife, the Prussian princess, Auguste, in the other those who supported his mistress, Emilie Ortlöpp.²¹² The Grimms chose to support the *Kurfürstin*. For once Jacob and Wilhelm backed the wrong horse. Their stance earned them the dislike of *Kurfürst* Wilhelm II, whose pettiness matched his lack of morality. Deprived of their usual circle of court allies, the Grimms were subjected to various insults. These soon turned into victimisation: in December, they had to vacate their house. They were, in their own words, "Leuten, die in Ungnade gefallen sind".²¹³

At the same time, the reputation of Jacob and Wilhelm in the rest of Germany continued to grow. During the 1820's, Jacob paid several visits to the university of Göttingen, where he conducted research. They may have been only assistant-librarians in Kassel, but they were already recognised as "Verfasser und Herausgeber bedeutender Werke", and "bereits hochberühmt".²¹⁴ Their association with the Hanoverian university was strengthened in 1824, when they were elected corresponding members of the

²¹¹ Michaelis-Jena, R, *op.cit.* pp. 93-4. For Wilhelm's groundbreaking research into runes see Heyerdahl, G. H, "Wilhelm Grimm and the Study of Runes". In E.H. Antonsen et al, *op.cit.* pp. 61-69.

²¹² Losch, Ph, *op.cit.* pp. 127 and following. She was elevated to the nobility with the title of countess Reichenbach.

²¹³ *Savigny*, pp. 325.

²¹⁴ Fleckenstein, J, "Die Brüder Grimm und die Göttinger Akademie". In K. Stackmann et al, *Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, pp. 99-100.

Königliche Sozietät der Wissenschaften. In 1826 and 1832 respectively, they also became corresponding members of the *Akademie der Wissenschaften* in Berlin. As befitting the author of the *Deutsche Grammatik*, honorary doctorates were conferred upon Jacob by the University of Berlin in 1828, followed by Breslau in 1829.²¹⁵ In February 1829, when Jacob applied for the position of first librarian upon the death of the incumbent, Völkel, Wilhelm tried for Jacob's old job at the same time. Both got nothing, as the *Kurfürst* turned down their requests. It proved to be the last straw. Unwilling to endure any more persecution, and aware that their beloved research was suffering, the brothers handed in their resignation. The *Kurfürst* accepted within a day: soon they would be packing for Göttingen.

Straddling the last years of the brothers' lives in Hessen and their stint at the University of Göttingen is Jacob's monumental work on the German language, the *Deutsche Grammatik*. It was published in four volumes, which appeared between 1819 and 1837, in which Jacob set out to find the essence of a German identity through language. Here Jacob was on firm intellectual ground. As far back as the end of the seventeenth century, the philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz had written his *Ermahnung an die Teutsche, ihren verstand und sprache beßer zu üben*.²¹⁶ To Leibniz, as to later philosophers and linguists, language was what bound Germans together, what made them a *Volk*. It bears repetition: language as the hallmark of a German identity was universally accepted amongst nineteenth-century German intellectuals. The French occupation under Napoleon Bonaparte had merely served to reinforce this. In 1806, Fichte cast the notion in stone, when he wrote that even if Germans lost their political independence, German language and literature would ensure that they remained a nation.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Denecke, L, "Mitgliedschaften der Brüder Grimm". In *BGG*, vol. 3, pp. 471-492.

²¹⁶ Blackall, E.A, *The Emergence of German as a Literary Language 1700-1775*, pp. 1-9.

²¹⁷ Fichte, J.G, "Reden an die deutsche Nation". In J.H. Fichte (ed), *op.cit.* vol. 7, p. 451.

This is the classic statement of the superiority of ethnicity over politics. This emphasis on the value of language, and particularly on its pre-eminence over political self-determination, was to have a long career.²¹⁸

It is also of crucial importance to any understanding of the debate about national identity and the nation-state during the lives of Jacob and Wilhelm. This ethnic self-identification set the Germans apart, formed the heart of their identity. If, as was the Grimms' intention, they were to provide the tools with which Germans could comprehend the essence of their own identity through their oeuvre, then an understanding and mastery of the German language was to be essential. In the first decade of the century, the tools to understand and use the language were at best superficial.²¹⁹ There were several dictionaries and grammars to which German-speakers could turn, but these were all characterised by their simple presentation of data and rules, and did not represent attempts to gain understanding.²²⁰ By contrast, the publication of first Jacob's *Deutsche Grammatik*, and subsequently the work of the brothers on an extensive and historical dictionary, sought to provide explanation of what had shaped the German language and how.

These works served a multiple of purposes. The Grimms, whilst conducting an enquiry into the essence – again that word – of language, simultaneously created an inventory of the essence of a German identity. Through this essence, they hoped to restore German identity to its original purity, which they thought could be found only in the past.²²¹ At around the same time as they discovered Herder, they had also come into contact with the works of Schelling.²²² From these, Jacob and Wilhelm distilled the importance of “der Zustand des Anfangs als Identität”, and in their linguistic research the *Anfang* lay in

²¹⁸ See, for example, the brothers' insistence in their introduction to the *Wörterbuch*, below, p. 164.

²¹⁹ Grimm, J, *Deutsche Grammatik*, vol. 1, pp. xvi-xvii.

²²⁰ That Jacob made a conscious decision to write a different kind of grammar may be gleaned from his comment that “ich nicht in diese reihe, sondern ganz aus ihr heraustreten will”. Ibid, p. ix.

²²¹ Ehrismann, O, *op.cit.* pp. 29-57. It is important to note, that this purity did not yet have the racial connotations it was to acquire later in the century.

²²² Savigny, p. 80.

the origins of words and grammar.²²³ The structure of the German language and the history of its words, were to provide an example for contemporary identity.

Jacob's *Deutsche Grammatik*, and the brothers' collaborative effort, the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, are in many respects complementary, and it is appropriate that they were published almost at opposite ends of the brothers' careers. As such they are the bookends to their oeuvre, the boundary stones of German ethnicity as contained in the German language. The *Grammatik* collated the development of the structures of a number of Germanic languages, amongst others German and Dutch. Through this, Jacob firmly rooted German in a definite past, and gave contemporary culture a pedigree. The work provided knowledge of the 'why' of the German language. The *Wörterbuch* – as will be examined below – established the pedigree of individual words, and conveyed an understanding of the 'how' of German.²²⁴

Jacob regarded the *Grammatik* as the "Anatomie der Sprache".²²⁵ By dissecting the language, he wished to explore two basic questions. The first of these concerned the quest for a common ancestor of modern Germanic languages.²²⁶ This was, of course, directly indebted to Jacob's reading of Schelling; the common ancestor was the *Anfang* of German, the pure essence of German culture, and, therefore, a *Haltpunkt* on the road to a German national identity.²²⁷ His second question revolved around a wish to discover why the language functioned in the way it did. Behind this lurked a deeper, Romantic sentiment, which Jacob highlighted in his dedication in the *Grammatik*,

"auf das vaterland sind wir von natur gewiesen und nichts anderes vermögen wir mit unsern angeborenen gaben in solchem maasze und so sicher begreifen zu lernen".²²⁸

²²³ Ehrismann, O, *op.cit.* p. 35.

²²⁴ The *Wörterbuch* also aimed at an understanding in depth, as opposed to the simple wordlists of previous efforts. See also the comment by Stackmann, K, "Über das Wörterbuch der Brüder Grimm". In K. Stackmann et al, *Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm* p. 20.

²²⁵ Strippel, J, "Zum Verhältnis von Deutscher Rechtsgeschichte und Deutscher Philologie". In J.J. Müller (ed), *Literaturwissenschaft und Sozialwissenschaften*, vol. 2, p. 156.

²²⁶ Grimm, J, *Deutsche Grammatik*, vol. 1, p. xi.

²²⁷ One may also detect the lingering influence of Linneaus here. The word *Haltpunkt* was first mentioned by Jacob in "Über meine Entlassung", p. 38.

²²⁸ Grimm, J, *Deutsche Grammatik*, vol. 1, p. iv. The volume is dedicated to Savigny and, as noted by Peuckert, it was "in Savignys Geist". It was an historical grammar. *Die Grossen Deutschen Deutsche Biographie*, 1956 ed. vol. 3, S.v. "Wilhelm und Jacob Grimm 1786-1859, 1785-1863", by W.-E. Peuckert.

An unambiguous statement of intent, revealing much of what drove Jacob's immense achievement: by gaining a deeper understanding of the German language, Germans could come closer to understanding Germany.

Here Jacob is, needless to say, *not* referring to a geographic Germany, rather to an ethnic one. *Vaterland* with the brothers Grimm frequently *did* signify a geo-political unit, but not here. In the *Grammatik*, people and language fuse to become the *Vaterland*. Its geographical element was perceived in a rather mystical light. This reflects the recent disappointments suffered by liberals like the Grimms with respect to German unification. To Jacob, language created an umbilical cord with one's *Heimat* – and this *does* indicate a geographical reality – through an incomprehensible process during childhood.²²⁹ Here one hits a raw nerve in the whole process of the growth of a German national identity. The widely-scattered German-speakers could never form a single state: a nation, certainly, but not a state.²³⁰ Jacob appears to suggest that the German *Heimat* is wherever German is spoken, but does not equate this with statehood. The impossibility of squaring the demands of German nationhood and German statehood are, nevertheless, clearly exposed here; the process through which a German national identity was born highly visible.

Göttingen.

Finding new jobs after their resignation in Hessen had been far from difficult. Such was their reputation, that within weeks of their resignation, Benecke was ensuring that they both received positions at the University of Göttingen. Professor Heeren, a historian at the university, wrote to king George IV in London, to suggest that the brothers be

²²⁹ Grimm, J, *Deutsche Grammatik*, vol. 1, p. ix.

²³⁰ Even the *Großdeutschen* never conceived of including the scattered German-speakers of eastern Europe into their state. It was not until Hitler that this notion gained currency, and even then realism often won out, as for example in the case of the Baltic Germans who were 'repatriated' to majority-German-speaking lands in the 1940's.

appointed librarians at the university.²³¹ They accepted the appointment immediately, and by the end of October 1829, Jacob could write to Lachmann that their departure for Hannover was imminent.²³² In a letter to his brother, Ferdinand, Jacob expressed his pleasure at being able to continue to live with Wilhelm and his family.²³³ At the end of the year, Jacob, Wilhelm, his wife, Dortchen, whom he had married in May 1825, and their son, Hermann, left Kassel for Göttingen.

It was at Göttingen that the brothers came to be recognised as foremen of the liberal movement by a wider audience. With almost prophetic anticipation, they arrived at the university virtually at the same time as the Metternich settlement began to crack. Revolutions in Paris, Brussels, Poland, and further south in Greece, began the destruction of the post-1815 system. In Antwerpen, Jan Frans Willems saw his dreams, which had been realised by the 1815 settlement, shattered. For liberal-leaning Germans, however, the revolutions brought the hope that their dreams were about to become reality. The revolutionary wave reached Göttingen relatively late. In January 1831, the university and town erupted into what has been called a “miniature revolution by students and citizens”.²³⁴ Lasting for three days, the demands by the revolutionaries for a constitution, and for the subjugation of monarchical power to popular sovereignty, echoed the Grimms’ own sentiments from the immediate post-war period.

To Jacob, the Europe-wide revolutions were welcome events. Reacting to the upheaval in Paris, he wrote that there were times when

“man bloß zu handeln hat, ohne rücksicht auf vergangenheit oder zukunft”.²³⁵

“Bloß handeln” was exactly what Wilhelm did when he experienced his own ‘mini-revolution’, but on the opposite side. When a group of students attempted to storm the library, he warded off this act of ‘sacrilege’, but at the expense of a severe shock to his

²³¹ Ebel, W. (ed), *Jacob Grimm. De desiderio patriae. Antrittsrede an der Göttinger Universität, gehalten am. 13. November 1830*, p. 20.

²³² *Lachmann*, vol. 2, p. 541.

²³³ *Unbekannte*, p. 165.

²³⁴ Sheehan, J.J, *German History*, p. 607.

²³⁵ *Savigny*, pp. 358-9.

nervous system. Although the Hannoverian army managed to restore order – and it took a rather large part of the armed forces to achieve this – the revolutionaries did manage to wring a number of concessions from the king. Amongst these was a new constitution, a reduction in taxation, and greater popular participation in the legislature. The Grimms’ strong dislike of direct action, regardless of Jacob’s insistence that “man bloß zu handeln hat”, re-emerged the next year, when he described the great popular rally held in Hambach in the Pfalz in May, as “Schrecken” and “ekelhaft”, a sentiment directly echoed in the chancelleries of Vienna and Berlin.²³⁶ Visions of republicanism and democracy such as expressed at Hambach were alien to the Grimms; their liberalism was one of legality and erudition, not of revolution and populism.

At Göttingen, the Grimms met Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann.²³⁷ They came to admire him, and the three soon became close friends. He was the epitome of German liberalism of the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Born in Schleswig-Holstein, Dahlmann had worked at the University of Kiel, but had fallen out with the Danish government, after which he had moved to the university at Göttingen. Such was his status, that in 1831 the Hannoverian government turned to him for help when writing the new constitution. It proved to be a poisoned chalice, from which the Grimms were to drink as deeply as Dahlmann himself. When, in 1837, the new king wished to abrogate Dahlmann’s constitution, uproar ensued. The affair was to end the Grimms’ stay in Göttingen.

The upheavals of that year are amongst the most discussed and pontificated upon in nineteenth-century German history, with the role of the seven professors, the *Göttinger Sieben*, and their dismissal by the king the subject of much debate. Klaus von See traced the retrospective projection of ideals onto the event since 1837, and noted how it could be made to suit the German Empire, the Weimar Republic, Nazi Germany, and finally the contemporary *Bundesrepublik*.²³⁸ A few examples will suffice to indicate just how wide-ranging opinion has been. To Treitschke, whose story of the event forms the prototype for all subsequent histories, the seven were initially, “Martyrer des constitutionellen

²³⁶ DuG, vol. 1, p. 19; Feldmann, R, *Jacob Grimm und die Politik*, p. 164.

²³⁷ Friderici, R, “Briefe von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm”. In *BGG*, vol. 3, pp. 67-8, n. 5a.

²³⁸ See, K. von, *Die Göttinger Sieben. Kritik einer Legende*.

Staatsprincips”, a view he later altered to that of seven apolitical conscientious objectors.²³⁹ Neumann turned the protest into a eulogy of liberal historicism; the seven were,

“eine Schar, über deren Arbeit und geistiger, freundschaftlicher Gemeinschaft der einzigartige Zauber geistiger Neuanfänge liegt”.²⁴⁰

It may be clear that a less enthusiastic assessment is required if one is to evaluate the relative importance of the event of 1837 to the brothers Grimm. To achieve this, the background to the opposition of the professors to the abolition of the Hanoverian constitution of 1833 has to be considered first. The problems started even before the new constitution was accepted. The king of Hannover, William IV, was also the king of Great Britain, and this influenced the shaping of the new constitution greatly. He relinquished the identification between monarch and land, as well as acknowledging some new powers for the Hanoverian parliament. In a British context, it was all far from radical, and as Von Aretin shrewdly noted, the new constitution fell well short of its Belgian contemporary.²⁴¹

To William IV, Hannover had been a sideshow. For his successor, matters were a little different. Ernst August had no recourse to extra-Hanoverian income, and, in addition, was also “ein überzeugter Hochtory”.²⁴² William, furthermore, had failed to consult Ernst August when approving the new constitution. There was no way in which he would accede to the separation of land and monarchy. The new king argued – correctly – that his predecessor had inserted clauses into the constitution without receiving the assent of parliament, making it illegal. As a result, he refused to swear the oath on the offending constitution, dismissed the parliament, and, on 1 November, followed this up with the invalidation of the constitution. Technically, at least, the new king was within his rights. To German liberals, however, this was yet another example of a monarch’s

²³⁹ Ibid, p. 11.

²⁴⁰ Neumann, E, *Wilhelm Grimm*, p. 6.

²⁴¹ Aretin, K.O. Freiherr von, “Die Brüder Grimm und die Politik ihrer Zeit”. In K. Stackmann et al, *Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, p. 56.

²⁴² Nipperdey, Th, *op.cit.* p. 376. He succeeded to the Hanoverian throne as his niece, Victoria, could not under Salic law.

infringing upon a constitution. As early as July, there had been negative comments upon the king's refusal to sanction the constitution; not even Metternich approved.²⁴³ Soon, what was a Hannoverian debate became a German one: the kingdom became the focal point of the German *Verfassungskämpfe*.

The brothers Grimm consequently found themselves in the eye of a Germany-wide storm. With Dahlmann, whose constitution was being challenged by the king, they formed the so-called "harter Kern" of liberal opposition.²⁴⁴ It is curious, to say the least, that the normally cautious brothers found themselves in this position. Personal friendships had always been important to them, but, on its own, this would have been insufficient to induce them to take this kind of risk. The real cause for the Grimms' outspokenness during the Göttingen crisis lay in their elevated notion of the role of the academic. The intelligentsia's role during the French occupation, had bestowed upon the collective group an aura of importance, of immunity even, in which the Grimms, to their cost, believed. They were considered to be the guardians of the true Germany, now as much as during the French period. In Dahlmann's mind, at least, there was absolutely no doubt that the German nation supported their cause. He made this clear to Jacob, writing,

"noch weniger zweifle ich, daß eine solche Erklärung [of opposition to the king's plans] ein großes Gewicht ... in ganz Deutschland haben würde".²⁴⁵

Although Dahlmann and the Grimms played the public card for all it was worth, they badly miscalculated both the support they would receive from their peers, and the determination of the king. Only four other professors rallied to their cause, with the university authorities sitting on the fence. The king, in the meanwhile, backed into a corner by all the publicity, simply refused to give in. Ignoring public opinion, Ernst August signed an *Entlassungsurkunde* by which Jacob and Wilhelm lost their jobs. Determined to crush his opponents, he also ordered Jacob to leave Hannover within three days on pain of imprisonment. Ironically, the king cited his involvement in

²⁴³ Aretin, K.O. von, *op.cit.* pp. 56-7.

²⁴⁴ *DuG*, vol. 1, p. v.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

publishing the seven's opinions as the reason for expelling Jacob from Hannover. Opposition was tolerated, publicity was not. The very public opinion upon which Jacob had based such trust ultimately became his downfall.²⁴⁶

Student rioting broke out in Göttingen, which the government could only just contain, and, when Jacob was finally expelled from Hannover together with Dahlmann and Gervinus, they received an escort of dragoons. The students walked to the Hessian border at Witzenhausen, where they greeted the three professors. There they treated them to an elaborate meal, interspersed with toasts and speeches. Finally, they pulled the coach with the three men through the town and across the border. This so-called *Witzenhauser Einzug* became the stuff of legend, indeed, the subject for children's toys.²⁴⁷ Wilhelm followed Jacob into exile the next year, in October 1838.

The event caused an international stir. In Britain, the Anglo-Saxon scholar, John Mitchell Kemble, wrote immediately to Jacob, inviting him to come to London, later adding that he was collecting the portraits of the seven to hang in his library.²⁴⁸ From Gent, Jan Frans Willems wrote to express his sympathy at the "ongeval", inviting Jacob to come to Belgium, where he was certain there would be an "honourable post".²⁴⁹ The Prussian crown prince wrote to his father's minister of culture, Freiherr von Altenstein, suggesting that,

"Der Gewinn der *Grimms* für unsere Universität wäre gewiß etwas großes".²⁵⁰

For the time being, though, the Grimms were not going anywhere. Their political reputation was such, that nobody in authority in the German lands would risk employing them, the only exception being the king of Saxony, whose invitation to the seven

²⁴⁶ Denecke, L, *Jacob Grimm und sein Bruder Wilhelm*, p. 137; Kamp, N, "Von der Göttinger Protestation zur Frankfurter Paulskirche". In *GW*, pp. 130-1.

²⁴⁷ For the toys, see *Lachmann*, vol. 2, p. 895. Any child caught playing with these toys was apparently banned from entering the Hanoverian civil service.

²⁴⁸ Wiley, R.A. (ed), *John Mitchell Kemble and Jakob Grimm*, pp. 157-8 and 166.

²⁴⁹ Vreese, W. de, "Briefwisseling van Jan Frans Willems en Jacob Grimm". In A. Bömer and J. Kirchner (eds), *Mittelalterliche Handschriften*, pp. 277-8.

²⁵⁰ *Bettine*, p. 201.

“achtbare Männer” was politely turned down.²⁵¹ It would be several years before the brothers were to find employment again.

One result of the affair in Göttingen was the publication by Jacob of *Über meine Entlassung*.²⁵² Written soon after he had been expelled, it was corrected by both Wilhelm and Dahlmann. They tried to get it published in the *Deutsche Bund*, but failed, and had to resort to a Swiss publishing house. From Switzerland, it was smuggled back into the *Bund* and became a bestseller. The whole affair is reminiscent of the problems Jan Frans Willems had faced in Belgium only a few years earlier. Once more, a government had targeted intellectuals engaged in defining the nation; once again, ‘exile’ had been its weapon of choice.²⁵³ Like Willems, the Grimms had to resort to a foreign publisher and smuggle the book back across the border.

Über meine Entlassung has aptly been called a *Rechtfertigungsschrift*, but it was much more than that.²⁵⁴ It may be read as a summary of where the Grimms stood in their thinking on the German nation by the late 1830’s. It also reflects the road they had travelled. Jacob emphasised, for example, that their opposition to the Hanoverian king was based in law, clearly reflecting Savigny’s lessons. These permeate his arguments: at the core of Jacob’s defence lies the proposition that the professors had sworn an oath on the constitution that the king wished to abolish. According to Jacob, oaths had always been sacred amongst the Germans. To support this, he quotes from one of the oldest sources available to him, the *Nibelungenlied*, “War sint die eide komen?”²⁵⁵ As they were sanctified by their antiquity, the king had no right to ask the professors to ignore their oaths.²⁵⁶ This was not a liberal stance, as Jacob is at pains to emphasise,

²⁵¹ *DuG*, vol. 1, p. 69.

²⁵² Grimm, J, “Über meine Entlassung”, pp. 34-63.

²⁵³ Lachmann refers to the Grimms’ situation in Kassel as their Patmos, and Jacob complained to Willems that they were feeling isolated. *Lachmann*, vol. 2, p. 695. See further Soeteman, C, “Ein bei de Vreese fehlender Brief von Jacob Grimm an Jan Frans Willems”. In *BGG*, vol. 6, p. 208.

²⁵⁴ Hennig, D. (ed), *Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm über ihre Entlassung*, p. 49.

²⁵⁵ Grimm, J, “Über meine Entlassung”, p. 35.

²⁵⁶ *Unbekannte*, p. 240.

“Die Liberalen verachten das Mittelalter und schreien wider Barbarei und Feudalismus ... Ich darf hier ein Wort mitsprechen, der ich gerade mein Leben an die Untersuchung unseres Mittelalters setzte”.²⁵⁷

Here then, is the juxtaposition: Jacob loves the Middle Ages, indeed reveres it, the liberals loathe it, *ergo* Jacob is no liberal. To the Grimms, liberalism was too narrow a creed to base opposition to a monarch on, the medieval past, on the other hand, was not.

A second element that pervades the work is Jacob’s great religiosity. His ancestors’ faith has already been alluded to, but it was his mother who really shaped Jacob’s religious outlook.²⁵⁸ Wilhelm shared this experience, as an early poem written in his *Stammbuch* by his mother shows. She emphasised the centrality of religion, exhorting him to keep “Religion recht fest im Herzen”.²⁵⁹ Lutheran tradition bequeathed a rather contradictory inheritance: on the one hand, it insisted on loyalty to authority, on the other, it exhorted believers to protest against what conscience tells is wrong. The very title given to their protest against the king’s actions – *Die Protestation der sieben Professoren vom 18. November 1837* – smacks of the Reformation, deliberately echoing Luther’s petition to the *Reichstag* of 1516. The call of conscience is heard loudly in *Über meine Entlassung*,

“Die untertänigst Unterzeichneten fühlen sich in ihrem Gewissen gedrungen”,

and, a little further,

“Die Unterzeichneten können sich bei aller schuldigen Ehrfurcht vor dem Königlichen Wort in ihrem Gewissen nicht davon überzeugen, daß das Staatsgrundgesetz um deshalb rechtswidrig errichtet, mithin ungültig sei”.²⁶⁰

Ultimately, though, the liberal element of their protest does shine through. As Jacob put it,

²⁵⁷ Grimm, J, “Über meine Entlassung”, pp. 41 and following.

²⁵⁸ *JGS*, pp. 5-6.

²⁵⁹ Seitz, G, *op.cit.* p. 30.

²⁶⁰ “Die Protestation der sieben Professoren vom 18. November 1837”. In *Bettine*, p. 339.

“der Nachfolger [started] seine Regierung damit anzutreten, daß er des königlichen Bruders und Vorfahren Werk ... umstürzt”²⁶¹

To Jacob and Wilhelm this liberalism may have been rooted in the German past, but it undeniably contained an element of the “aufklärerischen Naturrechtslehre”²⁶²

Strikingly, theirs was not a continental Enlightenment, but the liberal, British variant of Hume, with its emphasis on the civil rights of men. In addition, they turned to Kant to find confirmation of the notion of ‘Gewissensfreiheit’.²⁶³ All these were definitely liberal concepts, whatever the protestations of the brothers. Theirs was a conservative liberalism, or perhaps even more appropriate, a nationalist liberalism. *Über meine Entlassung* was thoroughly national, *Deutsch* in inspiration. As such, it forms part of their wider opus on German identity. What the Göttingen episode shows, is the extent to which their research was permeating all they believed in. Without wishing to diminish its liberal character, the opposition against the Hannoverian king was, as far as the brothers Grimm were concerned, as much a stance for the essence of a German identity, an essence they had grasped during their time at Marburg, and were now in the process of distilling.

Berlin: Germanisten, Revolution and the *Wörterbuch*.

When, after their dismissal from Göttingen, the brothers came to reside in Kassel once more, it would seem that their *Heimat* no longer held the same total command over their affections as it had done previously. An attempt to find employment at the University of Marburg foundered upon the opposition of the Kurfürst, Friedrich Wilhelm, who had replaced their old nemesis, Kurfürst Wilhelm II.²⁶⁴ As hostile to the brothers as his father, he resolutely refused to accept the application by the Hessian parliament to

²⁶¹ Grimm, J, “Über meine Entlassung”, p. 43.

²⁶² Hennig, D. (ed), *op.cit.* p. 57.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ He had become co-regent with his father in 1838.

appoint the brothers. Disappointment was tempered by realism. In the words of Wilhelm,

“Wir waren anfangs willens nach Marburg zu ziehen, aber bei der Gesinnung, die der Kurprinz äußert ... müssen wir erwarten daß uns der Aufenthalt auf der Universität versagt wird”.²⁶⁵

In contrast with their previous life in Hessen-Kassel, however, the brothers were not dependent on local work to earn a living. Even before their dismissal from Göttingen, a group of Leipzig academics, business people, and publishers, had started a fund in anticipation of the professors' losing their case. This was now used to keep the seven from starvation.²⁶⁶

The contact with the *Committee* had other, more far-reaching consequences. One of the associated publishers, the Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, offered the brothers the job of compiling a German Dictionary.²⁶⁷ This they did eventually accept, starting the work in Kassel. The Grimms soon realised that living in Kassel cut them off from the mainstream of German academia, and, before January 1838, Jacob wrote to Lachmann that he hoped to be given permission to lecture at the University of Berlin as a member of the *Akademie der Wissenschaften*. Lachmann, backed by Savigny, was reticent: both men realised that any such move would be construed as offensive to the Hannoverian king.²⁶⁸ In June 1840, the Prussian king died, and the crown prince, less concerned than his late father about offending his Hannoverian colleague, requested his *Kultusminister* Eichhorn to write to Jacob and Wilhelm to invite them to Berlin.²⁶⁹ The Grimms accepted in December. They were to go to Berlin as members of the *Akademie*, and continue their work on the dictionary. As there were no vacant positions at the university, the king would personally pay the brothers' salaries.

²⁶⁵ *Bettine*, pp. 33 and 35 n. 4.

²⁶⁶ Kirkness, A, *Geschichte des Deutschen Wörterbuchs 1838-1863*, p. 51.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 52.

²⁶⁸ *Lachmann*, vol. 2, p. 678.

²⁶⁹ Eichhorn may well have played a significant role in the decision, as he knew Jacob from as far back as 1815.

By now, the brothers had come to personify not just the liberal conscience of Germany, but, more aptly, they had come to be identified with German culture itself. In a remarkable poem by Anastasius Grün, Jacob is portrayed as a medieval champion of his people.²⁷⁰ The imagery used is striking. Jacob, “der stiere”, works at Göttingen, turning “vergilbt Papier [into] Urkunde deutscher Ehre”.²⁷¹ Even after his dismissal, Jacob remains Germany’s comfort,

“Noch steht die schönste Burg, der deutschen Sprache Veste,
O daß sie, deine Wartburg, dich bewirthe und schirm aufs Beste”.²⁷²

Dahlmann thought the poem “wahrhaft”; Jacob found it to contain “greuliche übertreibung”, but also “wahre natürliche gesinnung”.²⁷³ Grün’s was a widespread sentiment, which undoubtedly contributed much to the offer made by the Prussians. It was an offer which finally provided the comfort and security that the brothers had lacked for so long. Despite a lingering sense of *Heimweh*, they acknowledged that Prussian generosity had chased away the demons of financial uncertainty that had haunted them most of their adult lives.

The accession of the new king had been greeted with hope and expectation in Prussia, and, indeed, Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s first actions seemed to offer scope for liberal dreams. He also appeared to foster pan-German sentiment. Appearances were, however, deceptive. The monarch still regarded his power as divinely sanctioned, and would never countenance any challenge to it. Underneath the placid surface of *Biedermeier* Prussia, a chasm was forming that was to alter the character of the country and Germany forever. By April 1847, Jacob voiced the disillusion felt by so many in Prussia. Writing to Gervinus, he gave vent to his distress about the king’s failure to acknowledge his proper place in the political order.²⁷⁴ The dashed hopes of liberals all over Germany at the

²⁷⁰ This ‘heroic’ element of Jacob Grimm was noticed by Hunger, U, “Altdeutsche Studien als Sammeltätigkeit”. In J. Fohrmann and W. Voßkamp (eds), *Wissenschaft und Nation*, p. 89.

²⁷¹ Quoted in *DuG*, vol. 1, p. 105.

²⁷² *Ibid*, p. 106.

²⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 108; *Briefwechsel*, p. 565.

²⁷⁴ *DuG*, vol. 2, p. 92.

Prussian king's refusal to countenance a constitution in the spring of 1847, has correctly been seen as a prelude to the revolutions of the following year.

Throughout these pre-revolutionary years, the Grimms continued to display the mixture of scholarship and political *engagement* that had characterised their lives from the end of the French occupation onwards.²⁷⁵ Undoubtedly, the greatest achievement of the brothers during this period was their contribution to the first *Germanistenversammlung* of 1846. It brought together all those involved in research into German(ic) language and literature, those who were shaping German self-perception.²⁷⁶ Like the parliament of 1848, the scholars met in the capital of the *Deutsche Bund*, Frankfurt-am-Main.²⁷⁷ With their keen sense of history, the delegates convened in the *Kaisersaal*, the room that had been the symbolic focal point of the *Ancien Regime* during the later years of the Holy Roman Empire. Into its Gothic splendour, they carried the torch of liberal sentiment in Germany. Chairing the meeting was Jacob Grimm, and those present form a roll call of all those befriended by Jacob and Wilhelm over the past decades.²⁷⁸

It must have been an exciting event. Here, whilst the monarchs played politics, and whilst borders were still dividing the German people, sat the – self-appointed – guardians of the people's soul, gathered from all over the German-speaking world and beyond: here, for the first time, Germany was united. A certain air of self-importance surrounded the event; Jacob, in his address, stated that this was, “einer versammlung, in der so bedeutende männer vorragen”.²⁷⁹ The men had reason to regard themselves as central to the German nation: since the French period, academics and artists had come to

²⁷⁵ Herman Grimm, recalling his father during this time, wrote: “daß er die politischen Dinge mit Aufmerksamkeit verfolgte; wenn die Zeitung kam, *legte er sogleich die Feder nieder* und las sie genau durch”. Neumann, E, *op.cit.* p. 9. The italics are mine.

²⁷⁶ During the conference, Jacob elaborated on the word *Germanist* in his speech *Über den Namen der Germanisten*. He defined as a Germanist, “diejenigen, die sich mit der Erforschung der deutschen Sprache und Literatur befassen.” Meves, U, “Zur Namensgebung >Germanist<”. In J. Fohrmann and W. Voßkamp (eds), *Wissenschaftsgeschichte der Germanistik im 19. Jahrhundert*, pp. 27 and following.

²⁷⁷ The *Versammlung* has aptly been called the Vor-Parlament. Valentin, V, *Geschichte der deutschen Revolution von 1848-49*, p. 372.

²⁷⁸ Hinton Thomas, R, *Liberalism, Nationalism and the German Intellectuals (1822-1847)*, p. 84.

²⁷⁹ Grimm, J, “Über die wechselseitigen beziehungen und die verbindung der drei in der versammlung vertretenen wissenschaften”. In *JGKS*, vol. 7, p. 556.

embody Germany, and in no discipline was this truer than in the *Germanistik*.²⁸⁰ In the words of Franke,

“die damalige Germanistik [was] mit der geistigen Entwicklung Deutschlands verknüpft”.²⁸¹

It was a “geistigen Entwicklung” that managed to combine a utopian vision for a German identity, with an equally utopian idea for a German constitution. Jacob’s address made sure that nobody could misunderstand this fact. He stated,

“ein volk ist der inbegriff von menschen, welche dieselbe sprache reden”.²⁸²

This was surely the most political statement possible in the context of Germany in the 1840’s. He also stressed the crucial relationship between the three *Wissenschaften* represented at the conference, namely German *recht*, German *geschichte* and German *sprachforschung*.²⁸³ They were subjects he had made his own. The toast to Jacob, proposed by *Oberappellationsrat* Pauli, reveals just to what extent, and is worth quoting in full,

“Dem mann, um den deutsche sprache, deutsche geschichte und deutsche rechtswissenschaft sich streiten, welche von ihnen ihm am meisten danke, dem manne, der die deutsche grammatik zuerst wissenschaftlich begründet, der deutschen geschichte ihren tiefen mythischen hintergrund gegeben, die poesie in das deutsche recht eingeführt und dieses in seinen tiefsten tiefen erhellt hat”.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁰ Jacob was *not* the founder of the discipline, as is sometimes suggested. Magdalene Lutz-Henzel stresses that *Germanistik* was not founded by one person but by the co-operation of four: Georg Friedrich Benecke, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm and Karl Lachmann. Lutz-Henzel, M, *op.cit.* p. 11. See also Lämmert, E, “Germanistik – eine deutsche Wissenschaft”. In E. Lämmert et al, *Germanistik – eine deutsche Wissenschaft*, pp. 7-41.

²⁸¹ Franke, C, *Die Brüder Grimm*, p. 125.

²⁸² Grimm, J, “Über die wechselseitigen beziehungen”, p. 557.

²⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 556.

²⁸⁴ Quoted in Wyss, U, *Die wilde Philologie*, p. 264. Jacob, after having listened to the eulogy, rose to reply, but was overcome by emotion and sank back into the arms of Dahlmann, shouting, “ich liebe mein vaterland, mein vaterland ist mir immer über alles gegangen”.

The political problem that was to dominate the *Germanistenversammlung* was that perennial thorn of German nineteenth-century, pre-imperial politics: Schleswig-Holstein. It was here, in that part of the German nation controlled by the Danish monarchy, that the sensitivities of the *Germanisten* were most acutely touched. Here were German-speakers unable to exercise political control, their culture and language under pressure from a foreign ruler. As such, the situation could not fail to attract the attention of men whose lives were lived to promote and protect their language and culture; the Danes were quickly equated with the painful memory of the French occupation at the beginning of the century.

The *Germanistenversammlung* was the first “gesamtdeutsche” platform of the post-Napoleonic era, and it set the agenda for the years that followed.²⁸⁵ A year later, this agenda was re-emphasised at Lübeck, where a second meeting took place. The themes were by now inevitable: cultural repression – in particular in Schleswig-Holstein – the exaltation of German language and culture, and the celebration of the German past, combined with the liberal wish for constitutional reform. It was a potent mixture of national sentimentality and anger, which would soon explode onto the German streets. In all of this, both Jacob and Wilhelm played a significant role, although, typically, we know more about Jacob. The elder brother chaired both meetings, and as such was instrumental in shaping the agenda outlined above. As has become clear, Jacob held a utopian vision, in the shaping of which his profession was to play a central role. To Jacob Grimm the *Germanistenversammlung* was the start of a future in which,

“nicht flüsse, nicht berge völkerscheide bilden, sondern dasz einem volk, das über berge und ströme gedrungen ist, seine eigne sprache allein die grenze setzen kann”.²⁸⁶

One can almost hear the echoes of Hoffmann von Fallersleben’s *Lied der Deutschen*, with its emphasis on a united Germany across natural features.²⁸⁷ Cultural unification, the principle behind all their works, was proclaimed on the stage in Frankfurt-am-Main

²⁸⁵ Kamp, N, *op.cit.* p. 136.

²⁸⁶ Grimm, J, “Über die wechselseitigen beziehungen”, p. 557.

²⁸⁷ See Appendix Two, p. 305.

and Lübeck, long before political unity became a reality at Versailles in 1871. With a keen awareness of timing, Jacob urged delegates to be patriotic: here, “darf nur deutsches, und nichts undeutsches geschehen!”.²⁸⁸ The two *Germanistenversammlungen* were the apogee of the Grimms’ liberalism, the culmination of a process, which, as seen, started at the court of Jerome Bonaparte in Kassel. The Revolution of 1848 was to test their liberalism to destruction, as political sentiment clashed with culturally-fed notions of authority. It would do nothing to undermine the central certainty of their lives: the principle of German cultural unity was to survive the failure of the Revolution.

Whilst the Grimms were deeply involved in the *Germanistenversammlungen*, the German lands were lurching towards revolution. Sparked off by events in Paris in February 1848, the German revolutions were rooted in a variety of discontents.²⁸⁹ Into a lethal mixture of economic woe and social discontent were mixed the Siamese twins of liberal constitutional agitation and German national sentiment. The revolution reached Berlin and the brothers Grimm on 6 March 1848. On that day, workers demonstrated against poor economic circumstances, taking their cue from similar demonstrations in Köln three days earlier. The king’s advisors hoped to prevent a working-class alliance with the bourgeoisie, and tried to persuade him to espouse German unification and give in to other liberal demands. Twelve days later, the king proclaimed his intention to create a federal Germany. At the same time, he concentrated loyal armed units in his capital, a move resented by those taking part in the demonstrations. This led to a clash between army and protesters, in which several protesters were killed. Such was the revulsion this caused, that, morally, the army and Prussia’s conservative faction had been defeated.

Unable to withstand further liberal pressure, Friedrich Wilhelm capitulated. On 21 March, he issued the proclamation *An Mein Volk und an die deutsche Nation!*, in which he proclaimed the dissolution of his kingdom in a wider, unified Germany.²⁹⁰ At the same time, Prussia, notwithstanding its theoretical abolition, received a cabinet of

²⁸⁸ Grimm, J, “Über die wechselseitigen beziehungen”, p. 563.

²⁸⁹ For this see Eyck, F. (ed), *The Revolutions of 1848-49*.

²⁹⁰ For the full text see Görtemaker, M, *op.cit.* p. 92.

Liberal ministers. For the brothers Grimm, all they had believed in for so long was finally vindicated. Such was their delight, that Wilhelm could even convince himself that the king had readily agreed to changes,

“Nun ist die neue Verfassung gegeben ... Alles ist von ihm [the king] ausgegangen”.²⁹¹

It must have seemed as if their utopian Germany was about to become a reality. The events in Prussia were mirrored in almost every German state, including the German-speaking lands of the house of Habsburg. By 31 March, representatives from all states of the *Bund* were meeting in the Paulskirche in Frankfurt-am-Main to discuss a German-wide parliament or *Nationalversammlung*. They decided to call elections, which were duly held. This resulted, unsurprising in the light of the strict limitations on the franchise, in a very moderate parliament, dominated by centre-right liberals.²⁹²

In the parliament, most of the academic delegates grouped together in a centre-right alliance, which called itself the *Casinopartei*.²⁹³ Numerically the strongest faction in the parliament, it furnished its president, Heinrich von Gagern. It was as a member of the *Casinopartei* that Jacob Grimm took his seat. It mirrored his preference for a constitutional monarchy, with a limited franchise. Like Jacob, it also espoused the *Kleindeutsche Lösung*.²⁹⁴ That he subscribed to the *Kleindeutsche Lösung* seems odd at first. With Wilhelm, he had spent his life trying to prove the intrinsic cultural unity of *all* German-speakers, but he did not equate this with *political* unity. His closeness to the Prussian king must have contributed to this, as Prussia had no wish to be submerged in a Habsburg dominated state. His strongly-developed sense of the limitations of the possible was equally important. Jacob's mixed stance at Frankfurt reflects the constituency that he represented. Mülheim an der Ruhr, although a Prussian constituency, was situated in the heart of the traditionally more radical Rhineland. It was here that the French occupation had lasted the longest, and left its deepest trace. The

²⁹¹ Quoted in Seitz, G, *op.cit.* p. 148.

²⁹² Blackbourn, D, *op.cit.* p. 149.

²⁹³ Görtemaker, M, *op.cit.* p. 100. Its membership came predominantly from northern Germany.

²⁹⁴ This favoured the exclusion of German-speaking lands under Habsburg rule from a new German state.

electorate knew of Jacob's politics from his days at Göttingen, and the older, more educated, may even have remembered Jacob's position in the Bonapartist Westphalian kingdom. Nor could they have been in any doubt regarding his devotion to the monarchy. Jacob declared his political position in a letter of acceptance to his constituency upon his election, in which he wrote,

“Ich bin für ein freies einiges Vaterland unter einem mächtigen Könige und gegen alle republikanischen Gelüste”.²⁹⁵

Jacob took his task as deputy seriously. “The stenographic record of meetings and motions, as well as contemporary paintings, show Jacob in the midst of debates”.²⁹⁶ In the chamber, he voiced his opposition to *Knechtschaft*, and supported civil liberties. His speeches at Frankfurt show just how much he had learned from his former Bonapartist master. Like the Bonapartes, Jacob had a distinctly centrist view of the French Revolution's *Liberté, Egalité* and *Fraternité*. Whilst debating the German constitution, Jacob dismissed the latter two concepts as impractical and untrue, with only freedom having any reality in law. The concept of “freiheit [was to Jacob] ein so heiliger und wichtiger” that it overrode all, and should be the first article of any constitution.²⁹⁷ Once more one catches echoes of Savigny and the Historical School: freedom, that central plank of Romantic sensibilities, could be traced back to the Germans in Tacitus' *Germania*.²⁹⁸

Within a few months of his election to the parliament, disenchantment set in. Just as when he was *Legationssekretär* in Vienna during the Congress, Jacob proved to have no stomach for the processes of politics. This time it was not the machinations of ministers, but party political strife that annoyed him. In a letter to Wilhelm's wife, Dortchen, for

²⁹⁵ Kamp, N, *op.cit.* p. 138. He re-emphasised this point in a letter to Wilhelm, sent from Frankfurt in July. *Briefwechsel*, p. 745.

²⁹⁶ *Encyclopedia of German Literature*, vol. 1, 2000 ed. S.v. “Jacob Grimm 1785-1863”, and “Wilhelm Grimm 1786-1859”, by M. Bachem.

²⁹⁷ Grimm, J, “[Über Grundrechte]”. In *JGKS*, vol. 8.1, pp. 438-9. See further Denecke, L. (ed), *Jacob Grimm – Antrag zur Beratung über die Grundrechte des deutschen Volkes in der Nationalversammlung zu Frankfurt am Main 1848*.

²⁹⁸ For the centrality of *Freiheit* in the vocabulary of nationalist authors, see below, chapter 4, pp. 235, 253, 277 and *passim*.

example, he complained of having to listen to speeches by members of the radical party under Hecker.²⁹⁹ There were limits to Jacob's sense of democracy. What finished the little enthusiasm Jacob had left for the parliamentary process at Frankfurt was the crisis in Schleswig-Holstein. In April 1848, Prussia had come to the aid of a parliament convoked in Schleswig-Holstein by its German-speaking population. Under intense pressure from the great powers, however, Prussia halted its armed incursion on 16 September, and agreed to a truce at Malmö. This to the dismay of Jacob, who wrote to Wilhelm that the truce,

“brinkt die ganze deutsche einheit in grösste gefahr”.³⁰⁰

The parliament at Frankfurt, ignored on this occasion as on so many others, was thrown into chaos by the decision. At first, the radicals managed to win a vote against acceptance of the truce, but pressure was brought to bear by, amongst others, the provisional German government, and parliament reconsidered the question. According to Jacob Grimm, it debated the issue, “in einer von 9 uhr morgens bis 8 uhr abends ununterbrochen währenden sitzung”, after which the majority voted to accept the truce.³⁰¹ For Jacob the vote ended the parliament's relevance, and, on 17 September, a day after, he decided to leave Frankfurt.³⁰²

The Schleswig-Holstein crisis sheds a sharp light on the dangerous flammability of nationalist sentiments. The revolutions of 1848, and, above all, the perpetual crisis in Schleswig-Holstein, mark two turning points in the Grimms' national feelings. Passions were aroused, and tolerance went. Jacob, who had been happy to co-operate with the Serbian cultural nationalist, Vuk Karadžić, and who had drawn much on Scandinavia for information about a Germanic cultural past, now failed to see why the Danes disliked the Germans so much.³⁰³ There is not even a hint of the rights of the Danes of Schleswig,

²⁹⁹ *Unbekannte*, p. 380.

³⁰⁰ *Briefwechsel*, p. 764.

³⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 769.

³⁰² Bech, H, “Jacob Grimm und die Frankfurter Nationalversammlung”, *Euphorion*, vol. 61, 1967, pp. 359-60.

³⁰³ Bojić, V, *Jacob Grimm und Vuk Karadžić*.

just hurt at the perceived injustice of the past; not even a shared Germanic culture could prevent nationalist feelings from bubbling over.³⁰⁴

Jacob's lack of sympathy for the Danes was not an isolated case. The Italians, too, when crossing German nationalist aspirations, could not expect any understanding. In the Radetzky album, which commemorated the victory of the Habsburgs over the Italian part of the 1848 revolution, he wrote,

“Welchem Deutschen hätte nicht Radetzky's sieg über die Welschen froh das herz bewegt?”³⁰⁵

A remarkable sentiment, as these ‘Welschen’ had fought against the same Habsburgs as many German revolutionaries. Their cardinal sin was that they had laid claim to land in the southern Tyrol, where there were German-speakers. If 1848 marked the demise of the liberal dream, it also heralded a new, less respectful and certainly less tolerant nationalism: the utopia had encountered its inherent contradictions. The issue of Schleswig-Holstein was to haunt Jacob for the rest of his life, was indeed the only overtly political topic that continued to exercise him after 1849. In October 1850, he took yet another step towards a more intolerant nationalism. In an article in the *Constitutionelle zeitung*, he made the link that would become such a useful tool for politicians wishing to exploit nationalistic feelings everywhere: that between ‘real’ Germans, and those who did not take their nationality seriously enough, and thereby became ‘bad citizens’. Jacob's words, “An der schleswigholsteinschen sache gerechtigkeit zweifelt ein *guter* Deutscher nicht”, were to cast long shadows.³⁰⁶

For once, Jacob had timed leaving Frankfurt immaculately: within four days, the final revolution in Vienna was suppressed by troops loyal to the Habsburgs, heralding the beginning of the end of the revolutions in the *Deutsche Bund*. Soon the parliament in Frankfurt would sink into quiet oblivion. Its failure signalled the end of the political

³⁰⁴ Here there are echoes of Jan Frans Willems' attitude towards the Frisians. See above, chapter one, pp. 38-9.

³⁰⁵ Grimm, J, “[Aus dem Radetzky-Album]”. In *JGKS*, vol. 8.1, p. 455.

³⁰⁶ Grimm, J, “Erklärung”. In *JGKS*, vol. 8.1, p. 451. The italics are mine.

lives of the brothers Grimm. It had broken their liberal dreams of a united Germany with a liberal constitution, a utopian vision that, incidentally, also shattered on the cliff of their own strongly-held monarchism. That in the end the princes would oppose any German unification was evident: it was this group whose livelihood was threatened the most by a unified Germany. At a final count, the failure of Frankfurt meant more than merely the postponement of German unification. By failing to answer the question of how German ethnicity related to German nationality, it sowed the seeds of the all-encompassing drama of the Second World War. It had proven to be a chimera, an illusion, perhaps best summed up by Karl Marx in a letter to the New York Tribune in 1852, in which he described the whole affair as “the Parliament of an imaginary country”.³⁰⁷ Famously, all nations are imaginary entities, but they still require a measure of reality on the ground: the Frankfurt parliament failed to secure such a reality.

Jacob’s affiliation to the *Casinopartei* may explain why, upon his return to Berlin, he did not face any repercussions from his sojourn in Frankfurt. It is unlikely that the king would have punished one who had so loyally supported his views. The brothers can hardly have savoured their experiences of the years 1848 and 1849, yet, in a strange way, it did not affect their work significantly. German cultural, as opposed to political unity, did not depend on kings and armies. Nonetheless, a sense of defeat creeps into their correspondence after 1849. In 1851, Jacob described his life in rather dejected terms,

“Der größte Teil meines Lebens war mit frohen Hoffnungen erfüllt und es tut wehe, ihnen am Schluß desselben entsagen zu müssen”.³⁰⁸

Their passion for politics, which had constituted such a large part of their lives, almost petered out. It would be wrong, however, to seek their legacy in this field anyhow. Politics was not their main preoccupation.

³⁰⁷ Marx, K, “The Frankfort National Assembly”. In E. Marx Aveling (ed), *Karl Marx – Revolution and Counter-Revolution or Germany in 1848*, p. 56. It is interesting to note that Jacob never once mentions Marx or Engels in his letters or works but that they both use his works extensively. Kolb, H, “Karl Marx und Jacob Grimm”, *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 121, vol. 206, (1970), pp. 102 and following.

³⁰⁸ Gerstner, H, *op.cit.* p. 273.

Academically, the latter years of the lives of the brothers Grimm were dominated by their work on the *Wörterbuch*. It was to be the final major work of their oeuvre, in which they set out to put flesh on the bones laid bare in the *Grammatik*. Each entry is drenched in that central theme of all the brothers' works, the search for the original, the *Urgell*, and its implications for the present. Jacob spelled it out in his introduction to the *Wörterbuch*, where he wrote,

“jedes wort hat seine geschichte und lebt sein eigenes leben”.³⁰⁹

Through the *Wörterbuch*, the brothers had managed to portray, “die Geschichte der Sprache als Geistesgeschichte am Beispiel des Wortschatzes”.³¹⁰ The aim was to further a sense of German unity and the tools to accomplish this were to be found in the past, living in words. Jacob's triumphant sentence from the *Wörterbuch*, “nicht länger verschlossen liegen die quellen unserer sprache”, makes it clear, that to his mind, all could find the essence of their identity in the work.³¹¹

In conception, the *Wörterbuch* was remarkably democratic, a trait not normally found in the Grimms. Through its publication, the brothers hoped to establish, “ein heiligthum der sprache”, to which the dictionary was to be the door.³¹² Through their labour, Jacob and Wilhelm would, “allen zu ihm [der sprache] den eingang offen halten”.³¹³ One gets a sense that the conservative brothers had turned a corner whilst working on the *Wörterbuch*, probably influenced by their experiences during the 1848 Revolutions. It was a logical step to argue that if language characterises German ethnicity, then all those who spoke the language were part of that ethnicity, of that nation. If German unity was to be grounded in its language, then that language should be available to all. The *Wörterbuch* was to embrace the totality of the German *Volk*.

³⁰⁹ Grimm, J, *Deutsche Grammatik*, vol. 1, p. xiv.

³¹⁰ *Reallexikon der Germanischen Alterthumskunde*, vol. 13, S.v. “Grimm, Jacob und Wilhelm”, by E. Ebel.

³¹¹ Grimm, J. and W, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 1, column 7.

³¹² *Ibid*, column 12.

³¹³ *Ibid*.

The failure of the Revolutions had ended the Grimms' hope for political unity. In the *Wörterbuch*, one may see the true nature of their response. As ever when political circumstances interfered with the national dream, nineteenth-century nationalist thinkers could fall back upon that well-established maxim that it was cultural unity that mattered most. This is exactly the political motivation behind the *Wörterbuch*: it answered a practical need, and it certainly formed part of the wider intentions of the Grimms' oeuvre, but it cannot and should not be isolated from the period during which the Grimms were working on it. Political unity may have been thwarted: cultural unity was still very much within the realm of the possible.

The brothers clearly considered the act of writing the *Wörterbuch* to be an act of patriotism, to be offered, "auf des geliebten vaterlandes altar".³¹⁴ *Vaterland* was, in those post-revolutionary days, an even more ambiguous concept than it had been before 1848.³¹⁵ Past experience had shifted the matrix of the *Vaterland* away from the geographical onto the ethnic. That the brothers concurred with this shift – which only confirmed their own thinking since the early years of the century – may be seen in the introduction to the *Wörterbuch*, where they called the work, "ein hehres denkmal des volks".³¹⁶ The demise of German unity had turned the *Vaterland* into something more profound, almost mystical, as the phrase "vaterlandes altar" indicates.³¹⁷

This increasingly religious and even mystical element of the national identity is further attested to by Jacob's introduction to the *Wörterbuch*. There he wrote of a growing, "empfänglichkeit des volks für seine muttersprache", which in his mind was coupled with an "untilgbare begierde nach seiner [the *vaterland*] festeren einigung".³¹⁸ In the *Grammatik*, he had argued that language created an unfathomable and unbreakable bond between the speaker and his *Heimat*. Here, the same language, through a similarly unfathomable process, caused an unstoppable desire for national unity. To that unity, the

³¹⁴ Ibid, column 2.

³¹⁵ The first volume of the work, with the introduction, came out in 1854.

³¹⁶ Grimm, J. and W, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 1, column 12. The italics are mine.

³¹⁷ A sense of a sacrificial labour, even of a sacrificial life, appealed to the Grimms, and can be found as far back as 1838, when, in a letter to John Mitchell Kemble, Jacob wrote that, "es ist die Frucht unsrer Verbannung, die wir auf den Altar des Vaterlands niederlegen". Gerstner, H, *op.cit.* p. 220.

³¹⁸ Grimm, J. and W, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 1, column 3.

Wörterbuch made an indelible contribution. It was also an unequivocally ethnic unity. Returning to *the* theme of early nineteenth century nationalists, Jacob and Wilhelm proclaimed the supremacy of language in the identity of a people,

“was haben wir denn gemeinsames als unsere sprache und literatur?”³¹⁹

The importance of the failure to create concrete political unity in Frankfurt is diminished in this light, for the nation’s “gebiet und umfang folgen aus dem der deutschen sprache selbst”.³²⁰ The true extent of Germany, then, is not to be determined by political boundaries; it is the nation that is important, not the state. The Grimms also openly aired their opinion that it was impossible to unite all Germans in a political sense. The nation included *all* the widely-scattered German-speakers, those who live,

“über den Rhein in das Elsass, bis nach Lothringen, über die Eider tief in Schleswigholstein, am ostseegestade hin nach Riga und Reval, jenseits der Karpathen in Siebenbürgens altsakisches gebiet. auch zu euch, ihr ausgewanderten Deutschen ...”.³²¹

The inclusion of the latter, of the “ausgewanderten Deutschen”, is particularly significant. The list of those to whom the *Wörterbuch* was addressed leaves little scope for doubt as to where German unity was to be found.

Essentially, the Grimms had now concluded their enormous task: they had provided all the required markers on the road to a German identity. Through the fairytales, they had suggested an ideal landscape and a utopian social order. In their various works on mythology, the reader could discover the ideal German man or woman, the heroic icon. The *Grammatik* had placed language at the heart of German identity, and had proven its antiquity. The *Wörterbuch*, finally, made this language available to all, providing every

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid, column 14. Jacob is referring to the scope of the *Wörterbuch*, but as this was to encompass all of the German language, the implication is clear.

³²¹ Ibid, column 68.

German with the provenance of the one element they all shared, the words by which they communicated. As such, it became a flagship of German national identity.³²²

The political unity of the old *Reich* may not have been restored, but through their incredible intellectual achievement, the Grimms *had* ‘restored’ – or rather ‘reconstructed’ – a German cultural identity, centred on the lessons of the past as contained in German language and literature. In the process, they and their fellow travellers had elevated a love for their national culture onto a higher level. German national identity had almost become akin to a religion. Here one may detect a marked divergence from the situation in Flanders. In both countries nationalists placed much emphasis on language – they both agreed with the slogan *de Tael is Gantsch het Volk* – but in Flanders that had to be qualified somehow. For many, indeed for most, this qualification came in the form of the ardent Roman Catholicism of the Flemings, and this denied a Flemish national identity the quasi-religious character that came to characterise the idea in Germany. Jan Frans Willems, for one, found himself in hot water when he tried to claim divine blessing on his language.³²³ One has only to turn to Jacob’s mystical belief in the power of the German language to find evidence that in Germany the opposite was the case.

A last word should go to Ludwig Uhland, Jacob’s co-parliamentarian at Frankfurt, and fellow *Germanist*. One of his poems sums up the sacrosanct nature that German ethnicity had come to have, as the *Germanisten*, with Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm at their head, slowly constructed its parameters.

“Wenn so der Sprache Mehrung
Verbeßerung und Klärung
Bei dir von statten geht,
So wird man sagen müssen,
*Daß, wo sich Deutsche grüßen,
Der Athem Gottes weht*”.³²⁴

³²² Bahr, J, “Das Deutsche Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm. Stationen seiner inneren Geschichte”, *Sprachwissenschaft*, vol. 9, no. 4, (1984), pp. 393-4

³²³ Willems, J.F, *Verhandeling*, vol. 1, p. 2. See above, chapter one, p. 40.

³²⁴ Uhland, L, “Die deutsche Sprachgesellschaft”. In L. Uhland, *Uhlands Gedichte und Dramen*, vol. 1, p. 122. The italics are mine.

Epilogue.

Towards the end of their lives, the brothers had already become legendary figures.³²⁵ By the 1850's, it appeared that their political hopes for a united Germany had come to nothing, betrayed by the very class they had always held in such high esteem, the monarchs. In the years between the birth of the brothers in Hessen, and their last days in Berlin, however, something much bigger had happened than the failure of political unification. Through their works, Jacob and Wilhelm had contributed more than anyone else to the mental unification of Germans: they had been the engines of a cultural revolution. A generation had been raised on their *Märchen*, could conjure up idealised images of their German landscape, saw the German heroes of their *Sagen* as the ideal, and thought of the past as a *German* past. In addition, they constructed the language they spoke around the rules laid down by Jacob, and were growing used to reaching for the first volumes of the *Wörterbuch* when in doubt about the meaning of a word. It had become difficult to be German – at least if one defines being a German through language – without being influenced by the brothers Grimm.

It is the central tragedy of Jacob's life that he failed to perceive all this. His last years were embittered by the political failures of 1849 with regard to German unity, in Schleswig-Holstein, and on the constitutional field. Famous is his letter to Georg Waitz from 1858, the year before he was to lose Wilhelm,

“Wie oft muß einem das traurige Schicksal unsers Vaterlandes in den Sinn kommen und auf das Herz fallen und das Leben verbittern”.³²⁶

The experiences and dashed hope were too much. Jacob, and presumably Wilhelm, were defeated by the political reality of their old age. Work did continue, but even there the old enjoyment was fading. Here again is Jacob, this time writing to the librarian Lorenz Diefenbach,

³²⁵ See for example the letters from Gervinus and Dahlmann. *DuG*, vol. 1, p. 498; vol. 2, p. 11.

³²⁶ Quoted in Denecke, L, *Jacob Grimm und sein Brüder Wilhelm*, p. 142.

“Meine eignen Arbeiten haben ununterbrochen Fortgang, doch bei steigendem Alter etwas mühsamer und schwerer in einer auf uns allen lastenden Lage des Vaterlandes”.³²⁷

Then the inevitable happened. On 16 December 1859, Wilhelm died. Alone for the first time in his life, Jacob wrote with resignation to professor Weigand in Gießen,

“Was hab ich Ihnen zu melden! Gestern ... ist Wilhelm, die Hälfte von mir, gestorben”.³²⁸

One half had died indeed. Jacob was to survive his brother by nearly four years, the longest they had ever been apart. Little has come down to us from these final days, but by then their legacy to the German national identity had been well established. In time, it was to be celebrated, perverted, and finally celebrated and commercialised once more.³²⁹ Subsequent interpretations tell us little about what motivated the Grimms. As with Jan Frans Willems, indeed as with all the early nationalists of the nineteenth century, they were not interested in dominating others. Their purpose was to rescue their own culture, to celebrate their peoples' achievements. That, in the long run, this would cause conflict between Europe's cultures, as the inherent contradictions of nationalist aspirations became apparent, could not have been foreseen at this early date.

In the year of his death, Jacob wrote a fitting epitaph to himself and, unintentionally, to his brother. It sums up perfectly what their lives and work had all been about,

“Alle meine arbeiten wandten sich auf das vaterland, von dessen boden sie auch ihre kraft entnahmen, mir schwebte unbewust und bewusst vor, dasz es uns am sichersten führe und leite, dasz wir ihm zuerst verpflichtet seien”.³³⁰

Little did he realise just how much he and Wilhelm had given shape to that *vaterland*.

³²⁷ Gerstner, H, *op.cit.* p. 273.

³²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 294.

³²⁹ For the enduring legacy of the brothers Grimm, see, for example, the current brochures produced by the tourist information in Kassel: *Deutsche Märchenstraße. Auf den Spuren der Brüder Grimm*; and *Auf den Spuren der Brüder Grimm. Eine Reise auf der Deutschen Märchenstraße*. See also their website at www.deutsche-maerchenstrasse.de.

³³⁰ Grimm, J, “Weisthümer”. In *JGKS*, vol. 5, p. 452.

3. The Struggle for Flanders' Soul: Albrecht Rodenbach and *Het Lied der Vlaamsche Zonen*.

Albrecht Rodenbach (1856-1880)



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3. The Struggle for Flanders' Soul: Albrecht Rodenbach and *Het Lied der Vlaamsche Zonen*.

A Wayward Life.

The model of the 'nationalist' writer as it has emerged from the previous chapters is one of a brilliant academic, constructing a national identity by reconstructing the past to create a new, 'true' present. In addition, this writer was very much an establishment figure, whose opposition to the prevailing system was, usually, covert. The reality was, of course, far more complex than this. Notwithstanding their leadership and prominence, neither Jan Frans Willems, nor the brothers Grimm can be described as charismatic. The same applies to their works, which, with the exception of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, lacked a genuine and widespread public appeal. Targeted at an intellectual audience, these works inferred rather than prescribed the national ideal. Like their authors, these books and articles did their work in relatively small circles, from where they gradually percolated down to a wider audience.

For an additional and quite different model one has to look elsewhere: to the Romantic poets. These men *were* charismatic; cast in the Byronesque mould they strode the national scene with studied theatricality, embodying their own version of the national idea. In addition to their charisma, they also wrote iconic works, which did reach large audiences. In combination, these men and their writings form the opposite of the model studied in the previous two chapters. The Romantic poets contributed three essential elements to the idea of a national identity. The most conspicuous of these was their lack of compromise, a word that simply did not appear in their dictionaries. Their vision of the national was cast in stone, and no vulgar political necessity could alter this. Even when it was abundantly clear that their ideals stood little chance of ever being realised, even when their convictions jarred with those of other nationalists, indeed, even when they were being persecuted by the state, they stood firm in their belief.

Not only did they stand firm, they also did this in the most public fashion. This could have an adverse effect on their vision for the national identity of their people. At times, they espoused a national 'self' that clashed with the aspirations of their compatriots. This is one aspect that will need to be examined. Too much of the theoretical literature on nationalism obscures these failed and only partially successful visions. It is usually implied that national identities developed along almost predestined lines: it is started off by an external impulse coupled with vast internal changes, and in the ensuing confusion, a new sense of the communal self appeared.¹ Rarely is there much attention paid to the vagaries that accompany this process, to the *cul-de-sacs* that are so noticeable in case-studies such as these. The ambiguities of the process in Flanders and Germany are neatly highlighted by the poets Rodenbach and Hoffmann von Fallersleben, whose lives and careers throw a sharp light on the quirkiness of the growth of national identities, a focus one does not get from Willems and the Grimms.

The second major contribution to the development of a national identity in Flanders and Germany by the Romantic poets is to be found in the wide appeal of their works; not for them the internalised debate of the philologists. Their appeal burst the confines of academia and reached out to a wider audience, and their poems, set to music, became the battle hymns of national movements, providing a musical and sentimental accompaniment to the aspirations of generations. As such, their works transcended barriers of class and education, as the case of Verdi in Italy proves.² That poets were aware of this fact is attested by Prudens van Duyse, who wrote in 1840,

“Wil hy [the poet] verder tot alle standen der maetschappy spreken, hy zingt een *Volklied*”.³

The poetry – as well as the plays and prose – of these men was not just significant because of its reach. It also contained clear, unambiguous messages on what the ideals of the nation ought to be, what the nation should look like. In this, the poets

¹ Q.v. the three stages of nationalism put forward by Minogue, K.R, *Nationalism*, p. 25 and passim.

² Verdi may be considered to be a poet [librettist] as well as musician.

³ Duyse, P. van, *Vaderlandsche Poëzy*, vol. 1, p. 6. The italics are mine. This remark becomes even more salient when one recalls that Rodenbach read Van Duyse's works. Baur, F, “Albrecht Rodenbach's 'Wahrheit und Dichtung aus meinem Leben'”, *KVATL*, vol. 10, no. 5, (1956), p. 61.

differed considerably from the philologists.⁴ For the first time, one has the opportunity to examine in what guise Flanders or Germany were conceived by nineteenth-century writers. Aspirations, sentiments, and ideals contained in this poetry can all be examined to determine the impact of the Romantic poets on the development of national identities in Flanders and Germany.

The final and arguably most important contribution of the Romantic poets to the development of national identities during the nineteenth century is to be found in their 'myth'. Following the model created by Lord Byron, the Romantic poets lived theatrical lives, through which they gave shape to what they believed to be the essential characteristics of their respective peoples. This 'life-as-art' unsurprisingly gave rise to reputations which soon towered above the 'real' poets: they were consumed by their image. In these lives, contemporaries recognised what they believed to be the central characteristics of their people: both Rodenbach and Hoffmann von Fallersleben came to be seen as quintessentially Flemish and German. Their lack of compromise and iconic poetry, combined with their iconic lives, produced a heady cocktail on which the nationalist audience could get drunk: they furnished the myth of a national identity with the myth of a national figure.

Albrecht Rodenbach's waywardness was the chief characteristic of his life. He seems to have relished his role. Uncompromising, highly individualistic, independent-minded, and above all theatrical, he embodied the nineteenth-century ideal of the romantic nationalist poet. Born in 1856, Rodenbach came into the world when most of the century's Byronesque poets had already died.⁵ Lord Byron himself, the Czech poet Macha, the self-destructive Shelley, they had all passed from the scene, whilst in Germany Heine had died in the same year as Rodenbach was born, and Hoffmann von Fallersleben had become less prominent. Rodenbach, then, was a latecomer. However, he also worked in a country where the impact of a Byronesque life, and indeed of iconic poetry, on the development of a national identity could still be immediate in a way that was no longer the case in most of Europe. The very fact

⁴ The creation of a national landscape and the national characteristics in the works of the brothers Grimm has already been examined, but the poets went well beyond this. Theirs was an intentional, unambiguous creation. See above, chapter two, p. 118-20.

⁵ For a recent biography on Rodenbach, see *Vanlandschoot*.

that Flanders as a concept was still waiting to be invented as late as 1830 speaks volumes in this respect. Ten years before Rodenbach was born, the Antwerpen poet Theodoor van Ryswyck, writing about folksongs, could still argue that it was,

“jammer ... dat hier nooit iemand dit vak met byval beoefend heeft; het is een der sterkste middelen om den geest van nationaliteit by een volk te doen ontvlammen ... De Duitschers weten wat de gezangen van Uhland en Körner by hun te wege gebragt hebben ..”.⁶

Ten years later it was still the case that songs and poetry played a relatively minor role in the growth of a Flemish national awareness. Rodenbach was to change all this.

Appropriately, his family originated in Germany, the land which provided Van Ryswyck with his exemplar. Albrecht's ancestor, Ferdinand Rodenbach, came from the Rhineland to the southern Netherlands in the wake of the new Austrian Habsburg government in the early eighteenth century, serving in the army.⁷ Married into local stock, he set up home in Roeselare in southern Flanders, where the family would remain. Here they became prominent, but their importance never transcended their locality. This would change with the Belgian Revolution of 1830, in which Albrecht's immediate ancestors played an important role. Paradoxically, this upward step on the social ladder took place whilst fighting on the side of the rebels! The man who was to mould Flemish identity like no other writer since Conscience was thus born into a Belgicist milieu.⁸ By 1830, the Rodenbach family had become completely acculturated, speaking French, and thoroughly infatuated with French culture. Three of its members had served in the Napoleonic army and all much preferred imperial France to the Orangist United Kingdom. Their dislike of the Orangist state turned into subversive activity in the late 1820's, when they apparently were involved in almost every anti-Orangist activity in the south-west.⁹ The contrast

⁶ Ryswyck, Th. van, *Volkliedjes*, p. vii.

⁷ Baur, vol. 1, p. 7; see also Bruyne, M. de, *De Rodenbachs van Roeselare*.

⁸ Strange as this may sound it is not without parallels. The father of the greatest Flemish historical novelist, Hendrik Conscience, was a French-speaker who supported the Belgian revolutionary regime, whilst Hendrik actually served in their army. Willekens, E. (ed), *Hendrik Conscience en zijn tijd*, p. 14.

⁹ Baur, vol. 1, pp. 12-3.

with Jan Frans Willems and even with the brothers Grimm could not be starker: Albrecht Rodenbach was not inevitably drawn into the Flemish national camp.

Two of his grandfather's brothers were to have a major impact on the young writer, and, therefore, on the ultimate shape of a Flemish national identity.¹⁰ Constantin, who was held in high regard by the new king Leopold I, became the Belgian diplomatic representative in that other new state of the 1830's, Greece. There he could indulge in his Philhellenism, which was rivalled only by his love for the oppressed Poles. Albrecht would share Constantin's passion for both. It may not be too fanciful to suggest that Albrecht's precocious interest in Lord Byron was also inspired by the same source: with his own commitment to the young Greek state, Constantin would undoubtedly have admired the British poet, whose status amongst the Greeks bordered on the divine.¹¹ Albrecht's interest in the oppressed of Europe, with whom he was to equate the Flemish, was thus born in the wake of the reaction against Metternich's settlement of 1815.

Constantin's brother, Alexander, left an equally profound mark on the young Albrecht. It is this man's example that probably caused some of the apparent contradictions of Albrecht's cultural and political convictions, that may have initiated the centrifugal pull of Liberals and Catholics on the allegiance of his grand-nephew.¹² A strong proponent of the Catholic-Liberal alliance that had created the Belgian state, Alexander regarded the new country and its constitution as the best possible incarnation of real freedom, another theme that was to dominate Albrecht's life and his vision for his Flemish compatriots.¹³ When Alexander had to choose between Liberal and Catholic after the implosion of the coalition, he unhesitatingly opted for Catholicism, without losing his radical fervour. This unreserved adherence to Catholicism over and above any other loyalty was to be *the* central characteristic of Albrecht Rodenbach, and, partly through his effort, of the Flemish national identity. His Walloon mother, Sylvie, whose influence on her son can hardly be underestimated, strengthened Albrecht's early grounding in the cultural importance

¹⁰ Both brothers would take seats in the parliament of 1830. Although Constantin died before Albrecht's birth, his legacy remained strong, the stories part of a family tradition.

¹¹ *Baur*, vol. 1, pp. 22-3.

¹² *Vanlandschoot*, p. 98.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 84.

of Catholicism.¹⁴ This centrality of Roman Catholicism cannot be emphasised enough: Flemish national identity came to be intertwined with Catholicism as nowhere else in Europe, with the exception of Ireland and Poland, and Albrecht Rodenbach greatly helped to shape this fact.

The future student activist therefore grew up in a *milieu* of Belgicistic liberals, to whom the Catholic Church was more important than the liberty to which they so ardently aspired. Into this contradictory mixture was poured Constantin's emotive romanticism. Albrecht would ignite this explosive mixture with the radical Flemish sentiment he learned to admire at the seminary in Roeselare. A final lesson, which he learned in this environment of political engagement and militant Catholicism, was the power of the pen: his grand-uncle, Alexander, relied on it. In this we find an echo of Hoffmann von Fallersleben, who, when pondering what else he could have done to further the Revolutions of 1848, concluded that his only weapon was the song.¹⁵

One thing Albrecht did not learn from his family was how to compromise, which is all the stranger in the light of their establishment position. However, the Rodenbachs' active opposition to Orangist rule had been without compromise. Albrecht's own personality, informed by his intense piety, also has to be taken into account: rarely can there have been such a profoundly honest 'political' mind, utterly true to what he thought of as truth, totally committed to his ideals.¹⁶ This unfaltering attitude was maintained regardless of the consequences: friendships, advancement, position, even family ties; all had to give way to principle. It is, therefore, unsurprising to find that most of Albrecht's short life was given over to conflict of one sort or the other. This, in turn, affected his view of a Flemish national identity: conflict was already ingrained in the psyche of the Flemish movement by the 1870's, but Rodenbach's writings would further this considerably. His exhortation to Catholic Flemish students at Leuven in 1878, that "[men] behoorde ... ook ter

¹⁴ Like Conscience, Rodenbach felt hampered by the French-speaking milieu in which he grew up. Although they *spoke* Dutch at home – or rather Roeselares – he learned to *write* in French. *Lissens Brieven*, pp. 143-4, 155, and 184.

¹⁵ See *ML*, vol. 5, p. 77: "Meine Waffe war das Lied"; and also Rodenbach in a letter to Pol de Mont and Amaat Joos of 1877, "dat de penne ons een machtig wapen worde". *Lissens Brieven*, p. 182.

¹⁶ For Rodenbach on truth, see Rodenbach, A, "Vlaamsche Kamp". In F. Rodenbach, *Albrecht Rodenbach en de Blauwvoeterij*, vol. 2, pp. 121-2. This quest for truth is noticed by Haest, J, *Berten Rodenbach aan de jeugd voorgesteld*, p. 8. Published in 1944, this rather chillingly shows where some of Rodenbach's terminology was to end up.

katholieke hoogeschole sprekers te vormen, ten katholieken Vlaamschen *Kampe*” may be taken as typical of this mindset.¹⁷

“Een priester leerde mij mijn vaderland beminnen”.¹⁸

In 1866 Albrecht Rodenbach entered the institute that would shape his nationalist outlook: the *Klein Seminarie* of Roeselare, the place where the Flemish student movement was effectively born.¹⁹ Two basic characteristics of the seminary conspired to create Albrecht Rodenbach the Catholic Flemish Nationalist; it was a thoroughly French-speaking environment against the wishes of its Flemish students, and it was – obviously – infused with Catholic culture. Following the young Albrecht Rodenbach, one enters into a most contradictory world when passing through the doors of the Roeselare seminary. Behind its walls there was to be found fervent Ultramontanists, a Francophone upper-echelon which supported the Belgian state, strong *Flamingante* priests who were, nevertheless, also rather particularist, and all of this united within the Catholic Church.

At the seminary, the priests, Gustaaf Flamen and Hugo Verriest, personified the growing Flemish movement, and can be taken as indicative of the fusion between the developing Flemish national identity and Roman Catholicism.²⁰ These men believed strongly in the cultural values of Flanders as they had been espoused by the likes of Jan Frans Willems. Unlike Willems, however, they also managed to wed these to the cultural, ethical, philosophical, and political aspirations of the Catholic Church, in a similar fashion to Willems’ friend, canon Jan Baptist David. With his own Catholic

¹⁷ Rodenbach, A, “Studentenafdeeling. Davidsfonds. Voordracht ter vergadering der Leden”. In F. Rodenbach, *op.cit.* vol. 2, p. 54. The italics are mine.

¹⁸ Rodenbach was referring to Hugo Verriest. Baur, F, “Albrecht Rodenbach’s ‘Wahrheit und Dichtung’”, *KVATL*, vol. 10, no. 5, (1956), p. 69.

¹⁹ Effectively, if not officially. Rodenbach never considered himself to be the founder of the Flemish student movement. See Rodenbach, A, “Vlaamsche Kamp”. In F. Rodenbach, *op.cit.* vol. 2, p. 116. Posthumous mythologising has, however, attributed that role to him. Ridder, A. de, “Over Albrecht Rodenbach”, *De Nieuwe Gids*, vol. 24, (1909), p. 151; Cuique Suum [Drijvers, F.], “Is Rodenbach de stichter der Studentenbeweging?”, *De Student*, vol. 10, no. 1, (1889), pp. 12-6.

²⁰ *NEVB*, vol. 1, 1998 ed. S.v. “Flamen, Gustaaf-Hendrik”, by F. Boudrez; and *Ibid*, vol. 3, 1998 ed. S.v. “Verriest, Hugo”, by S. Maes. For the Flemish Movement in this period, see Elias, H.J, *Geschiedenis van de Vlaamse Gedachte*, vol. 3, chapters one and nine; and Witte, E, “Arm Vlaanderen”. In R. Doehaerd et al, *Geschiedenis van Vlaanderen van de oorsprong tot heden*, pp. 236 and forward.

background, Albrecht Rodenbach was clearly beguiled by this symbiosis between Catholicism and Flemish identity. There has never been an attempt to explain why this should have been the case.

The appeal of a militant Catholicism to Rodenbach is easily grasped, the appeal of the Flemish emancipation movement much less so. The lack of sources leaves one wondering whether, like so many ardent nationalists, Rodenbach found a sense of belonging in a Flemish identity, which had so far eluded him. This may sound fanciful, but besides the evidence of other outsiders, there is also the fact that a strong particularist spirit accompanied the nationalism of the Roeselare seminary. More than anything, this is reminiscent of the *Heimat* sentiments of the Grimms, with a direct appeal to the familiar, expanded to embrace the wider, Flemish world. This is an aspect of Rodenbach's vision for a Flemish identity that was to remain with him for the rest of his short life, and which one may find in his poetry. His *Klokke Roeland* serves as an illustration for this, transforming the ancient symbol of the city of Gent into the guardian of the whole of Flanders,

“mijn name is Roeland, 'k kleppe brand
en luide storm in Vlaanderland”.²¹

And again,

“... Ik ben Roeland, 'k kleppe brand
luide triomfe in Vlaanderland”.²²

It was this very intricate merging of the particularist spirit of western Flanders with a wider sense of Flemish identity which Rodenbach implemented with such success. *Klokke Roeland* was, indeed, transformed from the symbol of Gent to the symbol of Flanders.

Up until 1860, one of the teaching posts at the seminary had been held by the greatest champion of West Flemish particularism, the priest-poet, Guido Gezelle.²³

²¹ Rodenbach, A, “Klokke Roeland”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 56. For the sake of consistency, the edition of Rodenbach's poems by Puyvelde has been used throughout.

²² *Ibid*, p. 57.

His is the poetry of a West-Flemish Catholic identity *par excellence*, at the same time giving expression to a love of a wider Flanders, all umbilically tied to a Catholic font. Consider, for example, the following lines from his poem *In Vlaanderen blinkt de hemel blauw* of 1858, where he refers to his country as “het Katholieke Vlanderen” and says,

“Mijn Vlanderen spreekt een eigen taal;
God gaf elk land de zijne ...”²⁴

This perceived divine inspiration of the language gave Catholic Flemish identity a wholly new, very powerful impulse, lacking in the liberal-leaning Willems. It negated the need to prove the antiquity of the language by linking it to the divine plan for humanity. By implication, it became a sin to neglect it, and a duty to fight its corner. This line of argument greatly appealed to Rodenbach, and it is not without significance that Gezelle admired his poetry: amongst its lines, he found much that echoed his own Catholic-national ideals.²⁵ Rodenbach was to spread the message of the priests of the seminary far and wide amongst a Flemish student audience, who in turn would disseminate it to a wider audience still. In the words of Elias,

“Gezelle was de bron; Verriest was de initiator, de raadsman en de ruggesteun, maar Rodenbach is de opslaande vlam, het oplaaiende vuur, de agitator en de rusteloze bezieler”²⁶

This description of Rodenbach as a flame and agitator, as the man who moved the ideal of a Catholic Flemish identity outside the walls of the seminaries, was never as apt as during his greatest conflict with the episcopate of the Catholic Church in Belgium: *De Grootte Stooringe* or great disruption of 1875.²⁷ For the first time, one can witness the various elements of Rodenbach’s convictions merging and coming

²³ *NEVB*, vol. 2, 1998 ed. S.v. “Gezelle, Guido”, by P. Couttenier.

²⁴ Gezelle, G, *Guido Gezelle bloemlezing*. J. Boets (ed), p. 28.

²⁵ Baur, F, “Brieven van Hugo Verriest aan Albrecht Rodenbach”, *VMKVATL*, vol. 1, (1950), p. 127.

²⁶ Elias, H.J, *op.cit.* vol. 3, p. 108.

²⁷ The centenary of *De Grootte Stooringe* was commemorated by a collection of essays: Boucquey, R. et al, *De Grootte Stooringe 1875. Historische Bijdrage tot de Geschiedenis van de Vlaamse Studentenbeweging*.

out to do battle. Indirectly, it was also his first public contribution to the fledgling Flemish national identity.

The root cause of the disruption is easy to pinpoint. The students at Roeselare wished to expand the use of Dutch at the seminary. This did not relate to teaching, of course, but rather to entertainment. They had gradually come to the erroneous conviction that the seminary's superior, Henri Delbar, was not altogether unwilling to accommodate them. Three years before he had allowed the singing of a Flemish song in public, *and* had permitted Rodenbach to sing a few of his radical Flemish *Kerelsliederen*. He had also personally invited the Catholic Flemish poet, Lodewijk de Koninck, to come to speak to the students.²⁸ The superior welcomed him in Dutch, as Vanlandschoot noted probably for the first time in the history of the seminary.²⁹ All this combined had convinced the students that the time was ripe for a widening of the use of Dutch, and when they were thwarted, they revolted. It was Rodenbach's baptism as a radical figure in the Flemish movement and was to imprint him indelibly onto the conscience of a wider Flemish audience: Flanders' iconic poet was born.

Superior Delbar, like the rest of the Church's establishment in Belgium, walked a fine line between tolerating, encouraging, and curtailing Flemish cultural aspirations. The bishop of Brugge, Jean-Joseph Faict, for example, also supported De Koninck.³⁰ At first one is struck by the anomaly of this: why would the overtly Belgicist and Francophone episcopate bother to support anyone with – even slight – Flemish sentiments? The answer lies in part in the demographic structure of Belgian Catholicism. In the Walloon area, rapid industrialisation and urbanisation was making large inroads into the numbers of the faithful, assisted by the infiltration of anti-clerical ideas from France. In Flanders, these phenomena were confined mainly to Gent and Antwerpen. In both cities liberal ideas from Holland had long been established, and even socialism was rearing its head, particularly in Gent.³¹ For the vast majority of people in Flanders, however, these external influences were faint at

²⁸ *Kroniek*, pp. 19 and 53.

²⁹ *Vanlandschoot*, p. 282.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 281.

³¹ For early socialism see Witte, E. et al, *Politieke Geschiedenis van België*, pp. 51-4.

best. Their Catholicism was still vibrant, strong enough to resist the temptations of other creeds.³² Gradually, but noticeably, the Flemings were becoming the dominant element within the Church in Belgium, just as Catholicism was becoming the main plank in the national identity of the Flemings.

An additional impetus for the Francophone episcopate to accommodate at least some of the less radical demands of their Flemish flock was the importance of the Belgian state for their own position.³³ The bishops had been instrumental in the Revolution of 1830, long supported its various governments, and, in return, had seen their Church firmly embedded in the state.³⁴ Even when Catholic representation in the government fell away, as it occasionally did, and even when state and Church interests clashed as during the *Schoolstrijd*, the episcopate maintained this loyalty to Belgium.³⁵ It is in this context that the accommodating attitude of the episcopate towards the Flemish activists has to be seen. As king Leopold I before them, the bishops realised there could be no Belgian identity without the Flemings, indeed, the Catholic Church could survive only with the co-operation of the Flemings.

Few examples could highlight the common ground between episcopate and Flemish aspirations better than the strong backing that both gave to the Pontifical Zouaves, that international body of military volunteers to fight for the papacy. In 1874, only one year before *De Grootte Stooringe*, bishop Faict had addressed a meeting of the Zouaves at the Sint-Jozefscollege in Tielt.³⁶ Outside in the yard, the corps had assembled around a bust of Pope Pius IX. Faict held a speech, significantly in Flemish, which sums up the meeting of minds of the episcopate and Flemish activists,

“Benevens de vele versiersels die hier pryken, zie ik twee vanen, de nationale en de pauzelyke vaen; dat zyn twee zinnebeelden die uwe gevoelens allerbest uitdrukken: de nationale vaen zegt dat gij Belgen zyt, *Vlamingen*, die aen't vaderland van herte zyt verkleefd ... de pauzelyke vaen geeft uwe gevoelens van godsdienst te kennen en uwe liefde voor den Stedehouder van Christus op aerde”.³⁷

³² A fact borne out by the emergence of a strong Christian Democratic tradition, which channelled the desire for social change in a Catholic direction.

³³ Art, J, “Kerk en religie 1844-1914”. In *AGN*, vol. 12.1, pp. 169-70.

³⁴ Luykx, Th, *Politieke Geschiedenis van België van 1789 tot heden*, pp. 62 and following.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 166 and *passim*.

³⁶ For this and what follows see *Vanlandschoot*, pp. 241-2.

³⁷ Quoted in *Ibid*, p. 241. The italics are mine.

By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, then, the Belgian episcopate had managed to square a difficult circle: it had, to some extent, accommodated Flemish national aspirations, accepted a limited form of Ultramontanism, whilst maintaining its traditional loyalty to the Belgian state. As Jan Frans Willems, they had been able to contemplate multiple identities: Belgian, Catholic, *and* Flemish. All of this found a common meeting-ground in the Zouave movement and in the Ultramontanism which was sweeping Catholic Europe.³⁸ Into this carefully choreographed play burst the bombshell that was *De Grootte Stooringe*. The affair at Roeselare was not an isolated occurrence: throughout the seminaries in Flanders there was increased pressure to use more Dutch. In Mechelen and Sint Niklaas, for example, there were also disturbances. The difference between these and the events at Roeselare was that it was only here that real repression was used; superior Delbar obviously thought Flemish activism had been sufficiently accommodated.³⁹ He badly miscalculated the mood amongst his students.

Contrary to popular mythology, Rodenbach was not the only instigator of the disturbances. His friend, Julius de Vos, played a leading role, for which he was dismissed from the seminary. Rodenbach openly acknowledged De Vos' role, and significantly called him *de eerste martelaar*, touching upon a theme close to his and the Flemish movement's heart. A sense of being persecuted for a just cause had always lived amongst Flemish nationalists, illustrated by Jan Frans Willems' sense of martyrdom during his so-called 'exile' in Eeklo.⁴⁰ Now Rodenbach supplemented this with a Catholic sense of martyrdom, for his religion shared this approval of self-sacrifice and persecution of the 'righteous'. The careless Julius de Vos, simply a student dismissed for improper behaviour, was instantly transfigured into a Flemish martyr. In a powerful passage, Rodenbach links his friend to a dying hero during the medieval Battle of the Golden Spurs, that singular icon of the Flemish struggle,

³⁸ Lamberts, E, "Het ultramontanisme in België, 1830-1914". In E. Lamberts (ed), *De Kruistocht tegen het Liberalisme*, p. 52. On the papacy's lack of influence on the attitude of the Belgian episcopate vis-à-vis the Belgian state, see Wils, L, "In het klimaat van de *Kulturkampf* 1871-1878". In *AGN*, vol. 13.2, p. 170.

³⁹ Boucquey, R, "Bij de honderdste verjaardag van de Grootte Stooringe". In R. Boucquey et al, *De Grootte Stooringe 1875*, p. 8. He also points to the mythologising which has occurred around the event.

⁴⁰ See chapter one, pp. 54 and following.

“... Somber
wierpen de edele klauwaarts in het ronde
eenen blik vol vlammen op den vijand
en den lieven wapenbroeder stervend.
Ende hij die sterven ging een stonde
opende zijne oogen die verflauwden;
en zij knielden allen rond hem zwijgend,
en hun hoofden bogen en hij zei hun
stervend: ‘Broeders, leve God en Vlaandren!’⁴¹”

The pathos of the poem, and its conscious appeal to the medieval past and Catholic present ensured its impact was significant. Perhaps unwittingly, but more probably intentionally, Rodenbach had made his first contribution to the shape of Flanders’ national identity: the infamy of the events in Roeselare ensured that martyrdom now became an indelible element of Flemish identity.

The *Groote Stooringe* occurred during the *superiorsfeest*, the annual celebration of the seminary’s superior. The students turned the occasion into a manifestation of militant *Flamingantisme*, which they believed Delbar would countenance. They proposed to sing a number of Flemish songs, some composed by Rodenbach. His centrality amongst the seminary’s students is attested by this, for by now the whole atmosphere of the place was drenched in what became known as the *Kerelsromantiek*. Named after Hendrik Conscience’s seminal novel, *De Kerels van Vlaanderen* of 1871, it was to become a veritable movement under Rodenbach’s impulse.⁴² It would become an emblematic statement of the direction into which Rodenbach wished Flemish identity to travel, a direction which he encapsulated in the first version of what was to become the battle hymn of the Flemish student movement, *Het Lied der Vlaamsche Zonen*.⁴³ Paradoxically, and indicative of just how poorly Rodenbach judged the situation, it was also intended to toast the

⁴¹ Rodenbach, A, “De eerste martelaar. Aan Julius de Vos”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 63.

⁴² Conscience, H, *De Kerels van Vlaanderen*. See also Vos-Gevers, L. and L, *Dat volk moet herleven*, p. 15.

⁴³ Rodenbach, A, “Het Lied der Vlaamsche Zonen, I”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, pp. 33-5. See also Appendix One, I.

superior.⁴⁴ Deluded into believing that Delbar understood his designs for a Catholic Flemish national identity, he wrote,

“Priester, gij waardeert ons herten
minnend 't oude Kerelsland;
priester, gij waardeert ons smerten
over 't oude Vlaanderland”.⁴⁵

This same priest had a few days earlier issued a blanket ban on all *Kerels* manifestations: clearly the real Delbar had little love for 't *oude Kerelsland*. No longer were the students allowed to sing the songs, no longer were they allowed to shout the *Kerels*' slogan, *Vliegt de Blauwvoet! Storm op Zee!*⁴⁶ No longer could they indulge in the Flemish atmosphere, which Delbar had unwittingly encouraged.⁴⁷ The students were either very naïve, or knew that singing these songs would provoke a reaction. Delbar came up with a compromise suggestion, allowing one Flemish song as long as this was accompanied by a French one, thus diluting the nationalist atmosphere. This the students rejected and anti-French manifestations marred the feast.⁴⁸

Rodenbach was caught between his loyalty to the Church and his increasingly shrill anti-French feelings. He was careful to emphasise his loyalty in his *Lied*, which is full of praise for the Church, even in its second, more militant version, which was written just before the *superiorsfeest*.⁴⁹ His ardent Catholicism tempered his concerns for the national aspirations of the students. Indeed, Rodenbach would not have seen the contradiction between the two. To the Church authorities, however, this offered little consolation. The anti-French attitude of the students, their autonomous organisation, and their far too overt Ultramontane sentiments all proved too much.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ See notes by Rodenbach, Rodenbach, A, “Het Lied der Vlaamsche Zonen, I”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 33.

⁴⁵ Appendix One, I, verse 3.

⁴⁶ Delbar had been much provoked by previous incidents. Lamberty, M, “Bij een verjaring ...”. In R. Boucquey et al, *De Grootte Stooringe 1875*, p. 21. For the meaning of the *Blauwvoet*, see below, pp. 190 and 218-9.

⁴⁷ *Baur*, vol. 1, pp. 179-80.

⁴⁸ For this and what follows see *Kroniek*, pp. 64 and onwards; *Vanlandschoot*, p. 306.

⁴⁹ Rodenbach, A, “Het Lied der Vlaamsche Zonen gezeid De Blauwvoet”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, pp. 35-6. See also Appendix One, II.

⁵⁰ For the limited Ultramontane feelings of the episcopate, see above, p. 180-1.

The incident at Roeselare blew away the carefully constructed compromise of the Belgian episcopate between Flemish aspirations and their desire to support the Belgian state.

What made the student revolt really threatening in the eyes of the Church was the fact that many amongst the Dutch-speaking lower clergy supported the sentiments expressed by the students.⁵¹ The episcopate was correct in identifying this renewed Flemish surge towards a separate identity as a threat to Belgium; they were, however, wrong to see it as a threat to the Church. Rodenbach, for one, did not wish to contemplate a Flemish identity devoid of Catholicism. It may be regarded as typical of Rodenbach that throughout the *Groote Stooringe*, and, indeed, throughout his period at the Roeselare seminary, he tried to maintain his loyalty towards the Church. Whatever opposition he encountered from its hierarchy, Rodenbach remained devout *and* Flemish. He was not alone in this. Amongst the leading Flemish national thinkers of this period were many Catholics, who all maintained their faith and their national ideals in the face of persecution from the hierarchy. Nationalist priests such as the poet Gezelle or the early democrat, Adolf Daens, amply testify to this.

Just as the Flemish Catholic democrats could look towards the papacy, and find in the papal bull *Rerum novarum* confirmation of what they – but not the Belgian Catholic hierarchy – believed in, so Rodenbach could look towards the papacy to establish the credentials of the Flemish movement. That this was expressed through the Zouave corps has been noted, but there was another, far more potent merging of Flemish national sentiment with papal aspirations. In 1876, the last year of his studies at the seminary in Roeselare, Rodenbach participated in a Zouave festival. Using his talent as a designer, he drew the emblem for the event. This depicted the papal banner, guarded by the flags of Ireland and Poland, joined by that of

⁵¹ This whole episode suffers from a particularly poor historiography. Flemish scholars on the whole appear mainly interested in perpetuating the nationalist story of *De Groote Stooringe*. Even those critical of the received version have done little by way of analysis. The *reasons* for the Church's attitude are hardly ever discussed in depth, and the events are frequently reduced to questions of personalities. That the lower clergy in Flanders often followed a line which diverged from that of the episcopate may be stated with some certainty. The events which surround the early stirrings of Christian Democracy in Belgium go some way to indicate just how wide-spread this was. Isacker, K. van, *Het Daensisme*, pp. 37-9.

Flanders.⁵² As a statement on the essentially Catholic nature of Flemish identity, of his aspirations for his country, and of his faith in the papacy, this emblem must rank as one of the most striking Rodenbach ever designed.

Ireland and Poland were known throughout contemporary Europe as two enslaved Catholic nations, the one by Protestant Britain, the other by Orthodox Russia.⁵³ In both, Catholicism had fused with what nationalists believed to be the national character: being a Catholic was a badge of 'Irish-ness' or 'Polish-ness'. Both peoples also shared a sense of martyrdom: repression and rebellion in both were very real occurrences throughout the nineteenth century. Conjoined with Ultramontane sentiments, this made the Irish and the Poles potent symbols of the Catholic revival and of Catholic nationalist aspirations. By adding the flag of Flanders to that of Poland, Ireland and the papacy, Rodenbach threw all inhibitions overboard. At the very least, he suggested that Flanders ought to aspire to self-government, which was the demand of the majority of Irish Catholics; he may even have been dreaming of total independence, like Polish Catholics. Although impossible to verify his intentions, this is surely how contemporaries would have regarded the emblem. For his association of Flanders with Poland and Ireland, Rodenbach drew upon the writings of yet another Flemish Catholic lower clergyman, the curate Schuermans.⁵⁴ In the 1860's he had written upon the neglect of Dutch in Belgium, harking back to the appeals of the great figures of the first generation such as Prudens van Duyse. In addition, he pointed to the analogies with Ireland and Poland, where, he believed, language repression heralded the demise of national identities. There, at least, they had an O'Connell to fight the nationalist struggle.

In 1879 he was to elaborate on the association between Catholic Poland and Catholic Flanders in his play, *De studenten van Warschau*.⁵⁵ The Polish question had long fascinated the Rodenbach family, his grand-uncle, Constantin, in particular. In addition, Albrecht had spent much time in the company of the Polish count Tietzkiewicz that year, discussing the analogies between the Polish and Flemish

⁵² *Kroniek*, p. 79.

⁵³ He learned this analogy from that radical Flemish priest Gustav Flamen. *Baur*, vol. 1, p. 88.

⁵⁴ Elias, H.J., *op.cit.* vol. 3, p. 235.

⁵⁵ Rodenbach, A., "De studenten van Warschau. Poolse Tafereelen.", *Het Pennoen*, vol. 2, no. 2, (1878-9), pp. 46-61; and vol. 2, no. 3, (1878-9), pp. 80-96; Rodenbach, A., "De studenten van Warschau. Poolse Tafereelen.", *De Vlaamsche Vlagge*, vol. 5, no. 3, (1879), pp. 138-43.

situations.⁵⁶ Tietkiewicz had fled to Belgium in the wake of the Russian repression which followed the 1863 uprising, and had met Albrecht in Leuven. It was the latter who provided Rodenbach with the background details for his play. This transported the students from the Roeselare seminary to Poland, and turned the Flemish activists into Polish warriors. Rodenbach even provided a Polish version of the *Kerelslied*, called *Het liedeken van den roere. Poolsch Knapenlied*.⁵⁷ In a remarkable association of belief and convictions, his Polish students shout their slogan of freedom, their version of the slogan *Vliegt de Blauwvoet*: “Boze cos Polske!”⁵⁸

This once again raises serious questions as to Rodenbach’s intentions for his people: did he really advocate a Flemish uprising? One may assume that this was not the case; Rodenbach may have been idealistic, and he may have been uncompromising, but he did have an eye for the feasible as well. The importance of the imagery of battle to Rodenbach’s perception of a Flemish identity will be explored further below; sufficient for now to refer to his caveat when launching his periodical *Het Pennoen* – The Banner – where he stated that,

“Voor ons beteekent vlaamsche kamp het werk om Vlaanderen, het is te zeggen: het vlaamsche land, of vlaamsch Belgie, zoo men wilt, te doen herworden en herbloeien in de volle ontwikkeling van eigen wezen en werkzaamheid: aard, zedens, gedacht, gebruiken, tale, kunst, wetenschap, handel en nijverheid”.⁵⁹

When advertising the *Nieuw Pennoen*, Rodenbach was even more explicit, giving it the subtitle of “tijdschrift voor kritiek en zuiver vlaamschen *pennestrijd*”. The divergence between the radical tone of *De studenten van Warschau* and Rodenbach’s intentions serve as a warning against too literal an interpretation of his works.

The futility of hoping for papal support became apparent in 1877, when the papacy failed to endorse *De Vlaamsche Vlagge*.⁶⁰ This was the mouthpiece of the

⁵⁶ The “vage vermoeden” about a parallel with Flemish postulated by Vanlandschoot is surely a massive understatement: Rodenbach had been playing with the analogy for several years prior to his meetings with Tietkiewicz. *Vanlandschoot*, pp. 564-5.

⁵⁷ Rodenbach, A, “Het liedeken van den roere. Poolsch Knapenlied”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, pp. 175-6.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 176.

⁵⁹ Rodenbach, A, “Pennoen!”, *Het Pennoen*, vol. 1, no. 1, (1878), p. 5. Once more, this is full of intriguing information. Rodenbach seems to allow for Flemish autonomy or even independence here. There are also indirect references to the work of the Grimms, and there is the by now expected statement on restoration.

⁶⁰ Gevers, L, *Bewogen Jeugd*, pp. 89-90.

Westvlaamsche Gilde, an overarching West Flemish student and pupil organisation, of which publication Rodenbach had become the editor in 1876.⁶¹ The periodical reflected Rodenbach's wish for a Catholic Flemish identity, and one may have expected the bishop of Brugge to have endorsed *De Vlaamsche Vlagge*. This was, however, far from the case. Bishop Faict was deeply suspicious of the periodical's independence of Church control, and had come to view the Flemish movement as a threat. The curate, Vyncke, one of the co-founders of the *Westvlaamsche Gilde*, was aware of the episcopate's displeasure and in particular of that of bishop Faict. To bypass their hostility, he suggested the editors should appeal directly to the papacy.⁶² Such was Albrecht Rodenbach's reputation as a troublemaker, that Faict was appalled by the inclusion of his signature. Faict pulled out all the stops to ensure that the appeal was never really considered, and as a result, the papal endorsement of *De Vlaamsche Vlagge* never materialised.⁶³ Both this episode and that of *De Grootte Stooringe* indicate just how badly the young poet-playwright understood the *milieu* in which he operated. They also show the immense depth of his Catholic faith and of his allegiance to the papacy: the failure to get approval for *De Vlaamsche Vlagge* did nothing to diminish his strongly-held convictions.

Vanlandschoot, in conjuncture with many of Rodenbach's contemporaries, believes that Rodenbach actually *condemned* the Ultramontane theological approach to history and to the nineteenth century in particular. In his view, Rodenbach's poem *Geschiedenisse* contains an "uitgesproken kritiek ... op de ultramontaans-theologische visie op de negentiende eeuw", and furnishes evidence that the poet was not as devoted to Rome as has been argued here.⁶⁴ A close reading of the poem does not bear this out. The core of the Ultramontane approach to history, namely the theological argument that the Church is the essential tool for the salvation of humanity, is actually endorsed,

⁶¹ Huyghebaert, J, "De voorgeschiedenis van de Vlaamsche Vlagge (1873-1875)", *Wetenschappelijke Tijdingen*, vol. 36, no. 1, (1977), columns 203-6; Deprez, A. and Carlier, M, *Vlaamsche Vlagge. Bibliografie van de Vlaamsche Tijdschriften in de negentiende eeuw*, vol. 2, no. 13, pp. 13 and following. The name of the periodical was changed from *De Vlaamsche Vlag* to *De Vlaamsche Vlagge* in 1877.

⁶² For this and what follows see *Vanlandschoot*, pp. 447, 467-8 and 471-2. Rodenbach signed the appeal.

⁶³ It only ceased to appear in 1933. *EVB*. vol. 2, 1975 ed. S.v. "Vlaamsche Vlagge, De", by A. Demedts.

⁶⁴ *Vanlandschoot*, pp. 578, 583 and 605.

“Doch sedert eenigen tijd reeds steeg een Dagen in den Oosten.
Het schong. O dageraad, goddelik licht dat glanst uit goddelik Bloed!
O Waarheid, Vrijheid, Orde, Wet, o Kerke, wees gegroet!”⁶⁵

Rodenbach not only endorses the Catholic Church’s theological vision on its own role, he also equates it with a central theme of his poetry, *waarheid*. Truth, in the Christian sense of the word, formed the bedrock of Rodenbach’s world view, as he stated in his poem *Waarheid*, and, even more strongly, in *De Knape*, where it reads,

“voor Waarheid en Vrijheid steeds hand in hand,
voor Kunde en Kunsten en Vaderland”⁶⁶

One is immediately struck by the repetition of the combination *waarheid* and *vrijheid* in both *Geschiedenisse* and *De Knape*. Truth, then, is not just an essential element to Rodenbach, but truth is to be found only in the Church, and truth is essential to serve one’s *vaderland*.

This association between Flanders, a Flemish national identity, and Catholicism is also attested in the above verse from *Geschiedenisse*, which makes a double quote. It refers to one of the most famous poems in Middle Dutch, *Het daget inden oosten*.⁶⁷ This, in turn, formed the basis for a poem by Guido Gezelle’s adaptation of the breviary’s *Jam lucis orto sidere, De Zonne alreede is opgestaan*, which the Belgian hierarchy used in their version of the *Missale Romanum*.⁶⁸ All this hardly amounts to a rejection of Ultramontane theology. The poem recalls the Flemish ‘Golden Age’, the Middle Ages, and incontrovertibly links its culture to the Catholic Church,

“Maar in ’t midden van der stammen dreigend woelen,
daar stond de Kerk, en langzaam uit dien chaos wijd en diep
den wonderliken volkentocht der Middeneeuwen schiep,
... bont en prachtig ...
zoo schoon, zoo grootsch, dat de ooge er niets dan pracht en grootheid ziet”⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Rodenbach, A, “Geschiedenisse”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 118.

⁶⁶ Rodenbach, A, “Waarheid”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, pp. 1-2; Rodenbach, A, “De Knape”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 44.

⁶⁷ Axters, S, *Mystiek Brevier. De Nederlandsche Mystieke Poëzie*, pp. 131-6.

⁶⁸ Daeleman, L.J. (ed), *Roomsch-Katholiek Mis- en Vesperboek*, pp. 61-2.

⁶⁹ Rodenbach, A, “Geschiedenisse”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, pp. 118-9.

It is true that Rodenbach defends his own century in the poem, calling her “groot”, “spijts uw zonden”.⁷⁰ He also charges De Koninck, for whom he wrote the poem in reaction to virulently Ultramontane verses written by the latter, that he wrongly apportioned blame to peoples’ desires, which were “zinnelooze”.⁷¹ However, the subtlety of Rodenbach’s mind allowed him to make a truly theological assessment of the situation,

“En, laat ze maar eens schreeuwen
alsdat zij, vrij en ongetemd, almachtig, vroed en wijs,
geen Pauzendom behoeft nog geen onfeilbaar onderwijs;
... en laat haar dan hoogveerdig soms op de eeuwenoude Rotsen,
met deze en hare krachten al, in storremlopen botsen;
en laat ze, in haren trots en waan, met tuigen en gedacht
haar Babels bouwen, die zij zelf des anderdags belacht;
... of wilden dronken storten in den schoot der geile Lusten,
en, trillend op dat bedde, hoofd en zinnen in de war,
God loochenen”.⁷²

The searing sarcasm – “die zij zelf des anderdags belacht” – and utter condemnation of the deeds and aspirations of his own century jump out of these sentences.

Rodenbach is *not* defending his age against the condemnations of the papacy, he is merely arguing that it should be allowed to make its own mistakes and learn from these. His magnanimity is based on a simple belief,

“Zij roept naar Orde en Vrede: ja, God is het dat zij zoekt”.⁷³

Effectively Rodenbach is arguing that things are bad, but that it is a sin to despair: those who seek shall find. It was an audacious and highly intellectual assertion, much misunderstood at the time, but it is certainly not a repudiation of Ultramontane aspirations. Indeed, if anything it affirms – for those paying attention to detail – its centrality in Flanders’ national identity.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 121.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 120.

⁷² Ibid, p. 121.

⁷³ Ibid.

“één voordracht ... van het begin tot het einde”.⁷⁴

The glamorous poet of the Romantic era was a work of art: carefully presented, well thought out and ready to make a point through his actions. He had, like his role-model Lord Byron, “a sophisticated understanding of the power of self-presentation”.⁷⁵ This posture is exactly what interests us here. The role which Rodenbach took on is what determined his position in the canon of national poets, and what contributed to the success or otherwise of his message on Flemish identity. Consider, for example, how Rodenbach stage-managed his image in the seminary at Roeselare. Upon receiving a letter from Pol de Mont concerning the foundation of a pan-Flemish student union, Rodenbach called the students together. This did not happen, as one may imagine, in a hall somewhere, but outside, under a large tree. Now listen to how Rodenbach describes how he read the letter to the,

“Blauwvoeten’ van het collegie, aan den voet van eenen boom, tusschen licht en donker, onder de ruischende kruine der groene linden!”.⁷⁶

Here is all the drama of the Germanic myths: the students with their nickname of *Blauwvoeten*, in the shadows of the canopy of that quintessential symbol of a northern people, a linden tree, listening to the message of a fellow warrior from the outside world. This episode perfectly illustrates how Rodenbach helped shape a Flemish national identity through his actions.

In 1876, Rodenbach went to the University of Leuven. His life between that date and his death in 1880 was, in many respects, a continuation of the period in Roeselare, and he certainly did not lose his sense of the theatrical. As in the days of Jan Frans Willems, Leuven was the leading university in Belgium, highly regarded both internally and internationally.⁷⁷ It was *the* location for anyone wishing to indulge in Catholic action; perhaps less so for those with a Flemish mindset, but that was something Rodenbach set out to change. In Leuven, Rodenbach’s role-play

⁷⁴ *Lissens Brieven*, p. 215.

⁷⁵ Scottish National Portrait Gallery (ed), *Mad Bad and Dangerous. The Cult of Lord Byron*.

⁷⁶ *Lissens Brieven*, p. 169.

⁷⁷ The flourishing state of the university was noted by Jan Frans Willems in a letter to Hoffmann in 1837. Deprez, A. (ed), *Briefwisseling van Jan Frans Willems en Hoffmann von Fallersleben (1836-1843)*, p. 37.

became even more Byronesque. He had always seen himself as being involved in a battle for his ‘oppressed’ nation, as a poetic warrior. Now he also adopted a distinctly dandyesque persona.

Such was the importance of the theatrical to him, that at times it is not at all clear whether he distinguished between theatre and life itself. Take, for instance, a loose remark from a letter to canon Adolf Duclos, a prominent figure in the West Flemish national movement. Writing from his sickbed, Rodenbach reminisced about the student guilds. He recalled that “het heel verlot maar één voordracht was van het begin tot het einde”.⁷⁸ Was he really referring to student performances alone? An 1889 description of Rodenbach and Pol de Mont sauntering through Leuven suggests not. Such is the insight it creates into the self-portrayal of Rodenbach – ably assisted by De Mont – that it is worth quoting in full,

“Beiden droegen den overfrak over de schouders geworpen. Rodenbach keek fier op alle voorbijgangers neer; de zwarte kroezelharen stonden hem zoo recht op het hoofd, dat zijn tamelijk hooge hoed wel eenen decimeter van zijnen schedel verwijderd was; donker waren zijne oogen en iets ernstigs lag over zijn wezen: fletse wangen getuigden dat hij door eene onverbiddelijke ziekte aangetast was ... Pol had zijnen Rubenshoed diep op het rechteroor neergetrokken en zwaaide onophoudelijk met zijnen wandelstok”.⁷⁹

Two elements from this description point with great immediacy to the Romantic tradition: the dandyish poses of the two young students and the emphasis on Rodenbach’s illness. The latter was not feigned for it would kill him aged only twenty-four.⁸⁰ It is, nonetheless, one of the real hallmarks of the Romantic poet and lives on in the pages of the Romantic novel, where the hero frequently displays signs of mortal illness.

The dandyish element, the illness, and Rodenbach’s sense of being involved in a superhuman battle all show how deep the Byronesque model had imprinted itself on the whole European Romantic generation.⁸¹ It was more than self-indulgence,

⁷⁸ *Lissens Brieven*, p. 215.

⁷⁹ Swagers, F, *Pol de Mont*, p. 24.

⁸⁰ Rodenbach died from a respiratory disease.

⁸¹ It was not just Byronesque Romanticism that had influenced this generation. The brothers Grimm may be called to mind in Pol de Mont’s recollection of how he and Rodenbach journeyed through Flanders in search of remnants from the Middle Ages; whilst in a more general Romantic pose, the two set off into the forest “op dichtvaart”. Mont, P. de, “Albrecht Rodenbach. (Vervolg). Persoonlike

though. His conspicuousness had a purpose: through it Rodenbach became noticed, it helped him spread his message. The 'persona' Rodenbach, Rodenbach the poet, became an important tool in the emancipation struggle to which he wished to contribute. By imitating Lord Byron, Rodenbach made a different type of statement as well. Byron, the rebel, the fighter of noble causes, was a veritable concept in nineteenth-century Europe. By associating himself with such a concept, Rodenbach made a strong statement of intent and a strong statement on Flemish identity. He even went as far as to borrow a pseudonym from Byron's poetry, 'Harold', based on Byron's poem *Childe Harold*. An article from his days at the seminary, where signing his own name would have led to expulsion, illustrates this association of the concept 'Byron' and Rodenbach's ideals for a Flemish identity well. *Noodvier en Noodhoorn* is a story of conflict and betrayal set on the beaches and dunes of that perennial topos of Flemish national identity, the North Sea.⁸² Filled to the brim with references to the medieval theme of the *Kerels*, this short, stylised hymn to the national character as he saw it, was signed 'Harold'.⁸³ The reference to Lord Byron, in combination with the themes of the story, indicate Rodenbach's admiration for leadership, his desire to be at the head of his 'troops' in the great battle for the soul of Flanders.

One final role needs to be considered if we are to get some idea of how Rodenbach presented himself, and by implication his ideal of Flemish national identity, to his contemporaries. It was a role he relished, and one frequently alluded to before, that of leader of the vanguard of the Flemish battle, captain of the *Knapen*. From his earliest days at the seminary, we always find Rodenbach in the thick of student activity. That he consciously accrued a leadership role can be gleaned from a passage in his *Vlaamsche Kamp*, where he describes how he represented "in dezen landdag het studentenvolk van W. Vl."⁸⁴ A little further, he states his role most succinctly,

herinneringen", *Het Pennoen*, vol. 3, no. 9, (1880), p. 132; Puyvelde, L. van, *Albrecht Rodenbach*, p. 82.

⁸² Harold [A. Rodenbach], "Noodvier en Noodhoorn", *De Vlaamsche Vlag*, vol. 2, no. 1, (1876), pp. 114-7.

⁸³ See below, p. 214 and passim for the *Kerels* and the *Knapen*.

⁸⁴ Rodenbach, A, "Vlaamsche Kamp". In F. Rodenbach, *op.cit.* vol. 2, p. 115.

“Onze Toekomst, *ik* kome ze u te toonen; *ik* kome u te toonen wat onze plicht in de Toekomst zal zijn: Uit die plicht volgt de plicht van Heden ... het opbeuren en de verrijzenisse van het diepgevalen lieven Vlaanderen”.⁸⁵

This leadership role would not change much after he had moved to Leuven, although there he had to share the stage with Pol de Mont, to the eventual *chagrin* of both men. Lissens even thought he could see a reflection of Rodenbach’s leadership impulse in his works, a “rusteloos dynamisme en een streven naar grootheid”, a notion borne out by the prologue to *Gudrun*.⁸⁶ Contemporaries also immediately recognised Rodenbach’s leadership qualities. Gustav Flamen took one look at the sixteen-year-old, and wrote,

“Zoo zullen wij voor ons winnen eenen student die zeer machtig zal worden in ’t penne roeren en die veel te zeggen heeft bij zijne medegezellen”.⁸⁷

Flamen was not being altruistic here. He recognised that with Rodenbach on their side, those who dreamt of a Catholic Flemish identity would have a powerful voice.

Completely in the mould of the great Romantics, Rodenbach was ultimately to relinquish most of his leadership role: his individualistic streak was, in the end, too much for most of his fellow travellers. This, too, should be seen as part of the way in which he wished to act out the national character of his people. They were not only great fighters, but also great martyrs. Never one to endure criticism with equanimity, and clearly suffering greatly from his illness, Rodenbach would embrace the role of martyr with gusto. It was to be his last one, but putting an exact chronology on Rodenbach’s many roles would distort the picture of his being. As early as 1875, there appears a deep streak of melancholy, which may have been romantic posturing, but could well have been induced by a sense of foreboding. In his poem *Regendag*, he strongly – and skilfully – equates a sense of doom in the soul with autumnal weather,

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 121. The italics are mine.

⁸⁶ Lissens, R.F, *De Vlaamse Letterkunde van 1780 tot heden*, p. 87; Rodenbach, A, “Prologus. Van het drama ‘Gudrun’”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 141.

⁸⁷ *Kroniek*, p. 21.

“akelig schreeuwt en huilt de wilde wind.
Sombere wolken door mijn ziel ook zweven,
nevelig betreft mijn zonneglans”⁸⁸.

The season may have been chosen at random, but, as always with the elusive Rodenbach, could just as well have been picked with a purpose in mind. There is a chance that Rodenbach understood the importance of dying; if he did, he was correct. The dead Rodenbach was an immutable icon of Flemish identity, a great leader and great martyr from the past. The living Rodenbach was more often than not a rather awkward figurehead.

Underpinning all his roles was his desire to promote a Catholic Flemish identity. Yet whereas his Catholicism was that of the cradle, his Flemish identity, was, as noted, not exactly a birthright.⁸⁹ One may trace a definite process of ‘*vervlaamsing*’ during which he gained more and more of the accoutrements of a Flemish identity, until his head study master, Victor Lanssen, could describe him as “le type idéal de flamand”.⁹⁰ At no point is this clearer than when he changed his name. Changing from ‘Albert’ to ‘Albrecht’ was a similar statement of belonging: from here on, no one could question *Albrecht*’s devotion to his Flanders. It is almost impossible to underestimate the importance of this name change. Behind ‘Albrecht’ there was a whole raft of personalities, almost all carefully cultivated and all geared to the attainment of that one holy grail: to be the personification of the identity of a whole people.⁹¹

Lord Byron, Poland and Ireland, Ultramontane Catholicism, these various influences on Albrecht Rodenbach show the international scope of his nationalist outlook. One of these influences has not been discussed so far, but was probably the

⁸⁸ Rodenbach, A, “Regendag”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 13. The theme of autumn and death comes back strongly in a poem he wrote when dying, *Macte Animo*. Rodenbach, A, “Macte Animo”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 221.

⁸⁹ For the internal struggle by Rodenbach to maintain a ‘pure’ Catholicism one can turn to his letters to the priests Flamen and Verriest, who served as his confessors. This may help to explain one of the great differences between Hoffmann and Rodenbach. Whereas the former saw beer and wine as an integral part of the German national being, the latter considered “bierflamingantisme” as something to be deplored. *Vanlandschoot*, p. 402.

⁹⁰ Quoted in *Kroniek*, p. 85.

⁹¹ Compare “le type idéal de flamand” from above, with “der deutscheste Dichter” said of Hoffmann by Adolf Strodtmann. Andrée, F, *Hoffmann von Fallersleben*, p. 69.

single most important one to Rodenbach: Germany. Increasingly, Flemish nationalists were looking to the apparent success story which Germany represented. We have already encountered the poet, Van Ryswyck, holding up Germany as a role model. One need not look very far for similar declarations. Take, for example, the testimony of one of the few leading ladies of nineteenth-century Flemish letters, Virginie Loveling,

“Onze lievelingsschrijvers waren Goethe, Schiller, die wij (zijn gedichten tenminste) bijna gans van buiten kenden ... Byron en Heine waren echter onze lievelingen”.⁹²

Rodenbach shared Virginie Loveling’s predilection for Byron, but was equally enthusiastic about Goethe. Indeed, Goethe haunted his imagination.⁹³ He openly aspired to Goethe’s greatness, at times acting out the role of his hero. The inspiration that Goethe provided to Rodenbach was not purely based on an aesthetic appreciation of his artistic qualities. Goethe’s impact, or rather, the impact Rodenbach believed Goethe to have made, on the German people, hovers over his devotion. He expressed this most clearly in an address to the *Sint-Jansgilde* in 1878, some years after German unification,

“Duitschland heeft Schiller en Göthe gehad en de duitsche kunst is machtig geweest Duitschland te herscheppen. Het vlaamsche Land heeft zonder twijfel uitstekende mannen gehad, ja geniën misschien van minderen rang – maar, het genie dat een volk heel en gansch begeestert ... nog steeds moeten wij bidden en zeggen: dat de hemel ons een genie schenke”.⁹⁴

The poet as the (divine) instrument for national regeneration – rarely have the aspirations of nationalist writers of the nineteenth century been expressed this succinctly.

⁹² Loveling, V, *Herinneringen*, p. 23.

⁹³ Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, which had such a massive impact on the Romantic poets, did not fail to impress Rodenbach either. The illness of the protagonist, his unhappy love life, and the work’s emphasis on the *Schicksal* of youth, all chimed with Rodenbach and feature prominently in his poetry and writings. For the striking similarities between Goethe’s early years and Rodenbach’s life, see Boyle, N, *Goethe. The Poet and the Age*, vol. 1.

⁹⁴ Rodenbach, A, “Voordracht [aan het Sint-Jansgilde]”. In F. Rodenbach, *op.cit.* vol. 1, p. 173.

Rodenbach clearly saw himself as the genius for whom he told his audience at the *Sint-Jansgilde* to pray. It was a view that was encouraged by those around him. His teacher at the seminary, Hugo Verriest, wrote to him in 1878,

“Gij moet de katholieke, vrije, breeddenkende en dichtende Goethe worden van onzen tijd”.⁹⁵

One may question the combination of Goethe and Catholicism, and certainly the combination of militant Catholicism and liberalism, but the aspirations are crystal clear. Rodenbach was never as open about his role as the Flemish Goethe as to De Mont, whom he even referred to as “mijn Schiller”.⁹⁶ This lack of modesty was backed up by a deliberate attempt to accrue to his own person all the attributes he believed had made the German writers so successful in shaping a German national identity. Once again the 1878 speech reveals his motives,

“Wat deed men in Duitschland voor dat Schiller en Göthe dichtten? Men keek naar de oude Duitsche Letterkunde ... de wonderlike scheppingen der oude Noordsche Skalden: uit de Eddas, uit Gudrun, uit het Nevelingenlied. Men keek ook naar de vreemden ... naar het oude Griekenland ... naar het middeneeuwsch Italie ... naar Engeland en vond ... den koning van het tooneel, Shakespeare”.⁹⁷

It just so happened that one Albrecht Rodenbach was involved in all these causes. Besides being somewhat confused about the chronology of German philological research, Rodenbach in this speech also ignored those in Flanders who had long been working in the field of philology, such as Blommaert and Willems. This, too, is characteristic of Rodenbach: he clearly felt an almost prophetic desire to preach to his people, and one cannot escape a lingering feeling that, at times, this was driven by a need to be acclaimed as a *genie*.

The medium through which he wished to disseminate ‘his’ message was the stage: here, Rodenbach felt, one could reach all those who would not think of picking up a book in Dutch, those who could not even read. In addition, Flemish theatre should reflect that of Germany, where a “priester van den lande kan verschijnen en

⁹⁵ Baur, F, “Brieven van Hugo Verriest”, *VMKVATL*, vol. 1, (1950), p. 130.

⁹⁶ Baur, vol. 1, p. 288.

⁹⁷ Rodenbach, A, “Voordracht [aan het Sint-Jansgilde]”. In F. Rodenbach, *op.cit.* vol. 1, p. 174.

verschijnt met zijn priesterlik kleet aan”, reflecting his belief that nationality and morality were interrelated issues.⁹⁸ Nowhere is this moral and national theatre better represented than at Bayreuth,

“waar Wagner de groote dichter en komponist zijn reusachtige trilogiën doet vertoonen”.⁹⁹

This leads neatly to the other ‘great’ German in Rodenbach’s life, Richard Wagner.¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, the quote reveals how Rodenbach saw Wagner, as a ‘dichter’ first and only then as a ‘komponist’. It was, however, Wagner, the dramatist, who most obviously inspired Rodenbach. His most important play, *Gudrun*, was clearly based on Wagner’s *Ring*, and may be regarded as the closest expression of a sense of cultural fraternity between Flanders and Germany during this part of the nineteenth century.¹⁰¹

His fascination with Wagner was a long-standing one, which began when he attended the Roeselare seminary. This is attested by the drawings of figures from Wagner’s operas on the covers of his exercise books.¹⁰² What hooked Rodenbach, like so many Wagner fans, was the stirring *Ride of the Valkyries*, to which theme he wrote a poem on the train back from a performance in Brussel in 1877.¹⁰³ Besides using elements from Wagner’s operas, Rodenbach drank heavily from the same Germanic well as his German hero. There, in a long-lost Germanic past, which Rodenbach believed to be common to Flemings, Dutch, Scandinavians, and Germans, he hoped to discover the essence of his own people’s morality and culture.¹⁰⁴

At times, the Catholic Rodenbach even sailed close to the neo-pagan wind, nostalgically evoking the gods of the Germanic past as they appear in the *Edda*.¹⁰⁵ This was a price worth paying, when the moral exemplar of that pagan past was so

⁹⁸ Ibid, pp. 175-6.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 176.

¹⁰⁰ Wauters K, *Wagner en Vlaanderen 1844-1914*, pp. 194 and following.

¹⁰¹ Rodenbach, A, *Gudrun. Spel in vijf bedrijven*.

¹⁰² Puyvelde, L. van, *op.cit.* drawing, facing p. 104.

¹⁰³ *Kroniek*, pp. 144-5. Rodenbach, A, “Der Walkuren Rid”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, pp. 101-3.

¹⁰⁴ Rodenbach, A, “Voordracht ter Studentenaafdeeling”. In F. Rodenbach, *op.cit.* vol. 2, pp. 58-9. The influence of the work by the brothers Grimm is obvious here.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 59.

suitable to the present: for Rodenbach, as for the brothers Grimm, the Germanic culture of the past was to inform the culture of Germanic-speaking peoples in the present. This fusion of Wagnerian influences with Rodenbach's infatuation with a mythical Germanic past jumps from the pages of his introduction to *Gudrun*,

“De Dichter droomt en pegelt, door de nevelen der tijden,
en ziet een groot volk stijgen soms uit wilde reuzenstrijden,
en, wen dat volk in kampen bloeit, dan roept hem naar 't Tooneel
een Dichter, en herschept hem in een reuzig tafereel,
tot *voorbeeld en begeestering*, der Vaderen grootsche kampen”.¹⁰⁶

Noticeable is the inclusion of the poet in the prologue: once again Rodenbach placed himself in the role of contemporary hero, imparting to his audience the essence of their national identity.¹⁰⁷ There is almost a bardic quality to the ‘Dichter’ of the *Gudrun*.¹⁰⁸ He aspired to more than playing a modern bard, though. He wished to emulate his hero and the ultimate ‘celebrity’ of the nineteenth century, Richard Wagner. With rather false modesty, he described his amazement at the achievements of Wagner after attending a performance of *Tannhäuser*, hinting at the impossibility of reaching such heights in his own writing.¹⁰⁹ Yet his works received a similar reception in Flanders as Wagner's did in Germany. Max Rooses, for example, pondered whether *Gudrun* was “speelbaar”.¹¹⁰ Nor did Rodenbach underplay his ambitions: writing to Ad Hoste, the future publisher of his *Gudrun*, Rodenbach claimed that his use of the West Flemish dialect was a declaration that he was, “stout en bout, *révolutionnaire* tegen onze officiële pedanten”, an obvious echo of Wagner's stance that his art was “written consciously against his own age”.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Rodenbach, A, “Prologus. Van het drama ‘Gudrun’”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 141. The italics are mine.

¹⁰⁷ That Rodenbach is not just using the Romantic topos of ‘the Poet’ here, may be gleaned from the fact that his contemporaries saw him as ‘The Poet’.

¹⁰⁸ For example in Rodenbach, A, “Enen vroliken sangher”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 112; and Rodenbach, A, “De Skald”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, pp. 181-3.

¹⁰⁹ Rodenbach, A, “Het Voorspel van Tannhäuser”, *De Vlaamsche Gids*, vol. 9, (1913), p. 265.

¹¹⁰ It will come as no surprise that Rodenbach had read and clearly also implemented, Wagner's theoretical writings. Rooses, M, “Gudrun”. In M. Rooses, *Derde Schetsenboek*, vol. 2, p. 305.

¹¹¹ Baur, F, “Albrecht Rodenbach en zijn uitgever Ad. Hoste”, *KVATL*, vol. 10, no. 5, (1956), p.28; Garten, H.F, *Wagner the Dramatist*, p. 13.

“ik ben catholiek”.¹¹²

In 1845, Jan Frans Willems’ friend, Ferdinand Snellaert, wrote that,

“Duitschland slaet ons met aendacht gade, en ziet ... onze *beweging*: het noemt ze edel en grootsch”.¹¹³

Besides offering another interesting aside on the interaction between nationalist thinkers in Germany and Flanders, his statement also poses a significant question: was there such a thing as a ‘Vlaamse Beweging’? Snellaert assumed there was, but was his version the same as that of, say, Conscience, or Gezelle? Rodenbach disputed the very idea. To him the concept of a movement, at least in the context of his own day, was rather effete. In typically robust and combative fashion he preferred to call it “de Vlaamsche Kamp”.¹¹⁴ Even then, he still assumed that there was such a thing as a united Flemish front. He should have known better. Perhaps Hendrik Elias came closest to the truth when he referred to the Flemish national awakening as ‘de Vlaamse Gedachte’. At no time in its history, possibly with the exception of the earliest days under Jan Frans Willems, was there unity amongst those involved in shaping the ‘gedachte’ of Flanders.¹¹⁵

Unity was certainly hard to find during Rodenbach’s life, when the struggle for the soul of a Flemish identity amongst the activists was, at times, more brutal than that with the Belgian state. Impinging upon the ideals of the national were outside forces, which have already been encountered in relation to Jan Frans Willems. Deep centrifugal forces such as Liberalism, first in the form of Orangism, and then in its more traditional nineteenth-century form, and Ultramontane Catholicism tore at the unity which nationalists were so keen to forge amongst the nation. This led Elias to conclude that,

¹¹² Quoted in *Baur*, vol. 1, p. 378.

¹¹³ Snellaert, F, “De Vlaemsche Beweging in Duitschland beoordeeld”, *Belgisch Museum*, vol. 9, (1845), p. 436. The italics are mine.

¹¹⁴ Rodenbach, A, “Vlaamsche Kamp”. In F. Rodenbach, *op.cit.* vol. 2, p. 117.

¹¹⁵ See for example the co-operation between Willems and David, chapter one, pp. 72-5.

“het [Flemish national sentiment] is geen kracht die bij dit nationaal-onbewuste volk kan opwegen tegen de waarden die door beide partijen [Liberals and Catholics] in de politieke strijd worden geworpen”.¹¹⁶

This is only partly true. Both Liberalism and Catholicism soon found Flemish channels to flow through. The result was an unhappy one, for it caused a veritable battle for the ‘real’ Flanders. Just how hostile the feelings were can be surmised from a Rodenbach poem from 1877, entitled *Wanhoop*. In this poem, the ‘Kamp’ is no longer between Flemish and French, but an internal battle of Catholics with the liberal ‘Geuzen’.¹¹⁷ The associations between liberals and Orangism and between liberals and the French Enlightenment are striking. The poem reveals much of the intensity of the struggle Rodenbach was involved in, and the hate it contains puts the spotlight on the chasm within the so-called Flemish movement,

“Mijn God, indien het werk der Geuzen lukken moet,
... indien die bonte stoet
verkochte schrijvelaars en gierige demokraten,
in wiens beoedeld hand wij ’t kampen moeten laten
voor ’t lieve Vlaanderen, *hun* Vlaanderen, ’t monsterbeeld
uit hun Voltairegeest – hoe vlaamsch niet waar? – geteeld,
... dat de eerde berste en wij
en Vlaanderen, lijk het gaat en staat, verzwolgen zij,
en laas! verdwijne”.¹¹⁸

As a dismissal of the liberal version of Flanders this cannot be bettered. The snide reference to ‘hun’ Flanders, the association of the liberals with the hated French, and the sad admission that he would rather see his country swallowed up, all amount to a complete denunciation of the enemy within the ranks.

It has to be said that the feelings were mutual. As the heirs to the French Revolution, the liberals affirmed, “leur volonté de rationalisme et de *laïcité*”.¹¹⁹ Casting back to the birth pangs of the movement under Jan Frans Willems, one group of Flemish activists saw in Liberalism the logical continuation of the ideas of the

¹¹⁶ Elias, H.J, *op.cit.* vol. 3, p. 300.

¹¹⁷ The reference is to the nickname for the rebels against Spanish Catholic rule in the sixteenth century. It also implied northern, Dutch influence, and shows that the association between Orangism and Flemish liberals was still alive and well in the 1870’s.

¹¹⁸ Rodenbach, A, “Wanhoop”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 111. The italics are mine.

¹¹⁹ Gubin, E, “Flamingantisme et patriotisme en Belgique au XIXe siècle”, *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, vol. 95, (1982), p. 571. The italics are mine.

Vader der Vlaamsche Beweging. Nowhere was this more strongly expressed than in the cultural association named after Willems, *Het Willemsfonds*. In 1875, Julius Sabbe could claim before a *Willemsfonds* audience in Antwerpen, that,

“*vlaamsgezind en vrijzinnig zijn een en dezelfde gezindheid, zonder vrijzinnigheid is men geen volledige Vlaming, zonder vlaamsgezindheid geen volledige liberaal*”.¹²⁰

Obviously liberal *Flaminganten* dismissed the Catholic version of Flanders as inadequate. To their mind, the Catholic Church had helped to engineer the Belgian state, which was ‘suppressing’ Flemish culture. They believed the Francophone hierarchy to be indistinguishable from the Belgian establishment. Theirs was a vibrant Flanders, which embraced the future. This contrasted with Catholic Flanders, which has been aptly characterised as,

“*sentimental, intériorisé, traditionnaliste voire passéiste, prônant l’image d’une Flandre mystique*”.¹²¹

Two elements gave the Catholic version the edge: the Catholic nature of the novels of Conscience, which had done more than any other artistic endeavour to create a Flemish identity, and the deeply ingrained Catholicism of many in Flanders. It can be argued that there was an *a priori* Catholic national identity amongst the Flemings. The fact that the liberals were fighting the cause of a minority goes a long way to explain the bitterness of the divide.¹²²

In this battle, it was rare to cross the line to the other camp, and even rarer to form friendships across the divide. Characteristically, trying to reach out is exactly what the wayward Rodenbach did towards the end of his life. In 1879, he sent a letter to the leading liberal, Julius Vuylsteke, in which he expressed a veiled wish for closer

¹²⁰ Sabbe, J, “De Taal is gans het volk (14. 11. 1875)”. In M. Lamberty et al, *Twintig Eeuwen Vlaanderen*, vol. 15, p. 62.

¹²¹ Gubin, E, *op.cit.* p. 572.

¹²² See for example the following exhortation by Rodenbach to the Flemish students, “Op dan, moedige Jeugd! wij zullen in den oorlog staan, en zoo lang wij zullen adem halen moet ons hert Vlaamsch en *katholiek* blijven”. Quoted in Huyghebaert, J, “De voorgeschiedenis van de Vlaamsche Vlagge (1873-1875)”, *Wetenschappelijke Tijdingen*, vol. 36, no. 1, (1977), columns 207-9. The italics are mine.

acquaintance.¹²³ It was a curious move. Vuylsteke was renowned for his fiery anti-clericalism and unbending hatred of everything Catholic.¹²⁴ One line from the letter makes the affair even more curious,

“Al wilt het niemand geloven, ik ben catholiek”.¹²⁵

Not quite the conciliatory tone required one would have thought! The statement does possibly reveal why Rodenbach thought the liberals might be willing to accommodate him: few could believe that the man who fought such battles with the episcopate could still be Catholic. Another line is also revealing,

“Ik wenschte zoo zeer ... te overtuigen dat alle catholike niet en zijn gelijk het meeste deel onder ul[ieden] ze wanen”.¹²⁶

This sense of being misunderstood is another indication of Rodenbach's frustration with the situation. However, one should not lose sight of the statement of faith “ik ben catholiek”. Flemish, yes, just like Vuylsteke, but Catholic above all.

Unfortunately Rodenbach died just after sending this letter and we can but guess at what would have followed. One is reminded forcefully of Willems, who also died shortly after addressing the relative importance of the rival philosophy within the Flemish movement.

Rodenbach's contacts with Flemish liberals were not confined to Vuylsteke. Through a competition to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the national theatre in Antwerpen he befriended Max Rooses.¹²⁷ Rooses was a real nineteenth-century giant, who deserves to be remembered outside Flanders. He wrote several monographs on art, published on Jan Frans Willems and Hendrik Conscience, was a renowned literary critic, and, in 1876, became the first curator of the Plantin-Moretus Museum in Antwerpen.¹²⁸ His was not a narrow mind. He was employed by the

¹²³ Quoted in *Baur*, vol. 1, pp. 378-80.

¹²⁴ Witte, E, *Politieke Geschiedenis van België*, pp. 99-100.

¹²⁵ Quoted in *Baur*, vol. 1, p. 378.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 379.

¹²⁷ Rodenbach submitted his *Gudrun* for the celebration and received a gold medal. The friendship is attested by the warm tone of the letters. See for example *Lissens Brieven*, pp. 200-5.

¹²⁸ For Max Rooses, see Bom, E. de, *Het Levende Vlaanderen*, pp. 44-55. Perhaps their shared interest in Jan Frans Willems also brought the two men together. Rodenbach wrote a poem upon the death of

Belgian government, and, as the following shows, willing to work with anyone. Generously, he offered to publish Rodenbach's *Gudrun*, which would have given it a Belgium-wide audience. Rodenbach declined. And the grounds? He was "katholiek".¹²⁹ Rodenbach's letter to Rooses goes a long way to explain the dichotomies 'rebel-Catholic', 'nationalist-conciliator',

"Ik ben dus katholiek ... Het is te zeggen. Ik voele mij liberaal geboren, ik voele mijn gedacht overstroomden van liberalism. Mijne volkomene vrijheid achte ik mijn eerste goed, en ik ben wel besloten mij nooit aan het is gelijk welke partij te *verslaven*, even min aan eenen 'Cercle catholique' als aan eene 'Loge' ... In allen gevalle, het tijdschrift waarin gij medewerkt [and in which Rooses wished to publish *Gudrun*] bevecht de kerke, en ik wille, spijs een deel van mijn zelve, der kerke getrouwig zijn".¹³⁰

Rodenbach's Catholicism was an indelible part of his being, but he also detested being branded with a party mark. The rapprochement between Rodenbach, Vuylsteke and Rooses shows a maturity beyond his years. It brought him little joy, however. Intrinsicly incapable of ignoring his Catholicism, Rodenbach could never really have worked with, or belonged to, the liberal camp, even though both sides worked to achieve Flemish emancipation. The two visions of a Flemish national identity were just too divergent.

On his 'own' side, it made his life even more difficult. There is some evidence to suggest that his approach to the liberals may even have been caused by a new conflict in the Catholic camp, between Rodenbach and Pol de Mont. The whole episode has become obscured by subsequent manipulation of the events in the writings of De Mont, Albrecht's brother, Ferdinand, and others. Worse still, De Mont removed references to Rodenbach from his diary, and Rodenbach any mention of De Mont from his *Wahrheit und Dichtung*.¹³¹ All this makes a reconstruction of exactly

Willems' daughter Pauline in which he celebrated her father's achievements. Rodenbach, A, "Op het album van wijlend Jongvrouw Pauline Willems, J.F. Willems' dochter". In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 180.

¹²⁹ *Lissens Brieven*, p. 200.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 200-1.

¹³¹ *Baur*, vol. 1, pp. 278-9; Somers, M, "Een glimp uit de correspondentie Pol de Mont – Albrecht Rodenbach", *Wetenschappelijke Tijdingen*, vol. 37, no. 4, (1978), p. 194. Rodenbach's *Wahrheit und Dichtung* is still unpublished. Baur, F, "Albrecht Rodenbach's 'Wahrheit und Dichtung'", *KVATL*, vol. 10, no. 5, (1956), pp. 98-100. The manuscript is preserved in the *Archiefen Museum voor het Vlaamse Cultuurleven* (AMVC) R: 564.

what happened impossible. The fact that both men purged each other from their writings is evidence enough of the depth of their disagreement. Nothing De Mont would later write could camouflage this.

It seems that De Mont, like so many, could not accept Rodenbach's individualistic approach to the Church. He went as far as to describe him as three-quarter liberal.¹³² This was a serious charge, and a particularly pertinent one with respect to the shaping of a national identity: if Rodenbach wished for a Catholic Flemish nation, he simply could not afford to be three-quarter liberal. Another aspect of Rodenbach's past also came to haunt his relationship with De Mont, and, by implication, with many of his contemporaries. Although not aristocratic, the Rodenbachs were, nonetheless, part of Belgium's *haute bourgeoisie*, and this had left an indelible imprint on Albrecht. De Mont was a democrat, something Albrecht simply could not bring himself to be. As De Mont was later to write, the underlying cause of their rupture was a fundamental disagreement about how to take the *Flamingant* message to the masses; De Mont's suggestion that this ought to be done by appealing directly to the people was anathema to Rodenbach.¹³³ This is intriguing as it reveals Rodenbach's failure to feel the pulse of the growing participation of the masses in politics and raises the question for whom Rodenbach's national identity was written.

This failure to sense the *Zeitgeist* and confusion as to the 'why' of a national identity is peculiar. Perhaps this is yet another aspect of the Romantic poets' involvement in the creation of national identities. Highly individualistic, they are inherently incapable of participating in a national mass movement: influencing it, yes, shaping it possibly, but never part of it. The rupture between the two most prominent student leaders of Catholic Flanders was more than a localised spat between two big egos in a small pond. The affair invokes all the centrifugal elements that beset the Flemish movement during this period: particularism, the struggle between Catholicism and Liberalism, the growth of popular democracy, and the opposing demands of a concordat with the state and a papal-fed Ultramontanism. It

¹³² *Lissens Brieven*, p. 109. Lissens is the source for the quarrel between De Mont and Rodenbach, with an immaculate analysis of the affair. *Ibid*, pp. 101-18.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p. 91. This was to cause the publication of a new journal by Rodenbach to air his views, *Het Nieuw Pennoen*. According to De Mont this was the catalyst for the parting of their ways. This is *not* the place to explore the personality clashes between the two men, although these certainly contributed to souring the atmosphere.

also shows the failure of Rodenbach to appreciate how to work any social structure. He reached out to the liberals, but emphasised his Catholicism. By reaching out to the liberals he aroused the suspicion of other Catholics. He alienated his main friends and his family, the latter through a far from piously Catholic or properly bourgeois love-life.¹³⁴ Strangely, this had very little effect upon Rodenbach's impact on the shape of the national identity of Flanders: his writings were, after all, impeccably Catholic, even if his life was not.

To complicate an already complex picture, Rodenbach, who had become consciously and conspicuously Flemish at the Roeselare seminary, ended up courting the Francophone community once he had moved to Leuven. There he befriended some of the leading French-speaking poets of the country, including his relation, Georges Rodenbach. This link with those who would later combine to form that paradigm of Francophone Belgium, *La Jeune Belgique*, was greeted with horror in some circles, including by De Mont.¹³⁵ Again the obstinate character of Rodenbach emerges. Just as with his links to the liberals in Flanders, one should regard these contacts as the poet's normal interest in artistic excellence, irrespective of the national or religious character of the people involved. From the contacts Rodenbach had during the final years of his life, one may conclude that he saw himself as a Belgian, or even European poet, who should interact with other Belgian poets, be they Flemish liberals or Francophone.¹³⁶ Once again, this had little impact on the contribution he made to a Flemish national identity. His writings were too overtly Catholic and anti-French for his behaviour to influence his readers.

As a model of a nineteenth-century nationalist writer, Rodenbach furnishes us with an extremely complex example. His life is evidence for the multiple identities of many nationalists. This may sound like an oxymoron, but holds true, nonetheless. Rodenbach came from a pro-Belgian background, with strong Francophone connections, adopted a strident Flemish character but with pronounced West Flemish particularist traits, was devoutly and determinately Catholic and Ultramontane without giving up his personal freedom. He courted liberals and French-speaking writers whilst, at the same time, playing a leading role in the foundation of a Flemish

¹³⁴ Baur, pp. 317-8, 323, and 345-6.

¹³⁵ Elias, H.J, *op.cit.* vol. 3, pp. 6-7.

¹³⁶ For Rodenbach's desire not to be classified as provincial, see *Lissens Brieven*, p. 189.

student movement, and writing stridently pro-Catholic and anti-liberal and anti-French poems. All this combined in an artist whose inspirations were as wide-ranging as his identities: German and British, Nordic and Flemish. Even to those amongst his contemporaries who knew Rodenbach intimately, he remained something of an enigma. Hugo Verriest, who knew him very well indeed, could write after Rodenbach had died, that “hij was te veelvoudig, in zijne eenvoudigheid”.¹³⁷ The same cannot be said of his poetry. There the message was simple enough: to be Flemish one had to hate the French, the liberals and the Francophone bourgeoisie, and be a pious Catholic.

“Rodenbach, dat was Conscience in verzen”.¹³⁸

Like their creator, Rodenbach’s writings were uncompromisingly Flemish and unyieldingly Catholic. His poetry and writings proclaim a version of the Flemish identity he wished for, but could not always live himself. Rodenbach’s Catholic Flanders as it emerges from his works was already a reality for the majority of his readership, and, in one respect, he only translated this reality onto paper in much the same way that Conscience had done. The Catholic side of his poetry did not chase anything: it offered an affirmation of their identity to its readership. That he was conscious of this fact is borne out by a statement he made towards the end of his life,

“Een gedicht is nationaal, wiens hoofdpersonen uit het land des dichters genomen zijn en waar de zedens en beschaving van dit land in leven”.¹³⁹

This also points to the less accommodating side of his works: he as poet decided who its characters were, and what constituted its message on civilisation and morals. At this junction between affirming an existing Catholic culture and creating a national identity we find the true impact of Rodenbach. He was a past master at moulding the international themes of romantic poetry to shape the national identity of Flanders. In his mind Siegfried is no longer an Icelandic or Norse character, not even a prince

¹³⁷ Verriest, H, “Albrecht Rodenbach”. In *Twintig Vlaamsche Koppen*, vol. 1, p. 95.

¹³⁸ Cock, J. de, “Mijn Rodenbach”, *Rodenbachsblad*, no. 4, (1909), p. 1.

¹³⁹ Puyvelde, L. van, *op.cit.* p. 185.

along the Rhine, but a king in Holland; his *Gudrun* a “vorstinne langs de Noordzee”.¹⁴⁰ To Rodenbach’s mind these stories, which an earlier generation of *Germanisten* had culled from the Icelandic *Edda*, “verheerlijken de Trouwe, die dietsche deugd”.¹⁴¹ From these common themes and communal sets of ideals he tried to imagine the ‘national’ community. It is to these themes we should now turn.

The first and most crucial message contained within Rodenbach’s poetry and writing, besides its Catholicism, was his emphasis on language. This, by now, is what one would expect from any self-respecting nationalist writer, but whereas previously the emphasis was primarily on the intrinsic value of language, by the time of Rodenbach’s generation the emphasis had shifted. Gradually one finds a much greater stress being placed on being different from the ‘other’, more particularly the French. Rodenbach justified his anti-French sentiment on several levels. One was historical: France as the ancient enemy of Flanders. One does not have to listen too hard to hear the voice of Conscience’s *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen* here. Take, for example, the biting poem *De Fransche Ratten*, where the poet revisits a medieval French expedition into Flanders. The title alone shows his disdain, but the real clue to his dislike lies in the ‘foreign’ language,

“En rapend al zijn fransch bijeen,
zegt Zannekin: ‘Waar naartoe, he bien?’
maar, antwoorden – Lacy! ’t en dierf geen een ...

Ser Zannekin sprak: ‘gij, fransche rat,
moi sais bien, gij en zijt maar dit en dat,
et ne rien méritez que la valle en de kat”.¹⁴²

Of course, the medieval hero, Zannekin, was not chosen at random, but it is the sarcasm and disdain for French that marks this poem.¹⁴³ Referring to the French as ‘rats’ is too strong a statement to require explanations, but the sentence ‘En rapend al zijn fransch bijeen’ is arguably even more dismissive. Rodenbach’s disdain towards French did not restrict itself to medieval history. Rather it extended to all areas of

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. See in this respect the comments of the brothers Grimm on nationalising sagas, chapter two, p. 131.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Rodenbach, A, “De Fransche Ratten”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 52.

¹⁴³ For Zannekin see, Kulturele Raad Diksmuide (ed), *Nikolaas Zannekin en de Slag bij Kassel 1328-1978*.

French culture, predicated on the ‘fact’ that the language was a corrupting influence. This was expressed forcefully in his article *Beleefdheid en Fatsoenlijkheid*,

“Alzoo staat des franschmans geest gedraaid: de fransch is steeds tot het liegen in woord en daad genegen. Zijne tale bewijst het. Wij hebben het reeds gezegd, de tale verraadt het innig denken en vroeden eens volks. Welnu, het fransch krielt van woorden, wiens afgeleide zin, gewoonlijk de meest gebruikte, uit een overdrijven, een vervalschen van het oorspronkelijk gedacht komt. Zoo bestaat de fransch, zoo bestaat zijne beleefdheid”.¹⁴⁴

Underlying his disdain for French is a deep-seated sense of frustration. It was, after all, not the fault of the French that their culture was not up to Rodenbach’s standard: they could be forgiven. What *really* annoyed him was the fact that so many of his contemporaries in Flanders rated French higher than their own culture. Looking back at the earlier part of the century, and Willems’ struggle to justify the value of southern Dutch culture, one is almost tempted to say *plus ça change...* . The example of Germany, which frequently hovered before Rodenbach’s eyes, appears once more in a passage, in which he bemoans his fellow countrymen’s attitude,

“Wanneer de Duitsche jeugd op hare beurt tegen het franskilionism opstond ... en riep ... wij willen ons herduitschen ... weet gij wat ze dan onder andere deden? Zij kregen eens een *ultra* zot gedacht, en, terwijl alleman met de fransche *perruque* en de fransche kasakke liep, gingen zij – het hoofd in de lucht toen nog – op zijn Duitsch gekleed”.¹⁴⁵

And the reaction from the Frenchified Flemings?

“Hoe! Gij zoudet ons in <<Vlaamsche>> kleederen willen zien? Met leerzen zeker, eenen wijden kiel, en eene rieme met tassche? – *Qu’est ce que vous pense donc?*”.¹⁴⁶

Yet all hope is not lost. Amongst the Flemings are still to be found those ‘true’ to language, culture, and – needless to say – faith. Here Rodenbach moves from the role of critical observer to one in which he prescribes what being Flemish is about. Where are his ‘real’ Flemings to be found? Amongst the farmers and peasants, naturally.

¹⁴⁴ Rodenbach, A, “Beleefdheid en Fatsoenlijkheid”, *Het Pennoen*, vol. 1, no. 1, (1878), p. 29.

¹⁴⁵ Rodenbach, A, “Studentenwerk in den Vlaamschen kampe”, *Het Pennoen*, vol. 1, no. 2, (1878), p. 12. See in this respect also the attire of Hoffmann von Fallersleben, chapter four, p. 261 and passim.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

This topos was to have a long life in Flemish literature, culminating in the masterful novel by Felix Timmermans, *Pallieter*. Rodenbach's poetry is littered with bucolic scenes, full of 'real' Flemings, deeply pious, and above all happy,

“Over dorp en over veld
de avond spreidt, de beêklok schelt;
de avond heeft zijn vreugden mede
voor des braven landmans stede”.¹⁴⁷

And again, this time escaping the town,

“Ik vluchte geern de stede bij het dumsteren van den dag ...
Te midden zijne kinderen, gerust en kalm, daar gaat
de landman met gebogen hoofd, vermoeid maar 't herte in vrede.
En allen groeten met een kruis of met een korte bede
't eenvoudig wit kapelleken ...”.¹⁴⁸

This mystical approach to the countryside is not peculiar to Flanders: all over Europe, nationalists considered it to contain the essence of their nations. The irony cannot be lost on the careful observer. Whilst the countryside was drained of its population, and tied to an urban economy, those looking for an ideal version of their nation – urban creatures almost to the person – idealised a countryside that only ever existed in their imaginations. One can hardly blame them; increasingly, industrialisation was sweeping away the peace in the towns and cities, and escape must have seemed the only option.¹⁴⁹ It was peace they were looking for, but in Flanders, according to Rodenbach, this peace was threatened by the enemy within, and without. This is made clear in his play, *De Student*, where Rodenbach conjures up a scene in a rural *herberg*, in which the student, Frans, returning home from a town, addresses the locals. His emphasis is on the enemy within,

“en is maar te lande meer dat het volk ten volle goed gebleven is, en dat men nog het eenvoudig geloove van vroeger tijden en 't oude vlaamsche leven wedervindt. Maar

¹⁴⁷ Rodenbach, A, “Zondag”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁸ Rodenbach, A, “Avond”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, pp. 128-9.

¹⁴⁹ Rodenbach acknowledges this, when he wrote, “O rust en vrede, zaligheid mij vreemd en onbekend!”. *Ibid*, p. 130.

in de steden, en vooral in de groote! Wel zwijgt er van, het volk is daar al verfranscht en vergeusd!”¹⁵⁰

The student in the play is not just a random choice: it was amongst Frans’ friends that Rodenbach wished to recruit an intellectual elite to defend the ‘true’, but not too clever Flemish peasantry. They would fight the enemy within, but also the enemy without. In a remarkable play, Rodenbach evokes the German *Wacht am Rhein*, and urges the student-elite to defend *De Vlaamse Maagd* against French predation.¹⁵¹ His students are true heroes, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the heroes of the past.

In Rodenbach’s view, his people were still “in den grond nog middeleeuwsch en romantijk gebleven”.¹⁵² Given this ‘fact’, it is hardly surprising that the face staring from the exemplary mirror was medieval; they were, in Rodenbach’s own words, “toonbeelden”.¹⁵³ Like so many of his contemporaries, Rodenbach was immersed in the sensuous pleasures of the neo-gothic movement. This was all the more apt in a Flemish setting, where the original inspirations for the movement were within hands reach. Thus in 1872, he visited Brugge, swept up in the craze for Flemish Primitive Painting, to wander around the *Sint-Janshospitaal*. According to Vanlandschoot, the experience left a deep mark on Rodenbach, who kept on drawing versions of what he saw in his exercise books.¹⁵⁴ It also influenced his ideal of the ‘perfect’ Flemish woman. As he wrote in his poem *Van eener Jongvrouw*,

“Het was een schoone blonde, een van die middeneeuwsche wezens
die onze jong herboren schilderschool,
Hans Memlinc en Van Eyck in de ooge, op haren doeken toovert”.¹⁵⁵

Not only is this beautiful woman blond, she also insisted on speaking *Diets*.¹⁵⁶ Blond and *Diets*: to the post-Nazi reader this conjures up some unpleasant connotations. It

¹⁵⁰ Rodenbach, A, *Guido van Dampierre, - Een Abel Spel. De Student, - eene zotternie*, p. 63.

¹⁵¹ Rodenbach, A, “De Wacht over Vlaanderen”. In F. Rodenbach, *op.cit.* vol. 1, pp. 85-7.

¹⁵² Rodenbach, A, “Hou zee, Hou zee, Liedjes en gedichten!”, *De Vlaamsche Vlagge*, vol. 3, no. 1, (1877), p. 47.

¹⁵³ Rodenbach, A, “Overzicht der werkzaamheden der Studentenaafdeeling van het Davidsfonds”. In F. Rodenbach, *op.cit.* vol. 2, p. 83.

¹⁵⁴ Vanlandschoot, p. 179. For the wider context, see Peeters, M. (ed), *Impact. 1902 revisited*.

¹⁵⁵ Rodenbach, A, “Van eener jongvrouw”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 167.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 168.

is indeed in this enthusiasm for the native that the roots of the Nazi ideology – and of other right-wing ideologies – are to be found, although Rodenbach was obviously not planning this.

Rodenbach's enthusiasm for the medieval heroes was fired, appropriately enough, by a neo-gothic wall painting in the town hall of Kortrijk.¹⁵⁷ He had paid a visit to the battlefield of the *Guldensporenslag* of 1302, but left somewhat disappointed. The wall paintings, created only one year before, made up for this,

“Ik en heb nooit Breydel en De Coninck gebeeld gezien dat zij mij zoo aanstonden lijk deze dat Swerts daar geschilderd heeft, jong en kalm, zoo grootsch en zoo edel”.¹⁵⁸

Jan Breydel and Pieter de Coninck were, of course, the great heroes of Brugge, who stood up against an overwhelmingly powerful France during the early fourteenth century. Both men were of relatively low social backgrounds, but rose to prominence through their eloquence, and, one assumes, charisma. This *völkische* character of the two made them an obvious choice as role-models for the anti-French Rodenbach. Nor were they an original choice: there existed a veritable cult of the two figures amongst the Flemish movement.¹⁵⁹ Once again, one detects the influence of Conscience's *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen*, where the two men are leading protagonists. Rodenbach actively participated in furthering the myth of Breydel and De Coninck, fundraising for the statue in their honour that was to be unveiled in Brugge in 1887.¹⁶⁰

History tells very little about Breydel and De Coninck. How, then, did Rodenbach fill in this blank canvas? The main emphasis of his pen was on the valiant character of his two heroes, who complement each other: Breydel the brawn, De Coninck the brain,

¹⁵⁷ *Kroniek*, p. 82. For nineteenth-century murals, see Ogonovszky, J, “De monumentale schilderkunst, ‘aanschouwelijk onderwijs in vaderlandse geschiedenis’”. In A. Morelli (ed), *De grote mythen uit de geschiedenis van België, Vlaanderen en Wallonië*, pp. 147-158.

¹⁵⁸ *Kroniek*, p. 82.

¹⁵⁹ *NEVB*, vol. 1, 1998 ed. S.v. “Breydel, Jan en Coninck, Pieter de”, by T. Verschaffel and J. Tollebeek.

¹⁶⁰ *Kroniek*, p. 183. Rodenbach also won a competition to write a poem “ter verheerlijking van Breydel & De Coninck”, in 1878. He won the first prize. Rodenbach, A. “Breydel & De Coninck”. In Vlaamschen Broederbond (ed), *Bekroonde Dichtstukken in de Letterkundige Kampstrijden uitgeschreven door den Vlaamschen Broederbond te Brugge*, pp. 3-13.

“hoe Coninck slim was en hoe Breydel alles sloeg in spaandren”.¹⁶¹

These are truly fearless characters, undaunted by anyone. They were undaunted by rank as well, and this is of the greatest importance with regard to the lessons from the past for the present. Rank equalled Frenchification, or signified a Frenchman, in the days of Breydel and De Coninck just as in Rodenbach's. When Breydel enters the courtroom to free his friend from the French prison in Brugge, Rodenbach imagines his attitude as follows,

“Uit mijnen weg of 'k plette uw kop!’ riep iemand buiten.
De heeren keken op, elkaâr beziende, wen
de voordeur opensloeg. Jan Breydel stond voor hen.
‘Bij God!’ riep Châtillon, ‘dat's buiten alle palen!’
Jan Breydel schoof zijn muts van 't hoofd en: ‘Heeren Walen,’
zei hij, ‘en Leliaards...’”¹⁶²

The determined tone of voice, the fear and outrage of Châtillon, and above all the impudent referral to those present as ‘Walen’ and ‘Leliaards’, these are the hallmarks of what Rodenbach regards as a ‘true’ Fleming.¹⁶³ Rodenbach told a similar story with regards to the great Gent civic leaders, the Van Artevelde family. Once more, fearlessness, patriotism, and the ‘man-of-the-people’ story are used to illustrate a ‘great’ and ‘representative’ episode from the medieval past.¹⁶⁴ One recognises some of the themes from his poetry that referred to contemporary situations: only there one finds few such heroes as in these medieval fantasies. Rodenbach's message is clear: contemporary Flanders needs modern heroes, who, like Breydel and De Coninck of old at the Battle of the Golden Spurs, could send the Francophiles packing.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 12.

¹⁶² Rodenbach, A, “De Coninck Verlost”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 107.

¹⁶³ *Waal* was – and is – used as a derogatory term for those who speak French, summed up in Conscience's slogan *Wat wals is vals is! Slaat al dood! Leliaards* was, for a change, an actual historical term, applied to those in the county of Flanders who supported the French monarchy during the thirteenth- and fourteenth centuries. It was also a term of abuse.

¹⁶⁴ Rodenbach, A, “Klokke Roeland”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, pp. 56-7.

¹⁶⁵ Rodenbach, A, “Wandeling langs de vaart”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, pp. 105-6. For the importance of the Battle, see Tollebeek, J, “De Guldensporenslag. De Cultus van 1302 en de Vlaamse strijd”. In A. Morelli (ed), *op.cit.* pp. 191-202.

Rodenbach must have realised he was in no way a modern-day Breydel, but there were other, more appropriate medieval heroes he could turn to. Ever since the early days of the Flemish movement, one medieval poet in particular had been singled out for annexation to the present: Jacob van Maerlant.¹⁶⁶ The reason for this choice was clear, Maerlant's slogan "omdat ic Vlaminc ben", written in the thirteenth century could not fail to endear him to nineteenth-century nationalists. This statement of identity, by someone recognised as a major poet, coupled with its antiquity, drew Rodenbach to him like a magnet. In 1878, Rodenbach, accompanied by Pol de Mont, went on a pilgrimage to Damme, where Maerlant was buried. In one of his typical romantic gestures, Rodenbach left a poem to Maerlant in the tower of the church.¹⁶⁷ The sense that he could draw inspiration from Maerlant speaks from the poem left in the tower, which his brother Ferdinand published afterwards,

"O Maerlant, 't is dat Vlaanderen weêr uit een wanhopig strijden
moet stijgen groot en blij en vrij. Intusschen, dichtervaâr,
gij geeft ons voorbeeld ...".¹⁶⁸

Here, then, is Rodenbach's own medieval exemplar; not a warrior, not even a man from the people, but a poet, whose single statement 'omdat ic Vlaminc ben' gave purpose to Rodenbach's own life. Why? Because in Rodenbach's mind that one single sentence contained all a true patriot required. It imparted dignity and pride, even under repression and mockery,

"Fier moeten wij zijn gelijk onze vaders, en eens moet Vlaanderen dàar komen, dat de eenvoudigste boer van te lande, waneer een verfranschte nieting ievers hem misprijst, zijn hoofd rechte houdt, den anderen van omhoog bezieet, en zijn zelven groeter voelt dan die andere is, bij dat gedacht en vers van Maerlant: 'Omdat ic Vlaminc ben'" .¹⁶⁹

Through his own poetry and writings, Rodenbach felt he was imparting the message of his 'dichtervaâr'. All the frustration caused by Frenchification, all his love for the

¹⁶⁶ For the background to the Maerlant veneration, see Oostrom, F. van, *Maerlants Wereld*, pp. 395 and following.

¹⁶⁷ Mont, P. de, *op.cit.* p. 132; F. Rodenbach, *op.cit.* vol. 2, pp. 213-4.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

¹⁶⁹ Rodenbach, A, "Vlaamsche Kamp. In. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

'real', 'simple' peasant, these all speak from the quoted passage and help explain Rodenbach's vision of his own heroic role.

Rodenbach thought of himself as the poet of a whole company of new heroes, the *Kerels*. These, too, have their roots in a foggy medieval past, described in *Noodvier en Noodhoorn*,

"Twee jongelingen verlaten het visschersdorp. Blond is hun haar en hun vlamme baard; vierig stralen hunne blauwe oogen: Vlamen zijn het en Kerels, kinders van het ruwe Noorden".¹⁷⁰

The reference to the fishing village and the rough north owe much to a *Francophone* historian, Kervyn de Lettenhove, whose *Histoire de Flandre* of 1847 cast the *Kerels* mythology in stone.¹⁷¹ Kervyn had made a simple, but fundamental mistake when recreating the social conditions of early medieval Flanders: he had interpreted the word *karl*, comparable to the Anglo-Saxon *carl*, as covering the whole of society.¹⁷² As such, he envisaged a world of freeborn farmers, who, when necessary, would serve in the army.¹⁷³ Possibly influenced by the work of Anglo-Saxon scholars on the *housecarl*, and certainly by the *Kerelslied* from the medieval Flemish *Gruuthuse* manuscript, a vision of medieval Flanders was launched that chimed well with the hopes of those involved in the Flemish movement.¹⁷⁴ Here was the ideal: a country of farmers, that happy class of people we already saw carrying off Rodenbach's admiration, who owed servitude to none, and whose sturdy independence could not be quashed by the mockery of the fourteenth-century poem in the *Gruuthuse* manuscript.

It was this happy brotherhood that Rodenbach sought to recreate in the unlikely setting of the seminary at Roeselare, and it is this myth which gave rise to his most influential work: the student anthem, *Het Lied der Vlaamsche Zonen*.¹⁷⁵ Besides its peasant appeal, the *Kerels* mythology also gave Rodenbach a physical topos: the

¹⁷⁰ Rodenbach, A, "Noodvier en Noodhoorn", *De Vlaamsche Vlagge*, vol. 2, no. 1, (1876), p. 114.

¹⁷¹ Lettenhove, K. de, *Histoire de Flandre*, vol. 1, pp. 111-2.

¹⁷² *Kerels* was a later medieval derivation of *karl*.

¹⁷³ Kervyn was heavily influenced by the *Rigspula* from the Edda, in which the creation of the *karl* as a class was described. Vries, J. de, *Edda*, pp. 78-84.

¹⁷⁴ For the *Kerelslied*, see Carton, C, *Oudvlaemsche liederen en andere gedichten der XIVe en XVe eeuwen*, pp. 154-6.

¹⁷⁵ This came in three versions, all of which are given in Appendix One.

North Sea and its Flemish beaches. Like his elevation of a peasantry that was being eliminated by economic circumstances, Rodenbach's romantic beaches were being swamped by the newly-leisured classes, leaving precious few wild places for fishermen. However, this topos is of the greatest significance. Unlike the Germans, Scandinavians, English, and Dutch, the Flemings had a real problem 'proving' their Germanic antecedents. Such had been their interaction with French throughout their history, that this was no longer self-evident. As a result, one finds enormous emphasis being placed on the North-Sea beaches, even though these run for only some forty miles and have little to do with the majority of Flanders.

It was on these beaches, washed by the North Sea, that Flanders was inconvertibly tied to the Nordic world. This was, above else, because it was a violent environment, a hallmark of the north,

“Bij Rane! een donderslag.
De nacht rijst stormenzwanger aan de kimme ...
De bare grauwt, onrustig rolt de zee,
de lucht betreft, het waait een felle wind,
en meeuw en zeegier vliegen angstig strandwaarts:
het broedt een ongeweerte ...”¹⁷⁶

This is a fine evocation of the sea-side during an approaching gale, but aside from the quality, the poem also fundamentally establishes that link with the north: it comes from *Gudrun*, with its Wagnerian overtones. Naturally, this Nordic and North Sea theme has an association with a poet: where otherwise would Rodenbach place himself? *Enen vroliken sangher* – and note the deliberate Middle Dutch – places the poet on the beach, and thereby in the Germanic world. Let us consider the qualifications of those who sit amongst the “schare der Gezellen” and “het kroost der blonde Skalden”,

“Gij mint dus ook de vlucht der grijze noordzeemeeuwe,
gij mint dus ook den zang der wilde noorderzeeuwe”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Rodenbach, A, “Zeegezichten. Uit ‘Gudrun’”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 142.

¹⁷⁷ Rodenbach, A, “Enen vroliken sangher”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 112.

This love for the North Sea, then, is essential to the poet who is to join the ‘Skalden’, the Germanic bards in their reincarnated, nineteenth-century version.

There is yet another strand to the beach theme in Rodenbach, for the beach, an essential no-man’s land, is also a place of freedom. In a rather tortured historical analogy, Rodenbach introduces this idea of the North Sea beach as the last bastion of Flemish freedom. His *De Nederlage der Nerviers* requires some explanation, for its meaning is no longer immediately obvious to a modern audience. The poem deals with the defeat of the ancient Belgic tribe of the Nerviers at the hands of Julius Caesar, in the first century BC. Through a rather convoluted logic, this Celtic people are annexed to the aspiration for a Flemish national identity. Imperial Rome becomes synonymous with the French, courtesy of Jacob Grimm’s *Grammatik*, where French is classified as a Romanesque language like Latin. Even stranger is the fact that the Nerviers are referred to as ‘Belgen’, whilst what Rodenbach really means is Flemings. A final paradox comes in the overt theme of the poem, the utter *defeat* of the Nerviers. The real message comes at the very end, though, when a voice shouts from the distance,

“Der Belgen vrijheid leeft nog op ’t wilde noordzeestrand”.¹⁷⁸

On that same beach the ancestors of his *Kerels* had landed, in the form of the Vikings, whom Rodenbach believed to be the progenitors of his people. This is why the voice can shout with such confidence, and why it shouts from a distance. The belief also underlines the link with the north, and its importance,

“Onze ouders waren vrij.
In ’t vrije Noorden wierden zij geboren,
Romein, waar men der keizers naam niet kent,
noch jok noch slavernij ...
Hier landden zij met hunne kromme snekken
en kozen hier een tweede vaderland ...”.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Rodenbach, A, “De nederlage der Nerviers”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 100.

¹⁷⁹ Rodenbach, A, “De Wikings”, quoted in Seys, R, “Zannekin en de Kerels van Vlaanderen in het volkslied”. In *Kulturele Raad Diksmuide* (ed), *op.cit.* p. 198.

According to this contorted history, the devoutly Catholic Flemish farmers and peasants, who, according to Rodenbach, were the receptacle of all his people's virtues and culture, are descended from the Vikings and were always freeborn peasants. When this freedom came under threat, from France, of course, heroes like Breydel, De Coninck, and Van Artevelde stood up. That they ultimately failed was the result of the internal enemy, the *Leliaard*, who was still stalking Flanders' fields and towns. Now, after centuries of neglect and oppression, a new Maerlant, a Flemish Goethe, had arisen. In his company walked the new *Kerels van Vlaanderen*. Together they would rescue the farmers and peasants from the *Francophone* threat, and restore their pride, as well as their rightful place amongst the Germanic peoples.

The real inspiration for the whole *Kerels* ethos at the Roeselare seminary came, as mentioned before, from Conscience's eponymous novel, even though his writings had been banned by the superior.¹⁸⁰ As was his want, the novelist had put some flesh on the bones of Kervyn's more academic survey, flesh that made the by now thoroughly fictitious *Kerels* irresistible to Rodenbach and his fellow students. Just how irresistible can be gathered from a speech which he gave to the student division of the *Davidfonds* in Leuven in 1878,

“Uit het bloedbad der verraderlik omgebrachte Kerels stijgt de zeer kerelsche Gemeente. Keer voor keer wordt zij uit diepen val grooter en sterker herboren. En waneer Vlaanderen eindelijk zoo diep vervallen is dat men zelfs Gemeente en alles vergeten heeft, uit de overmate van schande scheidt het wederwerk een krachtig herleven onder den name van Vlaamsche Beweging”.¹⁸¹

This 'herleven', this notion of rising from the depths of defeat, echoes throughout the nineteenth-century nationalist movements, but rarely with such passion. For Rodenbach, this revival was part of a wider youth culture, consciously Flemish, and deliberately breaking with what had gone before.¹⁸² The rest of his speech to the *Davidfonds* is worth quoting, as it states this belief most virulently,

¹⁸⁰ It was in the introduction to Conscience's *Kerels van Vlaanderen* that Rodenbach learned of Kervyn de Lettenhove's ideas about the *karls*. Fris, V, *De Bronnen van de historische Romans van Conscience*, p. 60. For the ban on Conscience's books, see Bruyne, M. de, *Hendrik Conscience en Roeselare*, pp. 69-71.

¹⁸¹ Rodenbach, A, "Voordracht over de Kerels van Vlaanderen". In F. Rodenbach, *op.cit.* vol. 2, p. 84. This is one of the few times that Rodenbach refers to a 'Beweging'.

¹⁸² This sentiment appeared in several poems. See, for example, Rodenbach, A, "Het Vlaamsch Studentenvolk". In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, pp. 40-1.

“Die Beweging zien wij nu ... uiteenlopen en ontaarden. Doch sedert eenigen tijd verkwikt haar een nieuw herleven ... van wege de Jeugd die van alle kanten bond sluit en spreekt en handelt als Vlaamsche Knapenschap met de ooge ... op de Burschenschaft die Duitschland redde ... deze laatste herkwikking ... van onzen Vlaamschen stam herinnert aan het taaie volk onzer aloudheid: zij begon te midden het oude Kerlingaland, met de leuze der Kerels, begeesterde zich bij het lezen van den roman der Kerels en voerde waar zij begon eene name die de oude veeten der Kerels herinnerde ... *Blauwvoeterie*.¹⁸³

He could give this speech to the Catholic *Davidfonds*, because, almost miraculously, Rodenbach had managed to imbue his fictive Germanic heathens with a deep-seated Catholicism.¹⁸⁴ It was for this modern Catholic student movement, for this reincarnation of the *Kerels*, the *Blauwvoeterie*, that Rodenbach wrote his most famous poem, *Het Lied der Vlaamsche Zonen*. Also of interest is the fleeting reference to the German student movement, on which his own *Knapenschap*, an alternative name for the *Blauwvoeterie*, was based.¹⁸⁵

The *Lied* is a fascinating mixture of many of the themes discussed previously, complicated by the fact that there are three extant variants, all of which may be found in appendix one. The first version was written for the 1875 *superiorsfeest* at the seminary in Roeselare. Its tone is cheerful, full of gratitude to a Church hierarchy that was soon to dash the hopes of the students.¹⁸⁶ The ban on using the slogan *Vliegt de Blauwvoet! Storm op Zee!* and on singing Flemish songs angered the students, leading Rodenbach to re-write the song. The second version was sung during the *Groote Stooringe*, and reflects the bitterness of the affair. It became the most popular of the three versions, is defiant, angry, and affirms the Catholicism of the *Blauwvoeterie*.¹⁸⁷ Rodenbach considered his re-writing of the *Lied* to be a process,

¹⁸³ Rodenbach, A, “Voordracht over de Kerels van Vlaanderen”. In F. Rodenbach, *op.cit.* vol. 2, p. 84.

¹⁸⁴ See for example Rodenbach, A, “Aan de Sint-Jans Gilde”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 67.

¹⁸⁵ Rodenbach, A, “Overzicht der werkzaamheden der Studentenaafdeeling van het Davidfonds”. In F. Rodenbach, *op.cit.* vol. 2, p. 75; see also Gevers, L, “Rodenbachs bijdrage tot de Vlaamse studentenbeweging”, *Wetenschappelijke Tijdingen*, vol. 40, no. 1, (1981), column 33.

¹⁸⁶ This version was subsequently never used.

¹⁸⁷ *Kroniek*, p. 93; for this see also Huyghebaert, J, “De drie avontueren van het Lied der Vlaamsche Zonen”. In R. Boucquey et al, *De Groote Stooringe 1875. Historische Bijdrage tot de Geschiedenis van de Vlaamse Studentenbeweging*, pp. 27-62. It was published in *De Vlaamsche Vlag* in August 1876.

which only culminated in the third version.¹⁸⁸ This, much more aggressive, stridently anti-establishment, and virulently anti-French and anti *Francophone* version never achieved widespread popularity. When it was published in *Het Pennoen*, the three verses containing the bitterest vitriol were omitted.¹⁸⁹ This poses a problem: on the one hand, we have Rodenbach's own assertions that the third version reflects his mature considerations on the national *kamp*, on the other, the fact that the second, less confrontational version became best known. As it stands, all three versions reflect broadly similar themes, and it is to these that one can turn to discover the essence of Rodenbach's vision for Flanders.

The *Lied*'s most striking element is its slogan, "Vliegt de Blauwvoet – storm op zee!".¹⁹⁰ The identity of the bird – *de Blauwvoet* – is one that has preoccupied many. The name has no obvious ornithological meaning, yet Rodenbach did not choose it at random. Its origins are to be found in Hendrik Conscience's novel *De Kerels van Vlaanderen*, where the *Kerels* are also called *Blauwvoeten*. Important as this was to Rodenbach's choice, there was a deeper, symbolic meaning which he attributed to the *Blauwvoet*. Kesteloot has argued convincingly that the *Blauwvoet* actually refers to the gannet, which, calling to mind Rodenbach's deep, almost mystical reverence for the beaches of the North Sea, sheds a revealing light on the slogan.¹⁹¹ Whether Rodenbach believed the *Blauwvoet* to refer to a gannet or to a more general sea-going bird is immaterial: it is the close association it forged between his students – now called *Blauwvoeten* – and the North Sea that was foremost in his mind.

The centrality of the cultural north to Rodenbach has already been noticed. It will, therefore, come as no surprise to find it permeating all three versions of the *Lied*. In the dedication, for example, the student leader Amaat Vyncke's heroism is described as "germaansch".¹⁹² In version two there is a reference to "de blonde noordsche

¹⁸⁸ "Hier is de nieuwe Blauwvoet. Hij is wat langer doch men moet zijn gedacht geheel en gansch ontwikkelen nietwaar?" *Kroniek*, p. 165.

¹⁸⁹ Bursche [Rodenbach, A.], "Het lied der Westvlaamsche studenten gezeid 'De blauwvoet'", *Het Pennoen*, vol. 1, no. 2, (1878), pp. 19-21.

¹⁹⁰ For all quotes from the poems, see Appendix One.

¹⁹¹ For the debate, see Kesteloot, E, "De <<Blauwvoet>> in de vogelwereld", *Biekorf*, vol. 61, (1960), pp. 167-8. Conscience's belief that the name referred to the osprey or Jacob Grimm's belief that it was a fox (!) were all known to the students. Rodenbach, however, clearly looked for a non-predatory bird, as his statue in Roeselare reveals. *EVB*, vol. 1, 1973 ed. S.v. "Blauwvoet", by L. Vos-Gevers.

¹⁹² Appendix One, 'Opdracht'. There is considerable confusion surrounding what was dedicated to whom. Clear is that different people featured in different dedications, with amongst others Jozef Axters and Amaat Vyncke or Amaat Joos appearing in different versions. For this, see *Baur*, vol. 2,

stranden”, where a link is made between what was considered to be a northern ‘racial’ characteristic – blondness – with the beaches of Flanders.¹⁹³ This is worked out in greater detail in the third version, in which a line is dedicated to the “Wikings”.¹⁹⁴ This recalls his poem *De Nederlage der Nerviers*, where Flemish freedom is restored after the Roman occupation by invaders from the north. Nowhere is the emphasis on the north as strong as in the first verse of the second, most popular, version,

“Nu het lied der vlaamsche zonen,
nu een dreunend Kerelslied,
dat in wilde noordertonen
uit het diepste ons herten schiet”.¹⁹⁵

This sentiment is reinforced throughout the song, by a continuous reference to the “wilde noordertonen” in the refrain, which is, of course, repeated at frequent intervals,

“Ei, het lied der vlaamsche zonen,
met zijn wilde noordertonen,
met het oude vlaamsch Hoezee:
Vliegt de Blauwvoet – storm op zee!”.¹⁹⁶

The wildness of the north, the antiquity of Flanders and the redemptive nature of the beaches. These perennials of Rodenbach’s vision for his people all feature here. Through its manifold repetition at singing contests, during marches and at student gatherings it imprinted itself on the minds of the Flemings in the generations after Rodenbach’s death.¹⁹⁷

Rodenbach’s was a vision with a singular sense of history. It is through this historical awareness that he developed his idea of freedom in the three versions of

pp. 293–4. The one used here is the dedication which Puyvelde found in the *De Vlaamsche Vlagge* of 1885. For the confusion see *Kroniek*, p. 165, and *Vanlandschoot*, p. 385. Here Puyvelde’s version of the dedication has been used as it seems to fit Amaat Vyncke better than anyone else. For Vyncke, see *EVB*, vol. 2, 1975 ed. S.v. “Vyncke, Amaat”, by L. Vos-Gevers.

¹⁹³ Appendix One, II, verse 5.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, III, verse 5.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, II, verse 1.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, II, ‘Refrain’.

¹⁹⁷ The *Blauwvoet* was reprinted many times, and Flemish students had to learn it by heart. See for example *Rodenbachsblad*, no. 11, (1909), Bijvoeg.

Het Lied. Once more this freedom is heavily indebted to the redemption found on the beaches,

“Maar dan klonk een stemme krachtig
over ’t oude noordzeestrand,
en het stormde grootsch en machtig
in dat doode Vlaanderland”.¹⁹⁸

Here that almost Christ-like quality that Rodenbach believed to reside in the nationhood of Flanders is fully expressed: in a country that has died – implicitly through occupation or repression – a ‘divine’ wind revives its fortunes. Rodenbach’s own students, then, stand in a long line of revivals, which recalled the ‘Wikings’ and stretch in unbroken succession – in spite of periods of national dormancy – via the ‘Kerels’, the ‘Klauwaards’ and the ‘Gilde’ to the present.¹⁹⁹

The enemy was, of course, France, but there is an internal enemy as well, and at these the sharpest barbs of the third version were aimed,

“Volk met averechtsche plichten,
zonder u zal ’t ook wel gaan”.²⁰⁰

This refers to the liberals, without whom Rodenbach believed national emancipation could still be achieved. Much more serious are the accusations thrown at the ‘others’,

“Gijnder daar die ’t volk woudt paaien
met uw helden – landverraârs,
g’hebt bij God ! gedaan met zaaien,
uitgekochte leugenaars !

Gij die ons hebt uitgezogen,
fransch gebroed alhier gemest,
g’hebt genoeg op ons gespogen !
Ziet: ons zweep ! – en ginds, uw nest !”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Appendix One, II, verse 3.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, III, verses 5 and 6.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, III, verse 13.

²⁰¹ Ibid, III, verses 14 and 15.

These verses recall Jacob Grimm's definition of 'true' Germans in the conflict over Schleswig-Holstein.²⁰² Here the writer determines who is really Flemish: all those who disagree with him are traitors and liars who ought to be whipped back to France. Once more one reaches the limits of toleration, and the point where local pride and a justifiable sense of repression are replaced by a virulent hatred of the 'other'. There are several passages in *Het Lied* which throw dark shadows in any case. Again the third version provides an example,

“Horkt ! het lied de Vlaanderens gouwen
antwoordt op het Kerelslied:
ziet alom de vane ontvouwen,
scharen in 't vlaamsch Studentendiet”²⁰³

This verse almost pre-figures the dark days of the 1930's: gouwen, although here used as an archaic reference, emerged in the Flemish SS, and the marching behind a flag are all pregnant with the future.²⁰⁴ It is yet another indication that the course of national identities in Europe gradually ran into the channels that were to lead to disaster half a century onwards.

The striking change of tone between the three versions of *Het Lied*, gradually becoming more and more embittered, reflects the realities of the Flemish movement. It was not until 1873 that Dutch was used in courts, a situation that caused some striking miscarriages of justice.²⁰⁵ In 1878 Dutch began to be used in government in Dutch-speaking provinces, and three years after Rodenbach's death, in 1883, it also became the language of instruction in primary education. Yet these were cosmetic concessions: Frenchification proceeded apace and to anybody like Rodenbach it must have felt like an uphill struggle; it was not until after the Second World War that full emancipation became reality.²⁰⁶ This, of course, does not justify the outcome, but does explain the process.

²⁰² See chapter two, p. 160.

²⁰³ Appendix One, III, verse 11.

²⁰⁴ The *Blauwvoet* marches of the 1930's are a good example of what type of children Rodenbach's poetry begat. Anon., *Tweede Blauwvoet-Marsch*.

²⁰⁵ For this and what follows see, Witte, E. et al, *Politieke Geschiedenis van België*, p. 101.

²⁰⁶ For Rodenbach's reaction to these developments, see Rodenbach, A, "Vlaamsche Kamp". In F. Rodenbach, *op.cit.* vol. 2, p. 118.

The same process can be detected in another specific element of 1930's nationalism: violence. That Rodenbach regarded the Flemish movement as part of a struggle has been noticed; he almost habitually referred to it as a *kamp* or *strijd*. This theme of struggle and conflict dominates all three versions of *Het Lied*.²⁰⁷ Again it is a theme rooted in anger and frustration, as verse four of the second version testifies,

“En hier staan wij 't hoofd omhoog,
vuisten sidderend, kokend bloed,
vlamme in 't herte, vlamme in de ooge,
en ons naam ons trillen doet”.²⁰⁸

It is little wonder that the second version of *Het Lied* had such an enormous resonance amongst the Flemish soldiers at the Western Front during the First World War: the sense of freedom, the notion of the justified battle and the feeling of frustrated justice all appealed directly to the experiences of the trenches, where commands were given only in French, and another enemy was martyring Flanders.²⁰⁹

The greatest resonance was, however, reserved for Rodenbach's central plank of Flemish identity. In the light of Rodenbach's own strongly-held religious convictions, it is inevitable that *Het Lied* bears a deep Catholic hue. The dedication may be regarded as a statement of intent,

“u, die waneer het klaroen opgaat,
de wind ons vane in plooiën slaat,
vol vroomheid, tot spijt van die 't benijdt,
aan 't hoofd der tiegende bende zijt”.²¹⁰

Het Lied became more obviously Catholic, and the link between a Flemish identity and Catholicism stronger, as new versions appeared. It is a Catholicism marked by a militant spirit. In *Het Lied*, Rodenbach manages to imbue his Flemish struggle with the ethos of the Church Militant. In the second version a whole verse was dedicated to this merger of militant Catholicism with the militancy of the Flemish cause,

²⁰⁷ Appendix One, I, verse 5; II, verse 4; III, verse 6.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, II, verse 4.

²⁰⁹ *NEVB*, vol. 2, 1998 ed. S.v. “Kerels”, by T. Verschaffel. Verse 8 of version II was particularly popular.

²¹⁰ Appendix One, ‘Opdracht’.

“Op ons vane vliegt de Blauwvoet
die voorspelt het zeegedruisch,
en de Leeuw er met zijn klauw hoedt
't zegepralend Christi Kruis”.²¹¹

This is arguably the most potent of all the verses in *Het Lied*. Rodenbach managed to link the redemptive features of the North Sea – ‘het zeegedruisch’ – with the redemption of Christ. To this he added the centrality of Catholicism to his idea of Flemish identity, whilst at the same time bestowing upon his *kamp* a sense of Crusade: the ‘leeuw’ protects the triumphant Cross. No longer is Flanders a suffering companion of Poland or Ireland. Instead, Rodenbach, with his keen sense of history, is revisiting the days when Flemish counts and knights, and, indeed, Flemish peasants, fought for the Holy Land. In the final version this ‘theology’ of a Flemish national identity has been crafted to perfection,

“Hoog in wind de Klauwaardsvane,
't alverwinnend Kruis in top,
en, spijs gaais en franschen Hane,
met een blauwen Blauwvoet op”.²¹²

No longer is the Cross hiding behind the Flemish lion, rather she sits at the top, presiding over the flag with the lion of old, accompanied by the *Blauwvoet*. In such fashion, the ‘real’ Flanders tramples victoriously over her enemies, the French, *Francophone* Flemings, and, in the guise of jays, the liberals. This leads Rodenbach to the holy grail of nationalism, not just in Flanders but all over the world. Through the redemptive qualities of history and Faith, the ‘real’ Flanders shall re-emerge, the Flanders of the ‘Golden Age’,

“Vlaanderen stijgt, herkwikt, herboren,
uit het oud Kerlingaland !”.²¹³

It is above all a youthful Flanders that Rodenbach had in mind, which is unsurprising, seen his role as student leader. ‘His’ students are the reincarnation of

²¹¹ Ibid, II, verse 7.

²¹² Ibid, III, verse 9.

²¹³ Ibid, III, verse 16.

the old *Kereels*, and the inspiration of the ancients leads, in verse 12 of the third version, to a glorious future,

“’t Kerelslied wekt Vlaanderens krachten:
't heir groeit aan, zijn hoop, zijn deugd !
Ziet, zij grijnzen reeds die lachten:
Vlaanderens Toekomst hoort der jeugd !”.²¹⁴

“Mijn Vlaanderen is mijn ziel”.²¹⁵

For all the complexity and ambiguities of Albrecht Rodenbach’s life, there is little room for doubting the sincerity of his attachment to Flanders, nor about the genuine intensity of his Catholicism. The importance of his faith to Rodenbach always precluded any real affinity with Flemish liberals, for all his attempts at building bridges within the ruptured Flemish movement. The answer as to just how he could square his disobedience – a severe sin – towards the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church, with his continued sense of his own Catholic beliefs, is to be sought in the popular Catholicism that sustained the faith during any period of crisis, either political or personal. This devotional aspect of Catholicism is, arguably, the strongest expression of the faith during the nineteenth century, and Rodenbach participated most fully in its manifestations.

In the room in which Rodenbach passed away were found those two emblems of nineteenth-century popular devotional Catholicism, a rosary and a statue of Our Lady.²¹⁶ In addition, there was his translation of a Novena to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, dedicated by ‘Harold’ to “Maria die hem genezen kan”.²¹⁷ This popular belief in the powerful intercession of the Virgin Mary was accompanied by a contemplation of the suffering of Christ, yet another element of ‘popular’ Catholicism. Every day, Rodenbach had read to him a passage from Clemens Brentano’s *Das bitter Leiden Christi*, after the visions of Anne Catherine

²¹⁴ Ibid, III, verse 12.

²¹⁵ Rodenbach, A, “Zij Loechen”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 60.

²¹⁶ Puyvelde, L. van, *op.cit.* p. 225.

²¹⁷ *Kroniek*, p. 259.

Emmerich.²¹⁸ It is salutary to hear the effect upon Rodenbach this had, for it reveals just how totally Catholic he was,

“Het overwegen heeft mij deugd gedaan, en onder Gods oog en bijstand, hebbe ik moed geschept uit die diepten der ziele die altijd stille zijn”.²¹⁹

The fact that Catherine Emmerich had received the *stigmata* would have enhanced this experience, for Rodenbach had a deep interest in those who were so afflicted.²²⁰

The intensity of his religious feelings, his total trust in God which we encountered so powerfully and unconventionally in his poem *Geschiedenisse*, was to dominate every other decision Rodenbach made during his life. All the apparent contradictions in his personality can be traced back to this: he may have been charmed by the ancient myths, and he may have been attracted to the idea of a united Flemish movement, but all this paled into insignificance when set against the requirements of his faith. One may well ask if Rodenbach had lived in a less nationalistic age, whether he would not have become the spokesman for the Catholic faith, like Chesterton or Hilaire Belloc in Britain. Yet Conscience had ensured that Flemish national identity was intrinsically linked with Catholicism, and Gezelle had given this the seal of approval by a man of the cloth. Once Rodenbach encountered this heady mixture of religion and patriotism, he could do nothing else but become a leading spokesman for one particular form of a Flemish national identity, summed up in the slogan of the *Frontbeweging* during the First World War, ‘Alles voor Vlaanderen, Vlaanderen voor Kristus’, which still adorns the cross that stands over the battlefield at the IJzer. Through his poetry and plays, through his activities in the student movement, Rodenbach and his myth had ensured like almost nobody else that this version of a Flemish national identity was to remain a potent force for almost a century. Rodenbach wrote his own epitaph to this achievement in his poem *Zij loechen*,

²¹⁸ Ibid, p. 253. Upon this work Mel Gibson based his controversial film *The Passion of the Christ*, Kerevan, G, “The extreme religious sect which fuelled the passion of Mel Gibson”, *The Scotsman*, 20 March 2004, p. 17.

²¹⁹ *Kroniek*, p. 253.

²²⁰ See for example his cycle of poems on female religious, especially *De kruisdragende van Appels*. Rodenbach, A, “De Maagden”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. XIV.

“Zij loechen en staken hun schoûren op
omdat ik hun klapte van Vlaanderen.
Zij loechen en zeiden: Van anders wat
en hooren wij nimmer u klappen.
Wel neen! neen! Mijn Vlaanderen is mijn ziel,
mijn leven, het doel van mijn streven:
mijn leven voor Vlaanderen en Vlaanderen voor God,
o mocht ik dat winnende sneven!”²²¹

²²¹ Rodenbach, A, “Zij Loechen”. In *Rodenbach Gedichten*, p. 60.

**4. Poetry for the Nation: Hoffmann von Fallersleben
and *Das Lied der Deutschen*.**

August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben (1798-1874)



Painting by Carl Georg Christian Schumacher, 1819.
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4. Poetry for the Nation: Hoffmann von Fallersleben and *Das Lied der Deutschen*.

More than the *Lied*: August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben.

Today August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben is remembered for his hymn to German unity and culture, the *Lied der Deutschen*, but there is much more to the man than his best-known song. Indeed, it can be said that Hoffmann has become the victim of his song's success. Taken out of context, abused and misused, it has cast a long and dark shadow on its author.¹ As a result, Hoffmann has been subjected to more anachronistic analysis and appropriation than any of the other four men in this study, Rodenbach included. Denounced as a proto-Nazi, he has found champions who have gone to great lengths to defend his name, whilst the flexibility of his *Lied* has allowed its survival as the German national anthem.²

This partisan approach to both the writer and his legacy is all the more unfortunate, as man and oeuvre were of the greatest importance in giving shape to a German national identity during the nineteenth century. It is high time that, in the words of Friedrich Sengle, Hoffmann should be freed from the "Übermalung durch den Reichsmythos" and, indeed, from the fiery defence of his admirers.³ Hoffmann's predilection for alcohol, for example, was well-known during his life, in no small part due to the predominance of drinking themes in his works. This is usually seen as one of his 'endearing' characteristics, but has also given rise to much mythologising. One of his recent biographers was so taken by the image of a drunken poet, that he turned it into a dominant characteristic,

"Allerdings scheint mir doch, daß Hoffmann noch gewisse Schwierigkeiten hatte, die aus dem kräftigen Biergenuß resultierten, denn in seinen Erinnerungen steht <<Hemling>> statt <<Memling>>".⁴

¹ A succinct summary of the problems surrounding the song is given in *Jost*, p. 7. His *Kinderlieder* are also still loved, but are overshadowed by the *Lied*.

² These champions are united in the *Hoffmann von Fallersleben-Gesellschaft*.

³ Sengle, F, *Biedermeierzeit*, vol. 2, p. 523.

⁴ *Borchert*, p. 118.

A charming word picture, but unfortunately untrue. 'Hemling' was the standard spelling for Memling, and is to be found as such, in amongst others, the works of Willibald Alexis.⁵ Yes, Hoffmann drank a good deal of beer and wine, but eyewitnesses agree that he was jovial rather than drunk.⁶ Rather than concentrating on the drinking for its own sake, it is here suggested that the *reason* for 'Hoffmann-the-jovial-drinker' should be examined. As shall be seen, this was just one of his many guises, one of the various ways in which he play-acted a character through which he wished to shape the national identity of his people, arguably as important a means of communication to Hoffmann as his poetry.

Hoffmann was born in 1798, at the height of revolutionary fervour in Europe. As such, he was a contemporary of both Willems and the Grimms, and, unlike Rodenbach, experienced much the same upheavals as the other three men. This included the occupation of his country by the French, which at first sight appears to have left an indelible mark on the poet. Decades later, he described the pain he felt at the time, when writing about the aftermath of the Treaty of Sulinger in his autobiography, *Mein Leben*,

"Hannover war in den Händen der Franzosen ... Auch Fallersleben blieb nicht verschont".⁷

It was, however, a retrospective pain: unlike for Willems and the brothers Grimm, there is little evidence to suggest that French rule kindled much sense of the national in Hoffmann. It did not send him on the path of studying German culture, nor was he particularly drawn to resisting the French occupiers. For Hoffmann, the conversion to the national had little to do with outside aggression.

Fallersleben was Hoffmann's birthplace, but his attitude towards the town was far removed from the mystical elevation accorded to Hessen by the brothers Grimm. Always a practical man, he left his *Heimat* in 1819 to seek his fortune in Prussia,

⁵ Alexis, W, *Reise durch Österreich, Süd-Deutschland und die Schweiz*, pp. 215 and 462.

⁶ Legge, J.G, *Rhyme and Revolution in Germany*, pp. 197-8.

⁷ *ML*, vol. 1, p. 14. Fallersleben, like the Grimms' Kassel, later fell to the Bonapartist Kingdom of Westphalia.

disregarding his brother Daniel's advice to desist.⁸ Then again, he did appropriate the name as his own in 1821, when he 'elevated' himself to the nobility by adding 'von Fallersleben' to his surname.⁹ The episode shows the measure of the man: Hoffmann's jokes were as practical as his attitude to his place of birth. Before 1819, Hannover, nevertheless, remained the focal point of his life. He entered the University of Göttingen in 1816, but even here, he does not seem to have been exposed to the national question. This is rather odd: Germany in 1816 was still buzzing with the question of nationality, with the settlement reached at the Congress of Vienna waiting to bed down. Nevertheless, Hoffmann's earliest student days were dedicated to different subjects, such as theology and Antiquity. Hoffmann's experience serves as a warning to anyone wishing to find a pattern in the development of national identities. Whereas the brothers Grimm were introduced to the national question at university, Hoffmann, at least initially, was not. In addition, there is the Flemish evidence, in which the university plays an even smaller role in shaping the leaders of the national movement.

The fact that it took a meeting with Jacob Grimm to convince Hoffmann that the question of German national culture and identity was worth his efforts is illustrative of the former's immense stature amongst early German national thinkers. The impact Jacob made on Hoffmann speaks volumes about the way in which early nationalists communicated their ideals and recruited for the cause. Hoffmann was visiting the library in Kassel to carry out some research. Jacob was surprised to learn that he was planning a journey to Italy and Greece to study Classical Antiquity. The question he asked stands like a clarion call of the nationalist cause in Germany and further a field,

“Liegt Ihnen Ihr Vaterland nicht näher?”¹⁰

The impact on Hoffmann was instantaneous and permanent. Half a century later he wrote in his autobiography,

⁸ *ML*, vol. 1, p. 140.

⁹ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, *Bonner Bruchstücke vom Otfried*. This was the first occasion that he used his new name and his first publication as a *Germanist*.

¹⁰ *ML*, vol. 1, p. 125.

“Ich höre die Worte noch heute”.¹¹

The meeting set him irrevocably on the path of Germanic philology, and turned him into a *Volksliedforscher*: Hoffmann the nationalist writer had been born.¹² The next year he moved to the new university at Bonn to study the brand new subject of *Germanistik*.¹³ The period in Bonn was formative in many ways. As Rodenbach at the seminary in Roeselare, Hoffmann discovered a natural constituency in Bonn, the *Burschenschaft*.¹⁴ He was to remain a particular favourite with German students all of his life, and, indeed, frequently dressed to affirm his *Burschen* identity.¹⁵ In return, Hoffmann acknowledged his fondness of the student organisation, writing in *Mein Leben* that,

“Für die Idee der Burschenschaft war auch ich beseelt”.¹⁶

In the post-Kotzebue era, involvement with the *Burschenschaft* was almost by definition a statement of German identity and unity. Through his involvement, Hoffmann gave notice to the wider world what he wished the identity of his people to be. Together with some “alten Burschen”, Hoffmann founded a student organisation which they called an *Allgemeinheit*.¹⁷ This association with the *Burschenschaft* was to prove fundamental to the development of Hoffmann’s political worldview, which almost invariably meant his view on the national identity of the Germans. In this, he was not alone. A whole generation of well-educated young German men grew up with strongly-held beliefs about the importance of fraternity through unity, whether in the context of the *Burschenschaft* or in a wider, national sense.¹⁸

Theirs was a world of discontent. They disliked the Vienna Settlement, disliked the ‘feeble’ bureaucracy that had replaced French rule, disliked the political

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Holzappel, O, “Hoffmann von Fallersleben und der Beginn kritischer Volksliedforschung in Deutschland”, In *Behr*, pp. 183 and 196.

¹³ The generation of the brothers Grimm had made it possible for that of Hoffmann to study *Germanistik* at university level. See above, chapter two, p. 105.

¹⁴ For the *Burschenschaft*, see Jaraus, K.H, *Deutsche Studenten 1800-1970*, pp. 36 and following; Mechow, M, *Berliner Studenten. Von 1810 bis 1914*.

¹⁵ For Hoffmann in his student costume, see plate four, p. 229.

¹⁶ *ML*, vol. 1, p. 130.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 163-4.

¹⁸ For this and what follows, see Stark, G.D, “The Ideology of the German *Burschenschaft* Generation”, *European Studies Review*, vol. 8, no. 3, (1978), pp. 329 and 333-5.

fragmentation of the German people and the accompanying lack of a national identity. All are themes one may find in abundance in Hoffmann's writings. As late as 1840, he was still railing against the Vienna settlement,

“Wie sie glänzend bankettierten,
Wie sie ritterlich turnierten,
Wird genau erzählt! ...
Ob sie sonst was Gutes dachten,
Ueberhaupt was Gutes machten,
Wird auch nie erzählt”.¹⁹

The disappointments and dreams of the *Burschen* were rooted firmly in the raised hopes of the so-called *Freiheitskriege* of 1813-14, were the quintessential expression of the hopes of a generation for German unity, hopes that were to be carried over until 1871 and beyond. These hopes have been described as “etwas Schwärmerisches”, a charge that can also be levelled at Hoffmann's ideas on German identity.²⁰ Beyond a vague wish for German unity, and a pious Christianity, the *Burschenschaft* was essentially an ideologically poorly-defined entity. Here, as will be seen, Hoffmann parted company with the *Burschen*; his ideal Germany may not have been practical, but it was not bereft of a well-thought out set of morals and guidelines. He qualified his attachment to the *Burschen* from early on anyhow. Characteristically, he loved and lived the idea, but strongly disliked its regimented organisation.²¹ By 1820, he had distanced himself from the *Burschen*, although he would never quite lose his fondness for students. As late as 1872, he could still dedicate a *Commerslied* to “Den Studenten des deutschen Reiches”.²² Taken together, his philological studies and the ‘ideological’ input from the *Burschenschaft* gave Hoffmann the base on which he could construct his contribution to a German national identity.

¹⁹ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Neueste Beschreibung des Wiener Congresses”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 4, p. 175.

²⁰ Jaraus, K.H, *op.cit.* p. 38.

²¹ Like Jacob Grimm, he strongly disliked the *Turnverein*, dismissing it as “lächerlich und widerwärtig”. *ML*, vol. 1, p. 130.

²² Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Commerslied”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 5, pp. 189-90.

His involvement with the *Burschen* led to his first major publication, the *Bonner Burschenlieder*, which he edited.²³ True to form, these were predominantly drinking songs, such as Körner's *Auf! schwärmt und trinkt, geliebte Brüder*, thus helping to link Hoffmann to the drinking cult which grew up around his version of the 'real' German.²⁴ In addition, the songs contained many 'typical' *Burschen* slogans, with their emphasis on freedom, such as the line *Frei ist der Bursch!* or *Auf der Burschenfreiheit Wohl!*²⁵ Hoffmann's own contributions – under the pseudonym P. Siebel – focused mostly on the Rhine, of which more later, and his poetry mainly echoes the freedom motive of his fellow *Burschen*, with lines such as “Die Freiheit lebe vor allen”.²⁶ Placed in the context of Hoffmann's wider life, *Freiheit* became a permanent theme, *the* permanent theme of his poetry as well as of his own existence.²⁷ It is, therefore, no surprise that *Freiheit* became the cornerstone of his ideal Germany, although in Hoffmann's mind this *Freiheit* took on faintly anarchistic traits: freedom was God-given, and no earthly authority should impinge on this,

“Die Freiheit ist es, die Gott uns gegeben,
Das Schönste was er uns verlieh.
Wol könnt ihr sterben, wie wollet ihr leben,
Wie könnt ihr leben ohne sie!”²⁸

The theme of freedom, then, had deep roots in Hoffmann's psyche. Having imbued it with divine authority, he could not conceive of a Germany that was not free in the most literal sense of the word. His most famous statement on this crucial prescription for a German national identity appeared in the *Lied der Deutschen*,

“Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit
Für das deutsche Vaterland!”²⁹

To which he added the justification,

²³ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, *Bonner Burschenlieder*. It included songs by Arndt, Herder, and Körner.

²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 39-40.

²⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 16-7 and 15.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 20.

²⁷ Kämper, H, “Schlagwort, Begriff, Leitkonzept. Hoffmann von Fallersleben als politischer Dichter”. In *Behr*, pp. 116-8.

²⁸ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Lied von der Freiheit”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 1, p. 83.

²⁹ See Appendix Two.

“Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit
Sind des Glückes Unterpfand”.³⁰

Whatever Hoffmann's dedication to *Germanistik*, his career was never destined to follow in the footsteps of Jacob Grimm. There was always a duality in his soul: many of his student years, as well as those of his later life, were spent on the road. He travelled from one place of interest to another, but always needed a sedentary job to earn a living.³¹ As a result, Hoffmann came to embody the ideal of the wandering scholar, notwithstanding the fact that he spent most of his life as a member of that most sedentary of professions, the librarian. His wanderlust conveyed a sense of frivolity to Hoffmann's peers, who never quite knew what to make of him, or rather, judged him by his antics instead of on his work. Amongst German academics, he was considered to be a dilettante, not to be taken seriously. Lachmann, for example, called him “ein Narr”, the mistakes in his work “ordentlich lächerlich”.³² Even the field in which he excelled, the discovery of ancient manuscripts, brought little joy: his *Finderglück* was often held against him.³³ There were exceptions, of course. Ludwig Emil Grimm, for example, wrote after Hoffmann's dismissal from Breslau that “er scheint mir ein ehrlicher Mann zu sein”.³⁴ Honest, but not necessarily comprehensible. Hoffmann appears to have rather enjoyed his reputation and certainly did little to counter it. Like Rodenbach, he was very much his own man, and worried little about going against the grain. This was also how he saw the ‘real’ German: independent.

His reputation in Germany contrasted sharply with that in Flanders and the Netherlands, where he was held in the highest regard.³⁵ This reflected Hoffmann's

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Hoffmann's main interest was always the library, where he hunted for manuscripts. For the need for German writers to find income from other jobs, see O'Boyle, L, “The Image of the Journalist in France, Germany, and England, 1815-1848”. In C. Emsley (ed), *Conflict and Stability in Europe*, pp. 23-5.

³² *Lachmann*, vol. 1, p. 444; vol. 2, p. 500. For Hoffmann and other *Germanisten* see Eichholz, L, “Aus der Frühzeit der Germanistik”, *Mitteilungs-Blätter*, vol. 7, no. 18/19, (1959), pp. 1-6.

³³ *NDB*, vol. 9, 1972 ed. S.v. “Hoffmann von Fallersleben, Heinrich”, by A. Elschenbroich.

³⁴ Koolman, E. (ed), *Ludwig Emil Grimm Briefe*, vol. 1, p. 266.

³⁵ For this see Nelde, P.H, *Flandern in der Sicht Hoffmanns von Fallersleben*; Nelde, P.H, *Versuch einer Völker-Verständigung*.

deep infatuation with the literary past of the Low Countries, and the vast amount of work he undertook in this field. He travelled there for the first time in 1821, the first of many such journeys. Flattered by the attention of a German academic, local intellectuals regarded Hoffmann's wanderings as a compliment to their own cultural past, rather than a bizarre expression of discontent. Such was his impact on *Germanistik* in the Low Countries, that J.B. Berns described him as "ein wichtiges Kapitel in der Geschichte der Germanistik", and his work as having "große Folgen für die Entwicklung einer selbständigen Niederlandistik".³⁶ This was a view shared by contemporaries. Franz Jozef Mone, professor in Leuven, recognised him as only second to Jacob Grimm in the field of "die niederländische ältere Literatur".³⁷ Such was his *Fingerspitzengefühl* for medieval Dutch that he even composed new songs in it, which eminent specialists such as Bilderdijk, Willems and Snellaert held to be genuine.³⁸ The draw of the cultural past of the Low Countries on Hoffmann should be seen as part of a wider interest in the Germanic cultural past. For Hoffmann, as for Rodenbach, the past of the Low Countries was inseparable from that of Germany. Here, too, one could find ideas to shape the national present.

Whatever contemporary opinion, it may be clear that by the time Hoffmann left university in Bonn, he had already made an important contribution to *Germanistik*. In addition, all the concerns and ideals which he was to express in the *Lied der Deutschen*, were already firmly in place. Through his association with the *Burschenschaft*, he had forged a firm belief in German unity, both political and cultural, and his first sojourn in the Low Countries had given him a wider view of 'Germanic' culture. By the early 1820's, Hoffmann von Fallersleben had laid the foundations on which he could construct a German – and even a Flemish – national identity.

³⁶ Berns, J.B, "Hoffmann von Fallersleben und die Niederlande". In *Behr*, p. 209.

³⁷ Mone, F.J, *Übersicht der Niederländischen Volks-Literatur alterer Zeit*, p. iii. Hoffmann's discovery of the *Ludwigslied* in 1837 led to his co-operation with Jan Frans Willems on an edition. Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H. and Willems, J.F, *Elnonensia*.

³⁸ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, *Loverkens. Altniederländische Lieder, Horae Belgicae*, vol. 8, pp. iv-v.

“Herr von Ohnewitz, Hat den höchsten Sitz”.³⁹

It may be seen as characteristic of the contradictions that fill Hoffmann’s life, that his first professional posting was geographically about as far removed from the Low Countries as was possible in the German lands. In 1823 he arrived in Breslau (modern Wrocław) in Silesia, to become the *Kustos* of the university library. For all his pan-German sentiments, he would always dislike the city. Even before he arrived, he thought it,

“von Deutschland zu fern [*sic*]” and “von Holland ... erst recht fern”.⁴⁰

He was, of course, correct in his latter assertion, but the idea that Breslau was far away from Germany is rather curious. Obviously, Silesia at this point did not feature on his map of the country. The line reveals much about Hoffmann’s ideas of Germany at this juncture. With characteristic geographical vagueness, he clearly believed that there was somewhere that was Germany: Breslau was not part of this, but what was he leaves open for speculation. That, too, was characteristic. He would never develop a strong geographical sense of Germany; the country was to live in his mind more than in any physical reality. For all his criticism of Breslau, he should have been grateful for the opportunity it provided him. Such was his reputation, that most of his fellow *Germanisten* could only express surprise upon hearing he had secured the post.⁴¹ Little did they know it was actually something of a consolation prize. The appointment at Breslau came after a failure to become librarian at the Royal Library in Berlin.⁴²

The appointment is one of the few instances where one can observe the rather difficult Hoffmann successfully networking on his own behalf.⁴³ The key had been

³⁹ *ML*, vol. 2, p. 144.

⁴⁰ *ML*, vol. 1, p. 337.

⁴¹ “Ich weiß nicht bei wem er sich mag angeschlängelt haben”, wrote Lachmann to Jacob Grimm. *Lachmann*, vol. 1, p. 397.

⁴² *ML*, vol. 1, pp. 310-1.

⁴³ He did have plenty of friends, but not of the ‘useful’ type. During his life he established friendships or made acquaintance with amongst others the anarchist Bakunin, the leftwing Robert Blum, the radical publisher August Follen, Robert Prutz, Friedrich Engels and the political poet Ferdinand Freiligrath. Some of these were prominent in the Marxist movement, but Hoffmann was *not* a Marxist. When his friend Arnold Ruge tried to enlighten him about socialism, Hoffmann found it “viel zu langweilig”. *ML*, vol. 4, p. 59.

Hoffmann's friendship with *Freiherr* von Meusebach, the president of the *Rheinischen Kassations- und Revisionsgerichtshofes*. The two men shared a passion for manuscripts, and Hoffmann whiled away many hours in Meusebach's library.⁴⁴ Whilst spending the *Silvesternacht* of 1822 with Meusebach, Hoffmann met *Geheimrat* Johannes Schulze, a man who had the ear of the Prussian king and his minister, von Altenstein.⁴⁵ Although Hoffmann does not say so explicitly in *Mein Leben*, it is implicit that it was Schulze who procured him the Breslau job. The dedication of his *Die deutsche Philologie im Grundriß* to Schulze speaks volumes in this context.⁴⁶ It would be decades before Hoffmann managed to cultivate similarly useful friends in Germany again. It may be taken as symptomatic for Hoffmann's disregard for practicalities that he never stopped to think that this type of networking could assist him in spreading his ideas on German national identity. He knew he was reaching an audience anyhow.

The dichotomy between the 'German' Hoffmann and the 'Low Countries' Hoffmann became glaringly apparent shortly after his appointment, when he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Leiden for his achievement in publishing a survey of Middle Dutch poetry.⁴⁷ Normally this would have entitled him to lecture, but the university authorities in Breslau refused to recognise the validity of the degree. It is unclear what their motives were. The point is that Hoffmann felt victimised, and with some justification. For him it confirmed his conceit that Breslau, a vibrant city of around ninety thousand, was home to more *Philister* than any other city of its size.⁴⁸ A belated appointment to a professorship at the university failed to change his mind.

From this inauspicious start, things got worse. Hoffmann spent much of his time in Breslau in conflict with the university authorities and the Prussian state. It has to be admitted that conflict was the norm for most of Hoffmann's life. Not that he was

⁴⁴ *Jost*, pp. 40-2.

⁴⁵ *ML*, vol. 1, pp. 333-6.

⁴⁶ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, *Die deutsche Philologie im Grundriß*. To von Altenstein he would also dedicate a book. Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, *Fundgruben für Geschichte deutscher Sprache und Literatur*, 2 vols.

⁴⁷ This would appear later as *Horae Belgicae*, vol. 1, See also *Borchert*, pp. 67 and following.

⁴⁸ *Wintzingerode-Knorr*, p. 23.

always looking for trouble, but somehow it seemed to find him.⁴⁹ His lack of tact, forthright views, and well-developed sense of sarcasm did not help to divert attention either, and this was his intention. All were weapons in his epic quest to reveal to his fellow-countrymen their identity as Germans, to expound on his ideal of Germany. Whilst most appreciated these gestures and ideas, the authorities did not. In the end, his characteristic forthrightness inadvertently ‘liberated’ him from Breslau. The indirect cause of his dismissal from the university was the publication of the second volume of his collection of liberal-nationalist songs, *Unpolitische Lieder*.⁵⁰ Hoffmann never felt able to blunt his quill, and, in the *Unpolitische Lieder*, it was as sharp as it would get. These were some of the most political songs published in Germany at this time, and the sarcastic *Unpolitische* of the title must have made the censor’s blood boil.⁵¹ Here was a professor employed by the Prussian state, peddling idealistic notions of freedom and German unity, waxing lyrical about German identity. What was more, they were also bestsellers. Hoffmann’s publisher, Hoffmann und Campe, sold twelve thousand copies compared to, for example, forty copies of Heine’s *Ludwig Börne*.⁵² Their inflammatory mixture of *Burschen* themes and liberal demands made these songs an instant hit, helped by the fact that Hoffmann had provided the titles with well-known melodies.

The themes also ensured the *Lieder*’s popularity. Unlike his former friends in the *Burschenschaft*, Hoffmann never cared too much for blue blood, and his satirical *Schnaderhüpfel* heckles the aristocracy mercilessly,

“Der Fürst und der Adel stehn immer im Bund,
Der Fürst ist der Jäger, der Adel der Hund.

Der Fürst ist der Jäger, das Volk ist das Wild,
Weil mehr das Regal als das Menschenrecht gilt”.⁵³

⁴⁹ Thus, for example, the police attention following his dismissal from Breslau was occasioned more by the public interest others showed for Hoffmann, than his own actions. *Jost*, p. 91.

⁵⁰ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, *Unpolitische Lieder*, 2 vols. For a chronology of the events, see Siebs, Th, “Zur geschichte der germanistischen studien in Breslau”, *ZfDP*, vol. 43, (1911), pp. 209 and following.

⁵¹ Bayerdörfer, H.-P, “Vormärz”. In W. Hinderer, (ed), *Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik von Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, p. 323.

⁵² Farese, G, “Lyrik des Vormärz”. In B. Witte (ed), *Deutsche Literatur*, vol. 6, p. 231.

⁵³ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Schnaderhüpfel”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 4, p. 142.

This type of biting criticism was not restricted to king and nobility. The subject of progress, that fetish of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, also features, albeit stuck in reverse gear,

“Ihr passet recht zu unsern Zeiten,
Und wisset was uns nützt und frommt!
Ihr werdet immer rückwärts schreiten,
Bis ihr zur Schlacht von Jena kommt”.⁵⁴

Which battle took place thirty-five years earlier! Going back to the Battle of Jena was marching back to defeat. Of course that perennial theme, freedom, also makes frequent appearances. Here is Hoffmann on freedom of speech, an ironic theme as he was to be denied that freedom thanks to the *Lieder*,

“Der Vogel hat das Singen frei,
Kann singen wie’s ums Herz ihm ist,
Ihn schützt sogar die Polizei
Vor böser Buben Tück’und List.

Und singst du wie’s ums Herz dir ist,
Von Vaterlandes Leid und Last,
Und ob du wol kein Vogel bist,
Beim Flügel wirst du doch gefaßt”.⁵⁵

With themes such as these, which explored a German identity that was radically incompatible with the status quo, it is little wonder that the publication of the *Unpolitische Lieder* was more than the Prussian government could tolerate.⁵⁶ On the whole it did not look too unkindly on expressions of nationalism. After all, during the wars with France she had done much to encourage these sentiments. Yet there were lines which one could not cross, and crossing them was exactly what Hoffmann did. The *Lieder* have been called “eine Abrechnung mit der deutschen Gegenwart”, which naturally the authorities did not appreciate.⁵⁷ They also sought to popularise radical nationalist politics. Hoffmann always attracted a great deal of attention; his

⁵⁴ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Krebsgang”. In *Ibid*, p. 146.

⁵⁵ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Singfreiheit”. In *Ibid*, pp. 158-9.

⁵⁶ Even though some later commentators thought the work to be less than offensive. See for example *Reallexikon*, vol. 2, 1926/1928 ed. S.v. “Politische Dichtung”, by H. Heckel; or Heinemann, K, *Die deutsche Dichtung*, p. 221.

⁵⁷ Meid, V, *Metzler Literatur Chronik*, p. 408.

life was regularly in the public domain.⁵⁸ As such, people actually took notice of what he said, did and wrote. It was this publicity that the Prussian government *really* disliked.⁵⁹ It is perhaps surprising that the government did not act earlier, and that it took a second volume of the *Lieder* before Hoffmann reaped the consequences.

It took very little to bring down the fragile network upon which Hoffmann's career at Breslau rested. When, in 1840, Friedrich Wilhelm IV acceded to the Prussian throne, he installed a new government, and Hoffmann's patron, Von Altenstein, was succeeded as *Kultusminister* by Eichhorn. Whereas this was good news for the brothers Grimm, for Hoffmann it meant the replacement of a friend with a foe, and created space for his enemies in Breslau to move against him.⁶⁰ Of the latter, there were many. The most important of these was not a university professor, but the *Polizeipräsident* of Breslau, Heinke. With a typical provocative gesture, Hoffmann had made a mortal enemy of Heinke at the *Schillerfest* of 1837. There he had read out a poem, which contained strong criticism of Heinke, to the delight of the assembled crowds.⁶¹ The occasion made this all the worse: the *Schillerfeste* were a prime expression of German nationalist aspirations.

The public humiliation of Heinke is a prime illustration of Hoffmann's cavalier attitude towards the German establishment, of his wish to expound on the themes of freedom and German identity regardless of who was listening. Unfortunately, the *Polizeipräsident* was also the *Curator* of the university. From his position of power, Heinke required only one opportunity to destroy his tormentor. Hoffmann offered him this on a plate by publishing the second volume of his *Unpolitische Lieder*. They had been published anonymously, yet Hoffmann's authorship was about as well-kept a secret as Sir Walter Scott's of the Waverley novels. Heinke knew he had his man.

⁵⁸ The very articles of his dismissal were actually published by Hoffmann, showing once more the lack of tact which he so abundantly displayed. Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, *Zehn Actenstücke über die Amtsentsetzung des Professors Hoffman von Fallersleben*. For literature and publicity, see Arntzen, H, "Literatur und öffentliche Meinung". In V. Lange and H.-G. Rolof (eds), *Dichtung. Sprache. Gesellschaft*, pp. 179-88.

⁵⁹ See in this respect the dismissal of the brothers Grimm from Göttingen, where publicity also weighed heavily in the final decision. Chapter two, p. 147, and note 246.

⁶⁰ See chapter two, p. 151, and note 269. Hoffmann later claimed to have heard from Julius Fröbel that Alexander von Humboldt had said that had he been in Berlin at the time he would have stood up for him. We only have Hoffmann's word for this. *ML*, vol.4. p. 54.

⁶¹ *ML*, vol. 3, pp. 28-34, which includes the offending poem. For the political aspect of the *Schillerfesten* see Sheehan, J.J, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 13.

He started an investigation to prove that it was Hoffmann who had published the *Lieder*, and when this was confirmed lost no time in acting.

Part of Hoffmann's record of the conversation he had with Heinke on the subject is worth quoting,

Heinke: "Ferner, ob Sie diese Lieder vereinbar finden mit Ihrem Amte? – Sie sind doch kön. pr. Professor!"

Hoffmann: "Ich bin hier nicht als Professor, sondern als Dichter aufgetreten; ich bin als Professor, nicht als Dichter angestellt."

Heinke: "Das ist hier nicht zu trennen".⁶²

Heinke was correct in stating that Hoffmann's twin career as professor and poet were inseparable; the readership of the *Lieder* would certainly have thought so.⁶³ It is not quite clear if Hoffmann believed the distinction he was making himself. Possibly this is yet another case of his occasionally condescending sarcasm. Unsurprisingly, he failed to convince Heinke during their conversation, and it took little time to have Hoffmann dismissed.

After the ban in Breslau, his *Lieder* were removed from all public places in Prussia.⁶⁴ Going one step further, the authorities banned all publications emanating from the Hoffmann und Campe press.⁶⁵ A similar ban was in place in Hannover, and, indeed, in most of the German lands. As always there were bans and there were bans. In Weimar, the library had the *Lieder* in stock, but was not supposed to lend them out. This "Wird wol nicht so genau befolgt sein".⁶⁶ Whether this prevented Hoffmann's ideas on German identity from filtering through to a wider audience may be doubted, but it does illustrate the power of the writer in this period. From their point of view, the authorities were justified in their concern about the impact Hoffmann's writings were making. They were, in the words of Ricarda Huch,

⁶² *ML*, vol. 3, p. 227.

⁶³ In the words of Dünninger, "In der Persönlichkeit Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben ... haben sich der Dichter, Gelehrte und Politiker zu keinem glücklichen Bunde vereint". Dünninger, J, "Geschichte der deutschen Philologie". In W. Stammler (ed), *Deutsche Philologie im Aufriß*, vol. 1, column 171.

⁶⁴ The Kingdom of Hannover banned the *Lieder* before Prussia. *Wintzingerode-Knorr*, p. 26.

⁶⁵ Wiesemeyer, H, "Hoffmanns 'Unpolitische Lieder'". In Hoffmann von Fallersleben-Gesellschaft (ed), *Hoffmann von Fallersleben. Wollen-Wirken-Werke*, p. 30.

⁶⁶ *ML*, vol. 3, p. 279.

“wie ein Mückenschwarm, der dem Feinde mit kleinen, ungefährlichen, aber empfindlichen Stichen zusetzt”.⁶⁷

To the architect of restoration Germany, Metternich, poets were suspect by their very nature, and Hoffmann’s ‘ungefährliche Stichen’ must have seemed all but that.⁶⁸ In 1835, the *Deutsche Bundestag* had even gone as far as to ban the works of poets and writers from the literary school, *Jung Deutschland*.⁶⁹ Some German poets even found themselves threatened with the death penalty; such was the divergence between their vision of Germany and that of the authorities.

Hoffmann, by contrast, was treated with some leniency, particularly if one considers his impact on the wider population. For once, one can actually assess this impact. There was, of course, the radical audience. Amongst these was the “geheimen Zirkel” in Köln, where the publicist and satirist Georg Weerth was amongst those devouring Hoffmann’s *Lieder*.⁷⁰ The real ‘danger’ for the authorities lay in the fact that the *Lieder* reached places not normally associated with radical politics, such as the literary society, *Harmonie*, in Hamburg.⁷¹ That they had such a wide reach was partly the result of the communications revolution of the nineteenth century, which allowed song sheets to be printed cheaply and in great quantities, and partly by Hoffmann insisting on as cheap as possible imprints.⁷² This also points to his complicity in distributing his ideas: he *was* dangerous from the perspective of the establishment, for his ideas on German identity permeated even the remotest regions of the German lands.

The events of 1841 effectively killed Hoffmann’s academic career.⁷³ From now on, he looked for employment to finance his passion for poetry and song-writing, even

⁶⁷ Huch, R, *Alte und neue Götter*, p. 224.

⁶⁸ Jost, p. 73.

⁶⁹ For this and what follows see Ibid, pp. 69-70.

⁷⁰ Wintzingerode-Knorr, p. 27.

⁷¹ Ormrod, J, “Bürgerliche Organisation und Lektüre in den literarischgeselligen Vereinen der Restaurationsepoche”. In G. Häntzschel et al, *Zur Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur von der Aufklärung bis zur Jahrhundertwende*, p. 148.

⁷² He had asked that the *Lieder* would not be “zu theuer”. *ML*, vol. 3, p. 122. For the printing of sheet music, see Weber, W, “Wagner, Wagnerism, and Musical Idealism”. In D.C. Large and W. Weber (eds), *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, p. 32.

⁷³ Unlike the brothers Grimm he was not given a substitute job either. *ML*, vol. 6, p. 282.

though he would continue to work on philology.⁷⁴ He even managed to enhance his reputation as a revolutionary firebrand through a serious row with the brothers Grimm. The incident is indicative of Hoffmann's tendency to court trouble, even when he was not looking for it. In 1844 he had simply appeared at a reception of the Grimms, only to find himself the centre of attention. The assembled students, aware that they had a 'celebrity' amongst them, had turned to Hoffmann and greeted him with several *Hochs*.⁷⁵ This manifestation became known as the *Hoffmann Affair*, and horrified the Grimms, but was typical of a Hoffmann appearance.⁷⁶ Always careful not to offend the establishment, the Grimms now found their reception turned into a political manifestation. The brothers moved quickly to distance themselves from Hoffmann, and, in their rush to avoid contamination, destroyed what was left of Hoffmann's academic reputation.⁷⁷ Interesting, however, is Ludwig Emil Grimm's assertion in a letter to Wilhelm and his wife that the professors in Berlin had taken Hoffmann's side.⁷⁸ It would, nevertheless, not be until 1854 that Hoffmann was to find steady employment again. That this did not impair his ability to preach his version of a German identity is shown by the continuous persecution that he was to suffer during the 1840's.

"Die Politik verfolgte mich überall".⁷⁹

From late 1842, Hoffmann's was a *Wanderleben*, an experience that suited his 'role' as Romantic rebel-poet. Almost everywhere was too illiberal for Hoffmann. Even Baden, renowned for its liberal government, eventually found Hoffmann too

⁷⁴ In the Low Countries Hoffmann's reputation was not affected by all this. In the Netherlands, J.A. Alberdingk Thijm still wanted to shake his hand, in spite of him being "rood-democratisch". Karsten, G, *Honderd Jaar Nederlandse Philologie*, p. 62.

⁷⁵ For the Grimms' version of the story see Grimm, J, "Erklärung über Hoffmann von Fallersleben", *Vossische Zeitung*, 6 March, 1844. In *JGKS*, vol. 7, pp. 599-600.

⁷⁶ Such was his celebrity status that he even appeared in pull-outs from fashion magazines. Heremans, J.F.J, "Hoffmann van Fallersleben en de Nederlandsche Letterkunde", *Nederlandsch Museum*, vol. 2, (1874), p. 155.

⁷⁷ Always more careful than his brother, Wilhelm broke off all relations. When Hoffmann sent him a book eight years later, he sent it back with a note not to bother him anymore. *ML*, vol. 5, pp. 195-6. Hoffmann would later help Jacob by contributing to the *Wörterbuch*. Gerstenberg, H, *An meine Freunde*, p. 205.

⁷⁸ Koolman, E. (ed), *op.cit.* vol. 1, p. 328.

⁷⁹ *ML*, vol. 3, p. 76.

much to swallow. In all, he was expelled from different German lands on no fewer than thirty-nine separate occasions.⁸⁰ Living off the proceeds of his writings, a fairly unique way of making a living in the period, Hoffmann's conflict with different German authorities gradually came to a crescendo. The relations with the Prussian government reached their nadir after the *Hoffmann Affair* of 1844, which appeared to confirm Hoffmann's potential to disturb the political equilibrium: he had come to personify the alternative Germany. The *Hochs* from the students to this symbol was more than the government could countenance. Hoffmann was banned from Berlin.

Returning to Fallersleben, in the same way as the brothers Grimm had returned to Hessen after the Göttingen affair, was impossible. If anything, king Ernst August was even more hostile to Hoffmann than the Prussians. As far back as 1818, when he was a young student, he had published over a hundred verses criticising the Hannoverian government.⁸¹ At this time, Hoffmann showed an awareness of his vulnerability that was to be lacking in later life. Wisely, he published his poetry anonymously, and "so blieb meine Person unangefochten", although anonymity did not save his *Person* in Breslau.⁸² The Hannoverians could possibly have forgiven the sins of a student, but Hoffmann's subsequent actions had made this impossible. Ironically, the king had not forgiven Hoffmann's strident support for the brothers Grimm during the *Göttingen Sieben* affair. He had written the sarcastic poem, *Knüppel aus dem Sack*, which was contained in the first volume of his *Unpolitische Lieder*.⁸³ The title derived from *Tischchen deck dich, Goldesel und Knüppel aus dem Sack*, from the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*.⁸⁴ With characteristic vindictiveness, Ernst August had all Hoffmann's moves shadowed until 1861, five years before the demise of his state.⁸⁵

The effectiveness of all this persecution remains open to doubt. He may have been banned from entering Hannover altogether, yet that did not stop him from visiting

⁸⁰ *Metzler Autorenlexikon*, 1986 ed. S.v. "Hoffmann von Fallersleben, August Heinrich", by L. von Saalfeld.

⁸¹ *ML*, vol. 1, pp. 131-5.

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 132.

⁸³ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, "Knüppel aus dem Sack". In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 4, pp. 3-4. There has been some debate as to whether the poem actually referred to the Göttingen affair, but Hoffmann makes this very clear in a letter to Wilhelm Grimm. Schuster, K.G.P, "Poesie des Grimms". In *Behr*, p. 122.

⁸⁴ *KHM (1819)*, vol. 1, tale 36.

⁸⁵ *Borchert*, p. 194.

Fallersleben.⁸⁶ Abetted by local officialdom, Hoffmann managed to visit his family on several occasions, at one point evading capture by fleeing through the cowshed before the house could be surrounded.⁸⁷ For Hoffmann this was his equivalent of the exile experience, pivotal in the life of many a Romantic poet. Yet if this ‘exile’ existed predominantly in Hoffmann’s mind, the harassment was certainly real enough. An episode in Trier in 1852 is illustrative of the continuous pestering Hoffmann suffered.⁸⁸ The day after his arrival, he was pulled into the police station, where he was subjected to a long series of trivial questions. Apparently reassured, the police gave him permission to stay. The following day, however, they changed their mind, and he was ordered to leave within twenty-four hours. When he was on the point of leaving, his belongings were searched. It was this constant petty victimisation that characterised much of his life in the years between his dismissal from Breslau and his arrival in Weimar in 1854. Only in Belgium and the Netherlands did he find any respite. Rather than diminishing Hoffmann’s impact on the shape of a German national identity, however, the persecutions enhanced it. Hoffmann von Fallersleben was being turned into a symbol of the suffering Germany.

In Germany, in one of those ironic twists that are the hallmark of Hoffmann’s life, shelter was found in that most illiberal of German statelets: Mecklenburg, described by Golo Mann as “dem mittelalterlich, ständischen, erzkonservativen Mecklenburg”.⁸⁹ Bizarrely, the man whose identity was now so intimately intertwined with liberalism could not be expelled because his host, Rudolf Müller, held hereditary jurisdiction on his domains as a Junker!⁹⁰ It was a strange situation for Hoffmann to find himself in, but it did serve to keep his persecutors at bay. When he finally left, he wrote what is probably his most affectionate poem to a German state, in tones which remind one of the love of the Grimms for Hessen,

⁸⁶ Kühl, H, “Hoffmanns Verfolgungen und Ausweisungen”. In Hoffmann von Fallersleben-Gesellschaft (ed), *Hoffmann von Fallersleben. Wollen-Wirken-Werke*, pp. 42-3.

⁸⁷ *ML*, vol. 4, pp. 47-50; Gerstenberg, H, *An meine Freunde*, pp. 111-5.

⁸⁸ For this and what follows, see *ML*, vol. 5, pp. 192-4.

⁸⁹ Mann, G, *Deutsche Geschichte des neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, p. 119.

⁹⁰ Engelmann, B, *Trotz alledem. Deutsche Radikale 1777-1977*, p. 192.

“Leb wohl, du Land der guten Herzen!
Du Wiege deutscher Gastlichkeit!
Du hießest freundlich mich willkommen
In jener trüben bangen Zeit.

Verfolgt im ganzen deutschen Reiche,
Aus meiner Heimat gar verbannt,
Fand ich in dir was ich verloren,
Fand ich in dir mein Vaterland”.⁹¹

In spite of his dislike for the statelet’s antiquated political system, he liked its people and their hospitality. The poem shows just how Hoffmann’s view of Germany was being shaped by his experiences during this period. He managed to cull at least one positive element from the Mecklenburg episode, and turned this into a prescription for German behaviour: the hospitality of Mecklenburg was transformed into ‘deutscher Gastlichkeit’.

Whilst in Mecklenburg, Hoffmann had plenty of opportunity to further strengthen his bonds with the Low Countries. His continuous popularity there was in part the result of his deliberate modesty when in the Netherlands or Belgium, a reticence accompanied by a careful grooming of a potential network of allies to advance his *Germanistik* career. One of his main contacts was Hendrik Willem Tydeman, professor of Law at the University of Leiden. Aware of the sense of superiority which pervaded Dutch society, he flattered the professor’s sensibilities, as a letter from 1826 shows,

“Ich bin und bleibe ein Fremdling, weil ich einmal kein Holländer, sondern *nur* ein Deutscher sein kann”.⁹²

The ‘nur’ in particular seems to indicate a well-developed understanding of his host on Hoffmann’s part. In Belgium, too, he managed to meet and befriend all the right people. Here the relationship was built on a particularly strong foundation: his twelve volume *Horae Belgicae*, which did much to help shape a Flemish national identity. The great and the good queued up to meet Hoffmann. The Antwerpen archivist and

⁹¹ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Scheidegruß an Meklenburg”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 1, p.64.

⁹² *Tydeman*, p. 101. The italics are mine.

leading historian, Pieter Génard, wrote that he “was fier met hem [Hoffmann] in betrekking te mogen treden”.⁹³ Génard, in turn, introduced Hoffmann to the doyen of Flemish literature, Hendrik Conscience. The episode is illustrative of Hoffmann’s successful networking, but also of his enormous stature in Flanders. Génard describes how he took Hoffmann to the pub in which Conscience normally played cards. There the following scene took place.

“Ik naderde hem, en zegde eenvoudig: <<M. Conscience, de heer Hoffmann von Fallersleben komt u bezoeken.>> ... Conscience legde zijne kaarten op tafel, wierp pet en pijp weg, en met geopende armen kwam hij op Hoffmann toegelopen, zeggende: <<Mijn Hoffmann, mijn Hoffmann! de man, die mij het verrukkelijk naïeve onzer Middeleeuwsche Vlaamsche taal heeft leeren waardeeren!>>”.⁹⁴

This was some statement, and illuminates Hoffmann’s role in the construction of a Flemish, as well as a German, national identity, a role which will be more fully explored below.

Hoffmann also knew the Gent group of the Flemish movement, including Snellaert, Blommaert, Van Duyse, and, of course, Jan Frans Willems.⁹⁵ It was through his friendship with Willems, more than anything, that Hoffmann gained access to the Flemish movement. He made use of Willems’ library in Gent, and the depth of their mutual affection may be gleaned from their letters. Here, for example, is Willems writing in 1837, insisting that Hoffmann stay with him when visiting Belgium,

“Komt Gy met de vacantie niet eens naer Belgien over? Zoo ja, dan verzoek ik u by my te komen logeren”.⁹⁶

When in 1838 Hoffmann’s conflict with the Prussian government began, Willems wrote,

“Hetgeen gy my over uwen toestand by de bibliotheek der universiteit Breslau daerin vermeld, heeft my gevoelig aengedaen, en ik deel van harte in uw verdriet”.⁹⁷

⁹³ Génard, P, *Hoffmann von Fallersleben en Conscience*, p. 5.

⁹⁴ Ibid, pp. 9-10.

⁹⁵ Heremans, J.F.J, *op.cit.* pp. 148-9.

⁹⁶ Deprez, A, *Briefwisseling van Jan Frans Willems en Hoffmann von Fallersleben (1836-1843)*, p. 38.

⁹⁷ Ibid p. 48.

It was a sadness that was, perhaps, enhanced by the realisation that he had failed to procure a Belgian professorship for his German friend. Willems' own situation within the new Belgian state was still rather shaky, and not even the friendship of king Leopold I would have helped Hoffmann much in a climate that frowned upon expressions of Germanic solidarity.⁹⁸ It was, nevertheless, a rare friendship in both men's lives. In the words of Willems' biographer, Ada Deprez, the letters convey a

“hartelijkheid en vertrouwelijkheid van toon, die we ... maar al te zelden ... ontmoeten”.⁹⁹

Hoffmann reciprocated Willems' friendship: he dedicated the fifth volume of his *Horae Belgicae* to him.¹⁰⁰

In Germany, in the mean time, tension was rising. As if his situation in Mecklenburg was not anomalous enough, it now became the setting for Hoffmann's role in the revolutions of 1848. His contribution was a muted one, especially when one bears his reputation in mind: one does not find Hoffmann on the barricades in any of the German states. He restricted his activities to paper, in the form of drafting a petition to reform Mecklenburg's *Standesversammlung*. One would have expected something more from the ardent Hoffmann than a polite request to change the composition of the parliament. He even kept his cool when the government dragged its feet. In response, he co-wrote a set of demands, known as the *Die 20 Forderungen des meklenburgischen Volkes*.¹⁰¹ His greatest physical exertion then followed, when he travelled to Hamburg to have the *Forderungen* printed. Seventeen of the demands were accepted, and came to form the basis of a new constitution.¹⁰² These are hardly

⁹⁸ For this episode see, Schoof, W, “Hoffmann von Fallersleben und seine Bemühungen um eine Belgische Professur”, *Volkskunde*, vol. 67, (1966), pp. 20-2. The fact that the Belgian and the Dutch kings showered Hoffmann with gifts when he was being persecuted in the German lands speaks volumes for the difference in his status in Germany and the Low Countries.

⁹⁹ Deprez, A, *op.cit.* p. 48.

¹⁰⁰ The dedication reads “Johann Franz Willems Gewidmet”. Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, *Lantsloot ende die scone Sanderijn. Renout van Montalbaen, Horae Belgicae*, vol. 5,

¹⁰¹ *ML*, vol. 5, pp. 20-3.

¹⁰² The constitution did not survive for long. As early as 1850 it was declared invalid. *Borchert*, pp. 182-3.

the actions of someone with Hoffmann's reputation, but then, perhaps, that is what one should expect.

His role in the Prussian upheavals of that year was also far from radical. He first heard the news of the Berlin Revolution when he was in Hamburg.¹⁰³ The Prussian king declared an amnesty in the wake of the revolution, and Hoffmann returned to Berlin, quite reasonably assuming he had been included. He went in the hope of seeing his pension from Breslau reinstated, and ended by being offered a seat in the Frankfurt parliament.¹⁰⁴ His lackadaisical response underlines the uniqueness of Hoffmann's radicalism,

*“Man bestürmte mich, doch auch aufzutreten, ich würde gewiß gewählt u. Nachdem ich einige Augenblicke zugehört hatte, war meine Neugier befriedigt...”*¹⁰⁵

Allowing for a certain amount of retrospective exaggeration, there is no reason to doubt the story. Unlike Jacob Grimm, Hoffmann estimated the parliament in Frankfurt at its real value, and decided he wanted nothing to do with it. *This* was not going to achieve the German unity he so craved; the feeble delegates were not the right men to create the Germany he had been imagining in his writings. That it was, indeed, a most radical decision may be gleaned from the reaction by the Prussian authorities. Whilst their very existence was hanging in the balance, they made time to round on the man they considered to be *truly* dangerous. Hoffmann was ordered to leave Berlin, being told that he had been specifically excluded from the amnesty.¹⁰⁶ The years of the revolutions were a curious experience as far as Hoffmann was concerned. He must have shared the deep disappointment of all liberals at the failure to achieve unity, but left little evidence of his feelings. He had actively supported the limited reforms of Mecklenburg, whilst declining to be involved in the Frankfurt parliament, unlike so many other German philologists. His utopian vision of Germany and of a German identity was just not represented during the year 1848.

¹⁰³ *ML*, vol. 5, p. 20.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*. The italics are mine.

¹⁰⁶ Hoffmann-von-Fallersleben-Museum (ed), *Deutsche, die sich für demokratische Freiheit einsetzen – Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben und Bettine von Arnim*, p. 23. The information is contained in a letter from Hoffmann to Bettine.

Weimar and Corvey: was Hoffmann “ein Mann, der den Hofe nicht schmeicheln kann”?¹⁰⁷

After the revolutions, Hoffmann married his cousin, Ida zum Berge, with whom he was to have a son, the painter, Franz Hoffmann-Fallersleben.¹⁰⁸ In 1854, after a few false starts, including two spells of living on the river Rhine, they moved to Weimar, bringing the wandering years to a close. There *Großherzog* Carl Alexander wished to recall the ghosts of the past and restore Weimar to its cultural pre-eminence.¹⁰⁹ One of the projects involved publishing the *Weimarische Jahrbuch für deutsche Sprache, Literatur und Kunst*, and it was the editorship of this publication that finally persuaded Hoffmann to move to Weimar.¹¹⁰ The pivotal figure behind Hoffmann’s decision was Bettine von Arnim. She had never lost her admiration for Hoffmann, and had even stuck by him during and after the *Hoffmann Affair*.¹¹¹ If Hoffmann’s own testimony from *Mein Leben* is to be trusted, she began to arrange new employment for him in the early 1850’s. On 22 October 1853, a letter arrived at Hoffmann’s house in Neuwied on the Rhine. The sender was Schauenburg, who was to write a ‘biography’ of Hoffmann at the behest of Bettine.¹¹² It was a rather strange affair, for apparently Hoffmann was at a loss to understand why. In addition, Oscar Schade, a *Germanist* from Bonn whom Hoffmann had befriended in Berlin, was to write what amounted to a curriculum vitae, again on the orders of Bettine.¹¹³ This combined document was to be presented to *Großherzog* Carl Alexander in order to persuade him to appoint Hoffmann as librarian in Weimar.

According to Hoffmann, he believed the whole idea to be a fantasy of Bettine’s, but it stretches one’s imagination to take Hoffmann’s word that he just put the whole affair out of his mind. For the first time since Breslau, he was offered the chance of a real job. Surprisingly, even Jacob Grimm wrote to vouch for Hoffmann, the

¹⁰⁷ The quote comes from a poem by Ernst Ortlepp about Hoffmann, quoted in Petzt, C, *Die Blütezeit der deutschen politischen Lyrik*, p. 420.

¹⁰⁸ Hoffmann’s son became a prominent landscape artist. Henze, W, *Franz Hoffmann-Fallersleben 1855-1927*.

¹⁰⁹ Schenk, H.G, *The Mind of the European Romantics*, p. 210.

¹¹⁰ For his Weimar period see, Kaminiarz, I, *August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben in Weimar 1854 bis 1860*.

¹¹¹ She temporarily broke off her friendship with Grimms. Bäumer, K. and Schultz, H, *Bettina von Arnim*, pp. 79-80.

¹¹² *ML*, vol. 5, pp. 225-6.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p. 226.

acrimonious *Hoffmann Affair* apparently forgotten.¹¹⁴ By now, the *Großherzog* considered that Hoffmann would be a good catch to edit the new periodical he had in mind. In January 1854, von Schober, a member of the *Großherzog's* council, could write that his master was persuaded to employ Hoffmann.¹¹⁵ In *Mein Leben* Hoffmann claims that at this point he was still uncertain about accepting any offer, even that Bettine was using him for her own ends. Hoffmann, however, also helped his case, by the proven method of a book dedication. His dedication of the *Geschichte des deutschen Kirchenliedes bis auf Luthers Zeit* to the *Großherzog* pandered to the cultural pretensions of the ruler, who was indeed flattered.¹¹⁶ Then he went to Weimar in person where he met the *Hofkapellmeister*, Franz Liszt, who introduced Hoffmann at court. The matter of his appointment was soon clinched.

Whilst one can understand Hoffmann's desire for regular employment, this was still a complete *volte face*, which shocked his political friends.¹¹⁷ Effectively, Hoffmann seemed to be indulging in a sell-out to the establishment for 'love of culture', a move for which he had condemned Goethe in his poem *Goethischer Farbenwechsel* of 1841.¹¹⁸ In the poem, Hoffmann expressed particular horror at Goethe's 'betrayal' of Germany,

“Der Goethe war fürs Vaterland
Und deutsche Freiheit einst entbrannt ...

Doch Herr von Goethe ward er bald,
Für Vaterland und Freiheit kalt;
Ei, wie es wunderbar doch geht!
Der Goethe ward ein Hofpoet”.¹¹⁹

The lines could be applied directly to Hoffmann, whose own sense of discomfort at his move to Weimar permeates his description of the period in *Mein Leben*. The reproach that Goethe had become a *Hofpoet* in particular, can be levelled at Hoffmann, too, who wrote several sycophantic poems celebrating the ducal family. Hoffmann took the post against a background of widespread political repression and

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 241.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 235-6.

¹¹⁶ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, *Geschichte des deutschen Kirchenliedes bis auf Luthers Zeit*.

¹¹⁷ His 'political' friends were more than a little disappointed. *Jost*, pp. 124-5.

¹¹⁸ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Goethischer Farbenwechsel”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 4, p. 232.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

nationalist hopelessness.¹²⁰ Weimar was to offer respite from all this, but he never was comfortable with this, the one and only compromise of his life. Needless to say, for those interested in Hoffmann's contribution to the shaping of a German national identity, this was an almost barren period.

Hoffmann was unable to suppress his natural instincts for too long. Soon, he found the experience of editing the *Jahrbuch* grinding and Weimar suffocating. He had to write most of the periodical personally; a situation reminiscent of Jan Frans Willems and the *Belgisch Museum*. In addition, the *Großherzog* had lost interest in his cultural renaissance project. Liszt had left, and money was no longer forthcoming for the journal. With a wife and child to support, there was also a practical reason for wanting to leave Weimar: it was an expensive place and the income provided by his editorship far from generous. When he was able to leave, he could no longer hide his disgust of the place which had offered him shelter against wider persecution,

“Es ist mir recht lieb, daß ich endlich dies Residenzdorf, diesen Tummelplatz der hungrigen kleinlichen Hofräte, verlassen kann”.¹²¹

His stay in Weimar had provided Hoffmann with a new support network, and he would use this to find new employment. A deep friendship had grown between Liszt and Hoffmann, who probably recognised a kindred spirit in Liszt's own unconventional character. It would not be going too far to suggest that Liszt saw in Hoffmann his own mirror image.¹²² The composer had become godfather to Hoffmann's son, Franz, and Liszt's mistress's daughter – Marie, Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein – had struck-up a friendship with Ida. It was the latter who helped Hoffmann find a new position, one that would pay the bills and provide him with an outlet for his philological interests, as well as a space to work on his ideas for Germany. She mediated with her brother-in-law, duke Viktor von Ratibor, *Fürst* of

¹²⁰ Of course Hoffmann was also a victim of this repression. His old enemies in Hannover, for example, issued a *Steckbrief* against him. *ML*, vol. 5, p. 228.

¹²¹ Gerstenberg, H, *An meine Freunde*, p. 243.

¹²² “Like Byron, he [Liszt] invented a type that long outlasted him, surviving him in popular mythology as the original long-hair”. The quote could just as well refer to Hoffmann. Perényi, E, *Liszt*, p. 3.

Corvey, to provide Hoffmann with a job in his extensive library.¹²³ By a fortunate coincidence, the family had been well-disposed to Hoffmann, anyhow. Several decades earlier he had dedicated his *Merigarto*, which he had found in Prague, to the duke's stepfather.¹²⁴

Was all this a sign that Hoffmann mellowed in his dotage, that he accommodated the establishment? At first glance, one would say so. Duke Viktor von Ratibor was the quintessential establishment figure, for years *Präsident des preußischen Herrenhauses* and a family friend of the Prussian king.¹²⁵ Yet his appointment *did* cause controversy amongst the establishment, was indeed,

“eine politisch mutige und menschlich soziale Tat, denn die Meinung der ‘mitfürstlichen’ Umwelt stand keineswegs auf der Seite Hoffmanns”.¹²⁶

It would seem, then, that rather than Hoffmann appeasing the establishment, one of its members appreciated Hoffmann's talents. What is more, Hoffmann did not regard this appointment with the ambivalence that characterised his reminiscences about his job in Weimar. Writing to his sister, Minna, at the outset of his tenure in Corvey, he stated that it was “nur eine Privatstellung”, which would not associate him with the Prussian state.¹²⁷ Hoffmann's ambiguous character does not tolerate glib conclusions. His relationship with the establishment, as with all aspects of his life, was fraught with contradictions. Take, for example, his encounter in 1865 with his nemesis, the Prussian state, which arrived in ‘his’ library at Corvey in the person of king Wilhelm I. For once we can gather Hoffmann's opinion on an event from a source other than *Mein Leben*, and, therefore, not through the prism of his relentless self-presentation. Jotting down his feelings about the visit, he wrote,

“Zu den erfreulichen Ereignissen der Bibliothek ... gehört, daß am 20. October ... Sr. Majestät der König die Bibliothek in Augenschein nahm”.¹²⁸

¹²³ *Wintzingerode-Knorr*, pp. 32-3; Brüning, H.J, “Hoffmanns Corveyer Zeit und sein Tod”. In Hoffmann von Fallersleben-Gesellschaft (ed), *op.cit.* p. 51.

¹²⁴ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, *Merigato. Bruchstück eines bisher unbekanntes deutschen Gedichts aus dem XI Jahrhundert*. See also *Borchert*, p. 88; *ML*, vol. 2, p. 236.

¹²⁵ *Borchert*, p. 210.

¹²⁶ The king of Hannover went as far as calling him “ein Erzbösewicht”. Tiggesbäumker, G, “Hoffmann von Fallersleben als Bibliothekar in Corvey”. In *Behr*, p. 38.

¹²⁷ Gerstenberg, H, *An meine Freunde*, p. 242.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Tiggesbäumker, G, *op.cit.* p. 45.

Erfreulich? But then Hoffmann never ceased to surprise.

The move to the former abbey of Corvey in May 1860 brought him the closest he was to come to having a permanent home, the closest indeed to some peace. He remained at Corvey until his own death in 1874, a stay marred by the premature death of Ida soon after leaving Weimar. It was here that he found the leisure to compose his six-volume autobiography, *Mein Leben*, that ultimate source for his life and particularly his thoughts. The work is in many respects the culmination of his ideas on German national identity. Carefully thought out, it presents the life of Hoffmann as one big statement on Germany, its future, and the shape of its national character. His poetry from this period also continued to express his feelings about the direction in which Germany and the identity of the Germans was travelling. It did not reflect the peaceful environs and security in which he now found himself.¹²⁹

In Germany, the 1860's and 1870's were far from uneventful. In particular, Hoffmann witnessed the demise of the kingdom of Hannover in the *Brüderkrieg* of 1866, although this may have caused him a wry smile or two. The *Brüderkrieg* also ended all hopes for a *Großdeutsche* solution to the problem of German unity. From now on, any union would now invariably leave out many Germans and be under Prussian auspices. Whereas the brothers Grimm had been able to distinguish between essential cultural unity and political division, Hoffmann found this much harder. Nevertheless, when unity was achieved it caused him initial satisfaction. One anecdote illustrates this perfectly. Upon the passing of the very first postal wagon of the newly united Germany, which carried the inscription *Kaiserliche Post*, he lifted his hat and said,

“Sie wissen nicht, was ich um dieses eine Wort im Leben gelitten habe”.¹³⁰

The quote reveals his initial pleasure at the rather limited unification of 1871, and his sense that his suffering had not been in vain. His joy was to be short lived.

¹²⁹ Eichholz, L, “Die Jahre 1860-1874 im Leben und Werke Hoffmanns von Fallersleben”, *Mitteilungs-Blätter*, vol. 11, no. 35, (1964), pp. 3-7.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 5.

Hoffmann was exceptional amongst the five men under consideration in witnessing the fulfilment of his nationalist dreams. In 1871, after politically and militarily outmanoeuvring France, Otto von Bismarck managed to persuade the German kings and princes to unite under one flag. The *Kleindeutsche*, Prussian-dominated empire turned out to be the anti-thesis of all he had dreamed. Initially he *did* applaud the new emperor, referring to him as “der greise Siegesheld” in his poem, *Kaiser Wilhelm*, written a day after the armistice with France had been signed.¹³¹ He was also extraordinarily proud of the German armies, and enjoyed the humiliation of the ‘old enemy’. He spent most of the days of the conflict bent over maps and writing on its events.¹³² He wrote the marching song of the *Westfälischen Infanterieregiment 55*, recruited around Corvey, his *Wir sind da*.¹³³ As so many of his compatriots, he greeted the events of 1870-71 with high hopes. A poem from June 1871 expresses this well, exhorting the members of the new *Reichstag* to be steadfast,

“O zeigt, daß ihr gewachsen seid
Als Männer einer g r o ß e n Zeit”.¹³⁴

One year later, however, he realised this pious wish was to remain unfulfilled,

“Die Welt steht wieder still,
Als wäre sie am Ziel.
Der Fortschritt, den man will,
Ist nur ein Börsenspiel.

Ermüdet und erschlaft
Im zweifelhaften Glück
Läßt Wille, Mut und Kraft
Sich drängen schon zurück.

O unaussprechlich Leid
Fürs deutsche Vaterland.
Daß unsre g r o ß e Zeit
So k l e i n e Menschen fand!”¹³⁵

¹³¹ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Kaiser Wilhelm”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 5, pp. 182-3.

¹³² Eichholz, L, “Die Jahre 1860-1874”, p. 5.

¹³³ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Wir sind da”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 5, pp. 166-7.

¹³⁴ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “An die Männer des deutschen Reichstages”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 5, p. 183. This poem and the following were published in daily newspapers. *Jost*, p. 138. The italics are mine.

¹³⁵ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Schlechte Aussichten”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 5, p. 195.

Disenchantment is perhaps too soft a term to describe this poem: the utter disgust and pain at a missed opportunity speaks from every line. It also makes clear why Hoffmann had supported the foundation of the *Reich*. He regarded it as the first step towards the utopian *Deutschland* which he had espoused all of his life. Having taken that first step, the establishment now made a *sur place*, and Hoffmann's hopes evaporated as fast as they had been aroused. All this makes it obvious that he had not compromised; he had gone along with the establishment only when it was underpinned by a sincere friendship, as in the case of the duke of Corvey, or when the establishment appeared to move along the same track as he. When, after 1871, it became clear that unification was *all* they had wanted, the radical Hoffmann appeared as speedily as he seemed to have disappeared around the time of unification. The establishment appreciated this all too well; Bismarck refused to rehabilitate him even when a public campaign was started on Hoffmann's behalf.¹³⁶ It is appropriate that Hoffmann's life ended with this stalemate: a hero to the people, a radical mind, and a thorn in the side of the establishment, be it Hannoverian, Prussian, or German.

Life-as-Theatre.

Hoffmann's vision of a German identity is not just to be found in his writings. Throughout his life, he acted out the dreams and ideals which he considered to be typically German, one reason, perhaps, why he so frequently fell out with others. His was almost a post-modern life; a life as theatre. Through this 'act' – if an act it was – he became in the eyes of many of his contemporaries the personification of Germany. It was this which made him extra dangerous in the eyes of the establishment, and this which gave his work extra impact. The reactions which he solicited by his outward appearance were without exception dramatic. Achim von Arnim's description of a meeting with Hoffmann may stand as typical. Here he is writing from Bonn to Bettine,

¹³⁶ Borchert, pp. 216-7.

“Ich besah die Festungswerke ... von da stieg ein Minnesänger auf, ein gewisser Hoffmann mit sechs Bärten im Gesicht und zerissenem Wams, ein Sammler von Volksliedern ... Nun fehlte es nicht an Unterhaltung”.¹³⁷

One would struggle to find more German stereotypes in one man: a modern-day *Minnesänger*, who collects old songs to boot; a figure greatly bearded and rugged, and all that in the romantic national setting of the river Rhine. The centrality of the past in the self-presentation of the poet was certainly purposeful. Like Rodenbach, Hoffmann was imbued with the great deeds and glories of a past which the generation of the Grimms and Willems had recovered – or should that be ‘invented’? By dressing himself with these characteristics, Hoffmann managed to appropriate the symbols of this great past, thereby undergoing a metamorphosis into a living representation of that past. One should call to mind the meaning of such a statement to a generation impregnated with Chateaubriand’s ideals of restoring the past, and with the notion nurtured by the German Historical School that in the past the ideal for the future was to be discovered.¹³⁸ Hoffmann was the past come alive, a living example for a present German identity.

One cannot fail to sense something of startled awe in the tone of von Arnim’s letter, and it is beyond dispute that a certain madness, or at least an apparent madness, went hand-in-hand with Hoffmann’s personality. It is this trait which allows one safely to class him amongst the Byronic poets of the nineteenth century. He shares many of Lord Byron’s hallmarks, especially the dedication to freedom, which formed the core of Byronesque Romanticism. To the German writer Ludwig Börne, Byron fulfilled his

“Ideal der Identität von Künstler und Mensch ... durch den Einsatz von Kunst und Leben für die Sache der Freiheit”.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Hoffmann-von-Fallersleben-Museum (ed), *op.cit.* p. 16.

¹³⁸ See chapter two, pp. 101-2.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Balzer, B, “Liberale und radikaldemokratische Literatur”. In V. Žmegač (ed), *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, vol. 1.2, p. 284.

This marriage of art and life, this living for freedom, were all enacted in the 'character' played by the Romantic poets, including Hoffmann. Alistair Fowler summed up the characteristics of the Byronesque poet as follows,

"an alienated outsider ... [who] despite his emphatic loneliness ... is an expressive being, and cultivates his self absorbed sensitivity openly".¹⁴⁰

All these can certainly be applied to Hoffmann.

How, then, did Hoffmann influence the development of a national identity in Germany through his 'life-as-theatre'? The interaction between poet and the growing national identity is a complex one, perhaps even slightly ambiguous. If one calls to mind the description of the Romantic poet as an 'outsider', this ambiguity is most clear. How can an outsider transform or help to transform the self-image of a whole society? The simple answer is 'with great difficulty'. By their very nature, people like Hoffmann stand slightly aloof, observe rather than change. This was most obvious in his reaction to the invitation to take a seat in the Frankfurt parliament: he declined after his curiosity had been satisfied. It is at these moments that 'life-as-theatre' takes on its greatest significance. By living the character of the charismatic poet, Hoffmann hoped to show something of the national identities he wished to propagate, or to indicate his disapproval of certain developments. Being an outsider was essential in achieving this.

When writing *Mein Leben* he obviously aimed to portray himself as the perennial outsider. Take, for example, a passage on his youth, which, needless to say, is impossible to verify. What is of interest here is the image Hoffmann wanted to portray, the role he *wished* to be remembered for. The incident took place sometime before the Battle of Jena, when he was aged around eight, in his father's *Gasthaus*. Twice weekly the *Hamburger Correspondent* arrived and Hoffmann

"mußte dann die Blätter vorlesen. Die Stammgäste saßen um den großen Tisch herum ... Ich las und las in aufgeregter Stimmung, denn die Tagesbegebenheiten hatten auch für mich ein großes Interesse".¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Fowler, A, *A History of English Literature*, p. 230. Hoffmann emphasised his 'loneliness' when leaving Mecklenburg for the last time in 1849. Using the words of Lamennais, he wrote years later "L'exilé partout est seul". *ML*, vol. 5, p. 65.

¹⁴¹ *ML*, vol. 1, p. 20.

Besides portraying himself as highly precocious (for what eight year old has a *großes Interesse* in the details of the news?), what concerns us here is the position Hoffmann gave himself. In the parental pub it is he who reads out the paper, he who is the centre of attention, he who divulges the wider world to a captive audience.¹⁴²

Unlikely? We cannot now know, but interesting at any rate. He wanted his audience to think of him as a go-between between provincial Germans and the outside world. Here he portrays the idealised outsider: observing yet informing, aloof and yet at the heart of society.

Once he had reached maturity, this sense of being an outsider, or the wish to play at being an outsider, remained. His multiple personae testify to this. Although a passionate *Großdeutscher*, he frequently emphasised his love for the medieval Low Countries. Here, too, the outsider sentiment predominates: Hoffmann remained uninterested in Dutch current affairs, and in Belgium cared only about the state of the Flemish population. In the main it was not politics but literature that aroused his passion. Whilst he used to emphasise his links with the Low Countries when in Germany, his very appearance emphasised his German identity when he was in the Low Countries, as a passage from *Mein Leben* illustrates. His long hair, scraggy beard and German clothes were picked on by the children in Leiden, who called after him in the street, shouting that ubiquitous Dutch abuse for Germans “kijk eens, de mof!”¹⁴³ Dutch children were too much even for Hoffmann’s carefully-cultivated ‘outsiderness’, for he quickly discarded his *Burschen* image in favour of a more Dutch-looking outfit and shaved his beard and tied up his hair.

This passage shows the limitations of playing the outsider. Whereas in Germany, to some his appearance was evocative of the *Minnesänger*, in the Netherlands, it just called to mind the ‘onfatsoenlijke’ neighbours. If he was to exert any influence on the shape of German national identity, then his appearance and the role he played had to have resonance. It is in this light that a passage in *Mein Leben* on the gawping citizens of Köln begins to make sense. They suddenly stood “still vor und hinter uns,

¹⁴² One may call to mind the recollections of Ludwig Emil Grimm in this respect, who reported excitedly on the soldiery passing by throughout his young life, but did not claim an understanding of the events. Praesent, W. (ed), *Ludwig Emil Grimm. Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, p. 20.

¹⁴³ *ML*, vol. 1, p. 264.

um uns von allen Seiten betrachten zu können".¹⁴⁴ Hoffmann's notion that they had never seen any students before is surely misleading: they were being stared at because the people of Köln understood *exactly* what the little group of students stood for, but like Rodenbach's audience wondered why.¹⁴⁵

The authorities, in the mean while, understood his appearance all too well. As early as 1817, he was habitually stopped and arrested, just because he *looked* suspicious: he was simply too German! He not only looked suspicious, he also acted suspiciously, as he relates with relish in *Mein Leben*. Visiting his brother Daniel in Magdeburg with a fellow student, they were stopped,

"Mein Freund hatte neben seiner Matrikel einen Paß, er wurde nicht weiter beanstandet. Mit meiner Matrikel ging es mir schlecht. Der Unterofficier entfaltete die große Urkunde, schüttelte den Kopf und machte die geistreiche Bemerkung: 'Och Latein versteht kein Schwein'".¹⁴⁶

One has a sense that Hoffmann was being deliberately mischievous, though; the *academische Gesetze* for the students at Göttingen detailed that one required a matriculation card *and* a pass when travelling.¹⁴⁷ Since all students received a copy on matriculation, Hoffmann should have known this. It is this deliberate flaunting of petty rules that marks the serious side to Hoffmann's performances: they illuminate why he chose to stand out. In his own words,

"Jeder im deutschen Rocke und mit einem Schnurrbarte galt damals [1820's] für einen höchst gefährlichen Menschen, dem man das Schlimmste zutraute".¹⁴⁸

Hoffmann's greatest role was that of the medieval travelling scholar, known in Germany and the Low Countries as a *Vagant*.¹⁴⁹ Such was his success in this character that, to many, Hoffmann and the wandering scholar became synonymous. The remark by Closs, who christened him "der letzte 'Vagant'", speaks volumes.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 171.

¹⁴⁵ See chapter 3, p. 208.

¹⁴⁶ *ML*, vol. 1, p. 102.

¹⁴⁷ Wallis, L, *Der Göttinger Student*, pp. 63-4.

¹⁴⁸ *ML*, vol. 1, p. 235.

¹⁴⁹ See in this respect Enklaar, D.Th, *Varende Luyden*; Knuvelde, G, *Van Zwervers en Vagebonden*.

¹⁵⁰ Closs, A, "Die Neuere Deutsche Lyrik vom Barock bis zur Gegenwart". In W. Stammler (ed), *Deutsche Philologie im Aufriss*, vol. 2, column 253.

So does a caricature which appeared shortly after Hoffmann's dismissal from Breslau, depicting a man with his mouth firmly shut by a padlock, wearing a long coat and cap, and carrying a knapsack, walking away from a lectern. In his hands are a lyre and a walking stick.¹⁵¹ There was no need for a caption; everyone knew that this modern-day *Vagant* had to be Hoffmann. Heinrich Laube, who knew Hoffmann in Breslau, also remarked on Hoffmann's *Vagant*-like appearance. According to Laube, he wore a coat-like gown, "der die Mitte hielt zwischen einem Bettelmönche und einem fahrenden Schüler".¹⁵² To his peers his wanderlust was a constant source of bafflement, amusement, or envy. Jacob Grimm called him "Der reisefertige Hoffmann", whilst his friend, Meusebach, in a letter to Jacob, wrote,

"Wie gut hat's der Fallersleber! der reist ... wieder ein halb jahr in Deutschland herum".¹⁵³

There can be no doubt that Hoffmann realised the importance of his role. He made sure everyone knew him as a wandering scholar. About one third of the way into the first volume of *Mein Leben*, he provides his readers with a vivid description of the requirements of the travelling student, thus presenting the accoutrements of this character, and providing evidence that he planned his role meticulously. Just in case anyone had missed the point, he refers directly to himself as a descendant of the 'fahrenden Schüler'.¹⁵⁴ There was, of course, a practical reason for his travels: he needed to go where the archives were. The wandering Hoffmann received practical presents, such as "ein halb Dutzend gestrickter Strümpfe", or a "schön gestickte Reisetasche", which, in turn, reinforced the image until the point was reached when the two were inextricably linked.¹⁵⁵ His role as a 'fahrende Schuler', was more than just frivolous play-acting. It is salutary to recall the impact Hoffmann's appearance made on von Arnim. Through his role as 'fahrende Schuler' Hoffmann became the reincarnated messenger of Germany's cultural past; the prophet for its future. To this

¹⁵¹ The drawing is depicted in Müller, J.J., "Germanistik – eine Form bürgerlicher Opposition". In J.J. Müller (ed), *Literaturwissenschaft und Sozialwissenschaften*, vol. 2, plate 2.

¹⁵² Ermatinger, E, *Deutsche Dichter 1700-1900*, p. 413.

¹⁵³ Vreese, W. de, "Briefwisseling van Jan Frans Willems en Jacob Grimm". In A. Bömer and J. Kirchner (eds), *Mittelalterliche Handschriften*, p. 283; *Meusebach*, p. 203.

¹⁵⁴ *ML*, vol. 1, pp. 92-3.

¹⁵⁵ *ML*, vol. 4, pp. 288 and 390.

one ought to add the immense respect accorded to intellectuals in Hoffmann's Germany: any message on the nation was that little more credible coming from a scholar.

To his contemporaries, Hoffmann's sense of his own and by implication his countrymen's identity was frequently incomprehensible. Just as his utopian ideals for German unity were to prove illusive, so his notions of the 'true' German turned out to be beyond most. This was not helped by his impish sense of humour, which many failed to understand, and which caused Jacob Grimm to remark that,

“der Mensch hat unleugbar was verdrehtes in sich”.¹⁵⁶

Perhaps Jacob was correct here. A passage from *Mein Leben* describes an evening's entertainment with his friend, Reinwald, which consisted of hitting empty bottles with stones, and then emptying the equivalent number of full ones. To augment the fun, they used a megaphone to shout at people from the windows of Reinwald's castle. Unseen, the locals thought they heard

“eine Stimme vom Himmel: ‘Bekehre Dich! kniee nieder und bete!’ was denn der arme Sünder auch that”.¹⁵⁷

When used to present an image, this type of humour could seriously backfire. Take, for example, his use of the aristocratic ‘von Fallersleben’. Many thought this pretentious, treating him with some disdain as a result. The snide remark by the Berlin librarian, Buttman, about “der Dynast von Fallersleben” soon gained wider currency, with Jacob Grimm amongst its most eager users.¹⁵⁸ To Hoffmann the name was a subtle joke, an anti-aristocratic statement even. He made this quite clear to a wider audience in 1841, in his first volume of the *Unpolitische Lieder*:

“An meine Heimat dacht’ ich eben,
Da schrieb ich mich von Fallersleben....”

¹⁵⁶ *Lachmann*, vol. 1, p. 381.

¹⁵⁷ *ML*, vol. 1, p. 232.

¹⁵⁸ *Lachmann*, vol. 1, pp. 373 and 381.

“So schrieben sich viel Biederleute
Nach ihrem Ort und thun’s noch heute,
und keiner dachte je daran,
Durch v o n würd’ er ein Edelmann”.¹⁵⁹

And just to remove any doubt,

“Auf Burgen saßen Edelleute,
Wo aber sind die Burgen heute?
Es wohnt oft ohne Hab’ und Gut
Im Thale manches adlich Blut.

Und von den Gütern ihrer Lieben
Ist ihnen nur ein v o n geblieben;
Des alten Namens Herrlichkeit
Blieb manchem nur in unsrer Zeit.

So bin auch ich v o n Fallersleben.
Wer wird ein a u s mir wiedergeben?
Ich bin nur v o n, einst war ich a u s,
Jetzt hab’ ich weder Hof noch Haus”.¹⁶⁰

It is rather odd that few took notice of these sentiments, as they were shared by many, even by Jacob Grimm. However, the scorn which many poured on the ‘von Fallersleben’ does reveal the extent to which Hoffmann simply failed to bring his message across.

It was in many respects inevitable that this theatrical man attracted so much criticism, and equal amounts of rumours. One example of just how confusing his persona had become to those around him is furnished by the rumour mill that sprang into action in 1830, when he travelled to Berlin to secure his appointment as professor in Breslau. One story, the plausible one, suggested he had gone to take over Jacob Grimm’s job. This, at least, had the virtue of being complimentary, although Jacob would not have thought so. Less kind voices suggested he had died, and one went as far as to say that he had become a Benedictine monk in Austria!¹⁶¹ His role playing had many confused. Did he actually know who he was twenty years into his

¹⁵⁹ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Von”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 4, p. 21.

¹⁶⁰ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Von und Aus”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 4, p. 22.

¹⁶¹ *ML*, vol. 2, pp. 179-80.

variety of roles? Possibly not, and his autobiography continuously shows his own bewilderment at the impact he made.¹⁶²

It was, however, not amongst his peers, but amongst the wider population that Hoffmann made the biggest impact, and here he *was* understood. A passage from *Mein Leben* illustrates the near-mythical status he had achieved, even as early as 1844. Travelling to Mecklenburg, he stopped at an inn, where the following conversation with the landlord took place,

“Da steht ja [in the newspaper], der H. v. F. wird nächstens wiederkommen.’ — ‘Ja, sagt der Wirth, ich hab’s gelesen. Wenn ich den Mann mal sehen könnte, ich gäbe was drum!’ — ‘Ja, sage ich, der wird schon mal hierher kommen.’ — ‘Hierher? ach, im Leben nicht!’ — ‘Aber doch! er kommt, ja, er ist schon da — ich bin’s!’ — Der Mann war außer sich vor Freude”.¹⁶³

That this was intimately tied up with his vibrant persona may be gleaned from a newspaper article in the *Mannheimer Abendzeitung* of the same year. The enthusiastic, even awe-struck tone of the journalist conveys something of the impact of the combination Hoffmann the person, and Hoffmann’s poetry,

“Wahrhaftig, ein Lied von Hoffmann wirkt mehr als hundert Zeitungsartikel”.¹⁶⁴

Such was his popularity amongst this wider audience, that, in his dotage he had in their eyes come to personify German identity, just as he had planned. By now, many of his critical contemporaries had died and the old man, living at Corvey, had become the epitome of the wine-drinking, song-singing German of his poetry and songs.

Even though some dismissed his continued importance as early as 1845, his poetry was eagerly read by the post-unification generation, and widely sung by a German audience for whom it had become denuded of the politically volatile reputation of its author.¹⁶⁵ Still roving around, he was described by Paul Lindau as descending upon his house and keeping

¹⁶² For example *Ibid*, p. 180.

¹⁶³ *ML*, vol. 4, pp. 221-2.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Kühl, H, *op.cit.* p. 43.

¹⁶⁵ Hoffmann’s liberalism differed considerably from the more radical politics of Marx and friends. Koszyk, K. and Obermann, K, *Zeitgenossen von Marx und Engels*, pp. 6-8 and 15.

“the party up all night while he drank wine and trolled in a rich deep bass voice song after song, and reeled off tale after tale”.¹⁶⁶

Always a celebrity, Hoffmann’s fame reached legendary proportions. Even before he died, a statue was erected in his honour in the city of Hamburg, a distinction normally reserved for dead poets.¹⁶⁷ In Belgium, too, he was by now iconic, and it was as an icon that he attended the 1874 exhibition in Gent. By now too old to travel, Hoffmann wished to send one last greeting to the Flemish people and did so in the form of a bust he had had specially made by the sculptor Frits Neuber.¹⁶⁸ Here it was not so much the person, Hoffmann von Fallersleben, that lived on, but the enhanced sense of value that he had bestowed upon Flemish literature and culture. No outsider ever published such a potent and strongly-worded defence of the Flemish movement, and of the emancipation struggle *per se*, as Hoffmann. Nor did he confine himself to passive activity. In 1856, he dedicated his *De Vlaamsche Beweging* to the *vijfde Nederduitse Taalcongres*, delivering a potent endorsement of all the delegates believed in.¹⁶⁹ In both countries Hoffmann had certainly had a major impact on the development of national identities, through his writings, but perhaps more directly through his various persona. It is to his writings that we now need to turn to discover just what Hoffmann intended the German and the Flemish character to be.

“Mehr als 2700 Gedichte”: The ‘National’ in the Poetry of Hoffmann von Fallersleben.¹⁷⁰

Two thousand seven hundred plus poems ... one stands in awe of Hoffmann’s productivity. There are nature poems, drinking songs, protest poems, political and children’s songs, soldier and student songs, poetry about the Rhine, the Arminius

¹⁶⁶ Legge, J.G, *op.cit.* pp. 197-8.

¹⁶⁷ He even wrote a poem to thank everyone involved, and a rather more sarcastic one, entitled *An mein Bild*. Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “An mein Bild”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 1, pp. 148-9.

¹⁶⁸ Soenen, J, “Vlaenderen, Dach en Nacht. Hoffmann von Fallersleben en Vlaanderen”, *Aristo*, vol. 26, no. 11, (1958), p. 306.

¹⁶⁹ Hoffmann van Fallersleben, H, *De Vlaamsche Beweging*.

¹⁷⁰ Wendebourg, H. and Gerbert, A. (eds), *August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben. Gedichte und Lieder*, p. 11.

Monument, occasional poetry, in short, there was virtually no theme left untouched. This poetic variety reflects the personality of the poet: he was

“ein Improvisator, ein Sohn des Augenblicks, der im Augenblick alles gab, was er hatte und war, ein fahrender Sänger, der ... seine Lieder wie Seifenblasen hinspielte”.¹⁷¹

As we have seen, these *Seifenblasen* were not always harmless: occasionally they got in the authorities' eyes. Nor were they blown for decoration alone. Hoffmann considered his poetry to be a blueprint for a German identity. This much one is to expect. After all, Germany was the Alpha and Omega of Hoffmann's senses. As such, the poems and songs contain what can almost be termed a set of instructions, instructions which detail what it is that makes a German a German, and, as important, Germany German.

Naturally this poetry was emotive, indeed emotional. Poetry by definition intends to convey emotion, and the political poetry of the nineteenth century is no exception to this rule. Yet because Hoffmann's works wished to appeal to an undefined sense of German identity, emotion became paramount; his was not an appeal to intellect. His friend, Arnold Ruge, defined it as follows,

“‘Lieder der Gegenwart’, politische Lieder! ... Hoffmann von Fallersleben und Herwegh, ... sind selbst keineswegs stehengeblieben ... Unterdessen hat die politische Gemütsbewegung unter den Lyrikern stark um sich gegriffen ... so ist es nun doch, seit die neue Dichtungsart ein großes, ja das größte Publikum gefunden, ziemlich klargeworden, daß die neue Richtung im Nationalgeiste überhaupt eingetreten sei”.¹⁷²

Ruge presupposes a *Nationalgeist*, as one may expect from any nineteenth-century commentator. However, this *Nationalgeist* was exactly *what* was being formed by the emotive poetry of Hoffmann and others like him. What matters here, is that Ruge correctly identified its greatest strength, which was at the same time its greatest weakness: it predicated upon a *Gemütsbewegung*. Perhaps consciously, but more

¹⁷¹ Huch, R, *op.cit.* p. 221.

¹⁷² Ruge, A, “Lieder der Gegenwart”. In J. Hermand (ed), *Der deutsche Vormärz*, p. 49. Political poetry was not, as Ruge argued, new in the nineteenth century. It had existed for as long as poetry and politics had existed. See, Hinderer, W, “Versuch über den Begriff und die Theorie politischer Lyrik”. In W. Hinderer (ed), *Geschichte der politischen Lyrik in Deutschland*, p. 11 and following.

probably subconsciously, this is exactly what those in power realised. Hoffmann appealed to peoples' sentiments and not to their intellect. This fact also argues against any division of Hoffmann's poetry into "Vaterländische" and "Kritische" categories.¹⁷³ Even the critical poetry was meant to convey a sense of what a German national identity should be about, even if expressed in an inverted fashion.

As a result of this centrality of the emotions, there was little need to exemplify or solidify any ideas about the national: what mattered was that people were *sensible* to Hoffmann's vague appeals to their presupposed identity. For Hoffmann this was a happy coincidence. He had never felt any inclination to codify, rather felt a poet's aversion to any system. As an out and out *Gefühlsmensch* he could *imagine* the national and this was all that is required to construct an imagined community. When asked to define this community, however, Hoffmann was left without an answer. Thus when unity of sorts was achieved in 1871, he, as seen, was at first hopeful, soon lukewarm, and within no time actively scornful. He did not have concrete answers to practical questions. Yet that was not what his poetry was all about.

Remarkably, Hoffmann's vision for a national identity did not end at the borders of Germany, but extended to Flanders. This vision, often ignored by later commentators, was of paramount importance in Flanders. It not only provided moral support for those involved in the emancipation struggle in Belgium, but it also contained prescripts for the vision of Flanders which they ought to pursue. Hoffmann's involvement with the development of philological studies in the Low Countries need not detain us here. This element of Hoffmann's association with the Low Countries has received ample attention, and never in more detail than in the works by P.H. Nelde.¹⁷⁴ This relationship was "von wechselnder Intensität", but that cannot be said of his interest in developing a Flemish identity.¹⁷⁵

His interest in Flanders coincided with the birth of the concept, as traced in chapter one. As early as 1839 he published his thoughts on what Flanders needed if it was to develop as a *Kulturnation*. A cycle of four poems entitled *Gedichte aus Gent*

¹⁷³ Schlink, R, *Hoffmanns von Fallersleben Vaterländische und Gesellschaftskritische Lyrik*, p. 5.

¹⁷⁴ See note 35 and the bibliography.

¹⁷⁵ Nelde, P.H, "Deutsche Philologie und Flämische Bewegung". In Hoffmann von Fallersleben-Gesellschaft (ed), *Hoffmann von Fallersleben. Wollen-Wirken-Werke*, p. 11.

published in the first volume of his *Unpolitische Lieder*, engaged with the incipient Flemish ‘nation’.¹⁷⁶ These were written whilst Hoffmann was staying with Jan Frans Willems, and certainly reflect the latter’s concerns.¹⁷⁷ Of the four, *An Vlaemsch-Belgien* is the most informative,

“Suche nicht das Heil im Westen!
In der Fremde wohnt kein Glück —
Suchst du deines Glückes Vesten,
Kehre in dich selbst zurück!”¹⁷⁸

The emphasis on self-sufficiency, the rejection of outside influences – a theme elaborated upon in the third poem of the cycle, *Gegen die Fransquillons* – and the need to find one’s worth in one’s own past: these are all themes one may encounter with Willems and other Flemish literati. As to the reason for this defensiveness Hoffmann is clear: guard against the enemy within,

“Treu bewahr in deiner Mitte
Vor dem wälschen Uebermuth
Deine Sprach’ und deine Sitte,
Deiner Väter Gut und Blut”¹⁷⁹

The shared enemy of Germans and Flemings, the French, undoubtedly attracted Hoffmann to the Flemish movement. After his own people’s victory over the French in 1870-1, this sense of a combined mission only increased, as the poem *An die Männer von Flandern* shows,

“Ihr Männer von Flandern,
Nur Eines thut noth:
Der Kampf mit den Welschen
Auf Leben und Tod!
Ihr Männer von Flandern!
Ein würdig Geschlecht
Kämpft fröhlichen Muthes
Für Freiheit und Recht”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Gedichte aus Gent”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 4, pp. 97-9.

¹⁷⁷ *ML*, vol. 3, p. 106.

¹⁷⁸ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “An Vlaemsch-Belgien”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 4, p. 97.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “An die Männer von Flandern”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 5, p. 190.

This poem, with its remarkable echoes of the themes of the poetry of Rodenbach, encapsulates much of what Hoffmann stood for, both in Germany and in Flanders.¹⁸¹ Equality, freedom, rights: these are the perennials of his works and remind us forcefully that national identities and nationalism grew out of an emancipation struggle.

The attraction of Flanders for Hoffmann was not just confined to a shared antipathy towards the French. In Flemish culture Hoffmann discovered a communal past, in much the same way as the brothers Grimm had in Scandinavia, or Rodenbach in Germany. Naturally, this was stimulated by his philological research. Locked up in a mindset that simply could not conceive of a world without the nation-state, Hoffmann and other nineteenth-century philologists assumed that the fact that medieval literature crossed modern borders provided evidence for a lost unity amongst peoples with a 'Germanic' language. This pan-Germanism appears in the works of the brothers Grimm, shows up in the *Nederduytsche* theories of Willems, and, most conspicuously, in Rodenbach's poetry. Hoffmann referred to Flanders as having a "deutsche" element, which some have seen as a confusion of terminology.¹⁸² To Hoffmann, *deutsch* and *germanisch* were interchangeable only to a limited extent. The *deutsche* element which he found in Flanders referred to his notion that there was an unbroken culture which united the modern German with the medieval *Reich*. Flanders had been part of that *Reich*, its people, in Hoffmann's words, part of "dem grossen deutschen Volksstamme".¹⁸³

His greatest achievement in the construction of a Flemish identity is not to be found in any of the above endeavours, however. For this one needs to open the pages of his *Loverkens*, those poems which he composed in Middle Dutch. Not only was this a tremendous achievement in its own right, one or two of the poems were also influential in giving shape to a Flemish identity.¹⁸⁴ Crucial to the emerging

¹⁸¹ This in spite of the fact that Rodenbach and Hoffmann frequented opposite sides of the religious and political spectrum. Nationalist themes, it would appear, bridged these divides with some ease.

¹⁸² Nelde, P.H, *Flandern in der Sicht Hoffmanns von Fallersleben*, p. 167.

¹⁸³ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, "Einleitung". In *Horae Belgicae*, vol. 6, p. xi.

¹⁸⁴ For this see Soenen, J, "Werd Hoffmann von Fallersleben omstreeks de jaren 1850-1870 aangezien als de beste dichter in Vlaanderen?", *Spiegel Historiae van de Bond van Gentse Germanisten*, vol. 3, no. 4, (1961), pp. 124-30.

stereotypical Flemish landscape was his *Vlaenderen boven al!*.¹⁸⁵ Here Hoffmann does not only give shape to a ‘typical’ national landscape, but also roots this landscape in a – spurious – medieval past,

“Vlaenderen, dach en nacht
denc ic aen u.
waer ic ooc ben en vaer,
ghi sijt mi altijd naer.
Vlaenderen, dach en nacht
denc ic aen u.

Beemden en velden staen
overal groen.
schoon is ons lant gheheel,
schoon als een lustprieel.
Beemden en velden staen
overal groen”.¹⁸⁶

For all his commitment to Flanders, it is as *the* nationalist poet of Germany that Hoffmann really made career. Like those of Rodenbach, many of his poems and writings reflect the type of German identity he wished for. Here are to be found his ‘typical’ landscape, here one encounters the ideal German man and, to a lesser extent, woman. Such is the richness of Hoffmann’s poetry, that one can sample only a small, but representative section to construct the image he had in mind when he talked, sang and wrote about Germany. Like Wilhelm Grimm, Hoffmann had an interest in communicating with children. Indeed, it is in some of his writings for children that one may find the clearest indications of Hoffmann’s ideal Germany. He was also – as the brothers Grimm – working within a tradition, a tradition which expressed itself primarily in language. Hoffmann could express himself only in a “politische Wortschatz”, which in itself conditioned the ‘national’ element of his oeuvre.¹⁸⁷ This translated into the use of slogans such as *Freiheit* and *Einheit*, which is noticeable even in his children’s material.

It has been argued that Hoffmann’s children’s poems should not be treated as a separate category; rather they are “vielmehr ... in engem Zusammenhang mit

¹⁸⁵ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Vlaenderen boven al”. In *Loverkens*, p. 19-20.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 19.

¹⁸⁷ Wilke, J, “Vom Sturm und Drang bis zur Romantik”. In Hinderer, W. (ed), *Geschichte der politischen Lyrik in Deutschland*, p. 144.

anderen Liedergruppen des Dichters".¹⁸⁸ To this one may add, that, as the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, they contributed very significantly to the development of various elements within German identity. Writing for this young audience was a deliberate choice on Hoffmann's part,

"Ich dichtete jetzt Kinderlieder, Lieder für ein neues Geschlecht, denn von dem jetzigen erwartete ich nichts mehr".¹⁸⁹

Thus we have Hoffmann's word for the fact that this part of his oeuvre was targeted at developing the national in a coming generation. It must have been gratifying in his old age to reflect on the success this had had, all the more since many of the songs had been written as an antidote to the frustrations he felt after his dismissal from Breslau.¹⁹⁰ The topoi of Hoffmann's children's works are extremely varied, and reflect Hoffmann's wish to create a rounded identity for Germany. They were – and are – nonetheless supremely recognisable settings to a young audience. It cannot be overemphasised that many of the themes echo those in the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Hoffmann, as the Grimms, helped ensure that animals remained part of the German consciousness, even though they were rapidly fading from the everyday life of many Germans. His *Gänsecantate* may stand as representative of this theme, with its comical anthropomorphism as its main characteristic,

"Was haben wir Gänse für Kleidung an?

Gi ga gack!

Wir gehen barfuß allezeit

In einem weißen Federkleid".¹⁹¹

With this world populated by animals went an idealised landscape, which, needless to say, was a heavily wooded one. One of his most famous children's songs, *Ein Männlein steht im Walde*, reinforced the notion that Germany should be a land of forests,

¹⁸⁸ Wendebourg, H, "Hoffmann von Fallersleben als lyrischer und volkstümlicher Dichter". In Hoffmann von Fallersleben-Gesellschaft (ed), *Hoffmann von Fallersleben. Wollen-Wirken-Werke*, p. 24.

¹⁸⁹ *ML*, vol. 5, p. 120.

¹⁹⁰ Göhring, L, *Die Anfänge der deutschen Jugendliteratur im 18. Jahrhundert*, pp. 105-6.

¹⁹¹ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, "Gänsecantate". In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 2, p. 141.

“Ein Männlein steht im Walde
Ganz still und stumm,
Es hat von lauter Purpur
Ein Mäntlein um”.¹⁹²

Just how successfully Hoffmann’s sylvan atmosphere penetrated German awareness is illustrated by the line which later editors chose from his poems to give to an edition of his *Kinderlieder*, *Kuckuck Kuckuck ruft aus dem Wald*.¹⁹³ It has to be remembered that this impregnation with a rural idyll took place against a background of extremely rapid urbanisation. Wendebourg’s assertion that “Die gesamte Umgebung der Kinder, die in der Mitte des vorigen Jahrhunderts noch überwiegend ländlichen Charakter trug”, has to be balanced against this fact.¹⁹⁴ Hoffmann targeted the young on purpose, and it would be an insult to the man’s intellect to presuppose that he was not aware that this audience increasingly found themselves in an environment that differed considerably from that contained within his songs.

The creation of this landscape did not confine itself to his *Kinderlieder*. Hoffmann’s other poetry and songs frequently painted an idealised Germany. What is more, occasionally he even made an explicit connection between nationhood, or, at least, love for *Heimat*, and the beauty of the ‘typical’ German landscape. Nowhere does this appear as forcefully as in *Meine Heimat*,

“Nennet schön der Reben Düfte,
Wunderschön des Rheines Welle —
Seligsüß’ Erinnerung trink’ ich
Nur aus meiner Heimat Quelle;

Hauch’ ich aus der Heide Blüten,
Lausch’ ich aus der Fichte Sausen,
Aus des Frühlings Sang und Summen,
Und der Wälder stillem Grausen”.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Ein Männlein steht im Walde”. In A.H. Hoffmann von Fallersleben, *Fünfzig Kinderlieder*, p. 4.

¹⁹³ Freie Lehrervereinigung für Kunstpflege zu Berlin (ed), *Kuckuck Kuckuck ruft aus dem Wald. Bilder von C. Mickelait. Kinderlieder von Hoffmann von Fallersleben*.

¹⁹⁴ Wendebourg, H, “Hoffmann von Fallersleben als lyrischer und volkstümlicher Dichter”, p. 23. For German urbanisation, see Parker, G. (ed), *The Times Atlas of World History*, pp. 206-7 and 214-5.

¹⁹⁵ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Meine Heimat”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 3, p. 241.

Such is the imagery of this poem that it requires very little in the way of explanation. Here are all the perennials of the idealised German landscape: the moors, spring, the fir trees and naturally the dark forests. In addition, the poem introduces the great ‘mother river’ of the German people, the Rhine. The resonance of this waterway in the German identity as it was created during the nineteenth century has few equals in Europe, with the Volga in Russia and the Vltava for the Czechs as other, rare, examples. This was the river of the *Nibelungen*, the frontier with the ancient enemy France, the quintessential *German* river. Blithely ignoring the fact that the river begins in the Swiss Alps, that its left-bank is French for a good part of its course, that its final miles are in the Netherlands, and that, to the overwhelming majority of Germans, it was far-away, Hoffmann was amongst a host of poets and writers that made the Rhine an icon of German identity.¹⁹⁶ Hoffmann’s romantic sensibilities could not fail to be stirred by seeing *the* river,

“Am folgenden Tage reiste ich weiter den Rhein hinab mit dem Postschiffe ... Die meisten meiner Reisegefährten mochten wie ich noch nie den Rhein gesehen haben und waren entzückt von seinen wechselnden Schönheiten”.¹⁹⁷

Soon the river appeared in his poetry, for example in *Auf einer Rheinfahrt*, where the river is personified as “Vater Rhein”.¹⁹⁸ This sentiment is soon enhanced by a deeper, more mystical understanding of the river as the source of all that is truly German. It is a source from which one can drink, for on its banks grow vineyards, and from it flows that which *is* German to all corners of the land. One of his most famous songs, *Nur in Deutschland!*, ties this into an umbilical affiliation with his *Vaterland*,

“Zwischen Frankreich und dem Böhmerwald,
Da wachsen unsre Reben.
Grüß mein Lieb am grünen Rhein,
Grüß mir meinen kühlen Wein!
Nur in Deutschland

¹⁹⁶ Tully, C.L, *Creating a National Identity*, pp. 214-5 and 217.

¹⁹⁷ *ML*, vol. 1, p. 146. He later said that just seeing the Rhine was “recht einladend zum Dichten”.
Ibid, vol. 6, p. 219.

¹⁹⁸ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Auf einer Rheinfahrt”. In A.H. Hoffmann von Fallersleben (ed), *Bonner Burschenlieder*, p. 211.

Da will ich ewig leben".¹⁹⁹

These themes and the notion of the Rhine as the backbone of Germany re-appear in the later poem *Den Freunden*,

“Drum schenket heute deutschen Weines
Den Becher voll bis an den Rand,
Und von der Flut des grünen Rheines
Ertön’ es bis zum Ostseestrand:
Wenn Alles stirbt, uns bleibt doch Eines:
Die Liebe für das Vaterland!”.²⁰⁰

Apparent from these poems is the lack of a real geographical focus for Hoffmann’s Germany, and the emphasis on drinking. The former point is the more serious of the two: Hoffmann lacked a clear sense of *where* Germany was to accompany his strong ideas of *what* Germany was. The geographical pointers are vague in the extreme: Finland also has Baltic beaches, but Hoffmann obviously did not consider it to be German. Only the Rhine anchors Germans to a geographical entity, which explains why it became such an overwhelmingly important feature of Hoffmann’s poetry. This lack of clear geography was later to mar the reputation of the poet. In the *Lied der Deutschen* it apparently opens the door to a Germany that incorporates most of its neighbours, but in view of the fact that this geographical vagueness permeates his work, this is almost certainly *not* what Hoffmann was advocating. In spite of being an ardent traveller, he simply did not accord much importance to strict geography; his was a poetical sense of place.

The same cannot be said of his relationship with drink, which was important.²⁰¹ The fact that the Rhine in the two poems quoted above has the colour green surely refers to wine: it is this that flows across all the German lands. Nor was his interest in the metaphysical qualities of alcohol restricted to wine; beer also played an important part in the identity which he constructed for Germany,

¹⁹⁹ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Nur in Deutschland!”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 3, p. 234.

²⁰⁰ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Den Freunden”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 1, p. 92.

²⁰¹ He explains the metaphysical importance of wine in great detail in *ML*, vol. 1, p. 183.

“Es muß die deutsche Freiheit
Für uns gar theuer sein:
Sie hat bis jetzt gekostet
Gar manchen Tropfen Wein.

Sie hat bis jetzt gekostet
Auch manchen Tropfen Bier.
Je mehr wir Deutsche trinken,
Je freier warden wir.

Doch will die Freiheit werden
Für uns ein theurers Gut,
So soll sie uns auch kosten
Wol einen Tropfen Blut”.²⁰²

The poem highlights the previous comments on the linguistic content of this type of poetry perfectly. It also introduces two more crucial elements of Hoffmann’s poetry with regard to a German national identity, namely *Freiheit* and the price to pay for this. Without doubt *Freiheit* is *the* key concept of Hoffmann’s prescription for a German national identity. With this he was in good company; German poets, philosophers, political activists and many bourgeois citizens all espoused the cause of *Freiheit*. Usually the term, as used during the wars against Napoleonic France, implied freedom for the *Vaterland*.²⁰³ It was also used to convey the wish for liberal constitutions, or freedom from censorship.²⁰⁴ However, Hoffmann lifted *Freiheit* onto a completely different utopian plain.

Most of his poems directly addressing the issue of *Freiheit* were written at a point when Hoffmann was forced to contemplate the question of personal freedom to decide and act. Usually this was in reaction to state interference, but not always. This underlying motivation is of the greatest consequence for any understanding of Hoffmann’s concept of *Freiheit*. It is also what lifts it onto the aforementioned higher plain. For once the motivation of the author *does* matter. Hoffmann was in the rather unique position that his audience knew what he was trying to convey: his life and the roles he played were in the public domain, and, by implication, so were his

²⁰² Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “15. November 1844”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 5, pp. 106-7.

²⁰³ Schulze, H, *The Course of German Nationalism*, p. 55. Hoffmann wrote four *Freiheitslieder* to celebrate Napoleon’s defeat. Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, *Deutsche Lieder*.

²⁰⁴ For example Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Das freie Wort”. In A.H. Hoffmann von Fallersleben, *Deutsche Lieder aus der Schweiz*, pp. 138-40; Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Auch ein Mädchen aus der Fremde”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 4, pp.145-6.

ideals. In many ways, his whole life was dedicated to personal freedom. This is not to argue that Hoffmann never used *Freiheit* in the more conventional sense; *Freiheit* for Germany was one of his main themes, nor did he ignore *Freiheit* in the political sphere. Nevertheless, this personal *Freiheit* cannot and should not be isolated from the other two.

Hoffmann explained just how central this personal *Freiheit* was to him, and why it was important in wider society, to his friend Rudolf Müller, on whose Mecklenburg estate he found refuge in the 1840's,

“Es ist Pflicht für jeden Staatsbürger, sich frei zu machen von allen Vorurteilen, diesen Hemmnissen und Beschränkungen des Staatslebens. Nur in dem Freisein ist ein Wirken zum Besseren möglich, ohne Freiheit keine Tugend”.²⁰⁵

This is a truly remarkable passage, in which virtue is equated with a liberated mind. Obviously, Hoffmann's *Freiheit* was much more than a conventional statement. For his audience he put his message in unmistakable terms,

“Die Freiheit ist mein Leben
Und bleibt es immerfort,
Mein Sehnen, mein Gedanke,
Mein Traum, mein Lied und Wort”.²⁰⁶

Hoffmann's life, letters and poetry bear ample testimony to his ideal of *Freiheit*. This he then translated into a wider, national *Freiheit*. Just as he never defined his personal *Freiheit* aside from affirming its centrality, so he never managed to define a national *Freiheit*, although he did invariably link it to *Recht*. This occurs strongly in the *Lied der Deutschen*, but also features in, for example, *Deutschlands Ehr' und Hort*,

“Recht und Freiheit, sie nur retten
Unser deutsches Vaterland”.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Gerstenberg, H, *An meine Freunde*, p. 122. See also the perception that Müller had of Hoffmann: “Dem Freien Manne”. *ML*, vol. 4, p. 144.

²⁰⁶ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Das Lied von der Freiheit”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 4, p. 339.

²⁰⁷ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Deutschlands Ehr' und Hort”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 5, p. 165.

To which he added,

“Mit der Liebe heil’gem Feuer
Ziehn wir willig ins Gefecht:
Recht und Freiheit, immerfort
Deutschlands Ehr’ und Deutschlands Hort!”²⁰⁸

This leads neatly to another central element which Hoffmann considered essential to a German national identity, namely the ability of German men to fight, and if necessary to die, for Germany’s freedom and their own. His poetry is, in this respect, close to Rodenbach’s, full of dislike for the French, full of hope, and full of admiration for the heroes of the past.²⁰⁹ His poem, *Armin*, encapsulates all these themes.²¹⁰ The hero of the poem is Arminius, who, in the first century AD, had annihilated two of the emperor Augustus’ seemingly invincible legions. By the nineteenth century, this was viewed as a turning point in history, the moment when the border between Rome and the Germanic world became fixed on the Rhine rather than the Elbe.²¹¹ To many of Hoffmann’s contemporaries, obsessed by the Gibbonean idea of a clash of civilisations, the Battle of the Teutoburger Wald was a prefiguration of the modern clash between Rome’s heir France, and Arminius’ heir, Germany. In 1769, Klopstock published a play entitled *Hermanns Schlacht*, a

“Festlich-lyrische Verherrlichung heldischen Freiheitssinnes und sittlicher Größe bei den Germanen”.²¹²

The theme became very popular during the Napoleonic wars, with their obvious resonances of the distant past.²¹³

By the mid 1830’s, this fascination with the Germanic past began to reach epic proportions. It would last most of the century.²¹⁴ Arminius took pride of place amongst these public expressions of national pride. On the supposed site of the

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 166.

²⁰⁹ For his anti-French attitude see for example, Gerstenberg, H, *An meine Freunde*, p. 321.

²¹⁰ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Armin”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 4, pp. 90-6.

²¹¹ Chisholm, K. and Ferguson, G, *Rome. The Augustan Age*, pp, 576-80.

²¹² Frenzel, H.A. and E, *Daten deutscher Dichtung*, p. 165.

²¹³ Although Heine just could not take it seriously at all. Heine, H, *Deutschland. A Winter’s Tale*, pp. 76-81.

²¹⁴ For this and what follows see Mosse, G.L, “Mass Politics and the Political Liturgy of Nationalism”. In E. Kamenka (ed), *Nationalism*, p. 43; Schulze, H. *op.cit.* p. 67.

battlefield a statue was unveiled in his honour in 1875, after almost forty years of planning and building. In 1846, Hoffmann paid the growing monument a visit, six years after the publication of his poem.²¹⁵ It is little wonder that he chose Arminius as the hero for a poem in which many of his prescriptions for a German identity were deposited.

The whole poem is in many respects a mirror: Arminius had come to modern Germany from the past, thus allowing contemporaries to view themselves in the light of that past,

“Es kam vom Himmel nieder der deutsche Held Armin,
Seit grauen Zeiten wieder, er kam, wir sahen ihn;
Er war noch stets derselbe, er ging ganz frank und frei,
Er wollte Deutschland sehen, ob’s noch dasselbe Deutschland sei”.²¹⁶

Germany, of course, was no longer the same, and the change had not been for the better. Upon arrival, he is immediately stopped by the police and asked for his passport: the hero, “frank und frei”, rapidly discovers that *Freiheit* in modern Germany is interpreted rather differently from his own days.²¹⁷ Rescued from the police, he is taken by “ein alter Edelmann” to his castle for a good drink, and once more Hoffmann makes this connection between wine and freedom,

“... es bracht’ ihm einen Pokal,
Das war ein echter Römer, den schenkt’ er ganz voll Wein,
Und bot ihn auf Deutschlands Freiheit dem vielliebten Gaste sein”.²¹⁸

The old nobleman is a significant figure here, one who has emerged from the pages of medieval romances. He is almost a living link with the past and a ‘living’ rebuke to the modern aristocracy. He is also a reflection of the Grail king: with his large drinking bowl he holds the key to German identity and integrity. After some niceties, there follows a startling passage on the ideal physiognomy of the Germanic man, which recalls Rodenbach’s *Kerels*,

²¹⁵ *ML*, vol. 4, p. 292. Müller, J.J, *op.cit.* p. 111; Ehrismann, O, *Das Nibelungenlied in Deutschland*, p. 98.

²¹⁶ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Armin”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 4, p. 90.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 91.

“... du hoher Held Armin! ...
Du bist noch stets derselbe, mit deinem blonden Haar,
Mit deinem liebevollen, deinem schönen blauen Augenpaar!”²¹⁹

It is an ironic joke that history played: the blond hair and blue eyes that to Tacitus' Roman audience signified barbarity had come to embody the contemporary German and Flemish ideal. This fine specimen from the past is then presented with the food and drink of the modern Germans: “Grobkörnigen und feisten, Pumpnickel” and “echte Cheruskerwurst”; from Bavaria there came “Bock”; and finally, from the Free Cities, “Cigarren aus Havanna”, since “sie hatten Deutscheres nicht”.²²⁰ All these presents come from the ordinary people. This culinary tour of Germany gives yet another insight into Hoffmann's sense of German identity. It is to be found in the everyday, in the food and drink: through it one consumes the *Vaterland*.

This is contrasted starkly with the appearance of German academics, who have no time for food or drink, who do not regard Arminius as the embodiment of the German character, except in a negative way; indeed, they are Frenchified.²²¹ They are joined by the *Germanisten*, who also fall far short of the standard set by the ordinary Germans. They fuss about trivia, and fail to recognise the true importance of this emissary from the past sitting in front of them. The question that the philologist Maßmann asks Arminius can be seen as typical,

“... wie sich selber schrieb' Armin,
Ob deutsch, ob teutsch, was richtig und welches vorzuziehn?”²²²

In the triviality of the question and the lack of imagination on the part of the scientific community one can hear Hoffmann the poet. The national will not be found in sterile debates, but in the imagination. Even the neo-gothic movement does not escape a scolding. The bandwagon of artists who try to capture an image of the hero are dismissed on grounds of their motivation: they are seeking only fame.²²³ All these confused seekers are contrasted with the *Göttinger Sieben* in a particularly

²¹⁹ Ibid, p. 92.

²²⁰ Ibid, pp. 92-3.

²²¹ Ibid, p. 93.

²²² Ibid, p. 94.

²²³ Ibid, p. 95.

sharp passage, whose principle is applauded by Arminius in his acceptance speech on receiving an honorary doctorate in law from Göttingen,

“Gut daß ich es noch erfahre — was ich gethan an Rom
Ist also Recht gewesen, ist Recht bis auf diesen Tag!
Gott gebe, daß es den *Sieben*, wie’s mir jetzt geht, ergehen mag!”²²⁴

By now Arminius has almost had enough of modern Germany. It only takes a Papal request in a Latin he cannot understand, and a *Fürst* who wishes to raise him to the nobility for him to make up his mind that he wishes to return to Walhalla.²²⁵

Hoffmann’s conclusion is as poignant as the rest of the poem is bitter,

“Das war zu viel — da starb er. Nun heißt es doch fortan:
Das Vaterland hat gerettet ein alter deutscher Edelmann”.²²⁶

And so, as in the Grail romances, the old man’s gift has proven to be illusive. The test has proven too much for most. Too many people play at patriotism, too many claim to represent the German spirit, but when put to the ultimate test, they are weighed by history and found wanting. Only the well-meaning ordinary people with the gifts of local food come out well in this poem. The recipe for a German identity is clear: be one with your *Heimat* in what you eat and drink, be united, admire and emulate the past, and, like the *Göttingen Sieben*, do not compromise with those who are destroying the German soul. Hoffmann’s ideas of a German national identity were simplicity itself: you will find Germany amongst the *Volk*. It is only when these were tested against practicalities that they ran into trouble, almost to the point of destroying his reputation.

It is Hoffmann’s most famous *Lied*, the *Lied der Deutschen*, which simultaneously sums up many of the ideas which he held about German identity, and which posthumously ensured that his name remained familiar.²²⁷ It also contributed more than anything to the regular threats to his reputation. In its capacity as the German

²²⁴ Ibid. The italics are mine.

²²⁵ Ibid, p. 96.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ The *Lied* was first distributed as a pamphlet in September 1841, and contained music by Haydn and a woodcut of Hoffmann’s portrait.

national anthem, it has gained wide fame and notoriety, but its popularity preceded its adoption as the national song. In Flanders, for example, Rodenbach and his friends sang the *Lied* in 1877.²²⁸ It was known well enough by the outbreak of the First World War to have reached Arabia. There, in Jidda, T.E. Lawrence witnessed a captured Turkish band striking up “shakingly into ‘Deutschland über Alles’”, the alternative title under which the *Lied* is better known.²²⁹ It had also found its way into just about every single German *Lieder-Album*, thereby penetrating the German consciousness.²³⁰

Its first performance was during a torch-lit parade held by the *Hamburger Turnerschaft* in honour of the Baden Liberal Karl Theodor Welcker in October 1841.²³¹ Two facts stand out: the parade has sinister connotations, and it was held for a *Liberal*. This dichotomy is the hallmark of the history of the *Lied*. It was not until 1922 that *Reichspräsident* Ebert, a socialist, made it the German national anthem.²³² Strangely, it was maintained as such during the Nazi era, when the line *Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles* gained notoriety through association. The Allies banned the song, but it was reinstated by the new government of the *Bundesrepublik*, if only after some considerable debate, and was retained after unification in 1991.²³³ Perhaps the strangest fact of all is that this celebration of German identity, and of Germany, was actually written in Britain, or on Helgoland to be precise, which did not become German until 1890.²³⁴

For all these strange and at times controversial facts, the *Lied* is a surprisingly short and relatively standard nineteenth-century national ditty.²³⁵ As is the case with Rodenbach’s *Lied der Vlaamsche Zonen*, Hoffmann’s *Lied* contains themes which

²²⁸ *Kroniek*, p. 152.

²²⁹ Lawrence, T.E, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 75.

²³⁰ See for example Fink, G.W. (ed), *Musikalischer Hausschatz der Deutschen*, p. 251, of 1860; and Andersen, L. (ed), *Deutsche Heimat*, p. 22, of around 1931.

²³¹ *Jost*, p. 88.

²³² For this and what follows see Karweik, H.-A, “Das Lied der Deutschen und dessen Dichter August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben”, *Mitteilungs-Blätter*, vol. 39, no. 64, (1992), pp. 19 and following. See also Rohse, E, “‘Das Lied der Deutschen’ in seiner politischen, literarischen und literaturwissenschaftlichen Rezeption”. In *Behr*, pp. 72 and forward.

²³³ For the post Second World War sources see Hoffmann von Fallersleben-Gesellschaft (ed), “Das Deutschlandlied – eine Dokumentation”, *Mitteilungs-Blätter*, vol. 39, no. 63, (1992), pp. 16-9.

²³⁴ It was swapped for Zanzibar. See *ML*, vol. 3, pp. 210-12.

²³⁵ For the text, see Appendix Two.

appear in his other works.²³⁶ Nowhere is this more apparent than in the third verse, which is to this day the German national anthem. “Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit”, “Brüderlich mit Herz und Hand!”: here speaks the voice of *Freiheit* that we have already encountered in abundance. Here, too, speaks the voice of the *Burschenschaft*, with its love of brotherhood. *Einigkeit* is yet another slogan from the *Burschen*, here surely meant to imply German unity, regardless of its ‘correct’ meaning. *Recht* is a highly significant concept in the understanding of the *Lied*. Here it is paired with *Freiheit*, both in its national meaning – “Für das deutsche Vaterland!” – but also, as was invariably the case with Hoffmann, in the more personalised, moral interpretation. The inclusion of *Recht* in the verse lends weight to this interpretation. In Friedrich Sengle’s words,

“Und schließlich verrät ja die ... dritte Strophe, vor allem auch durch den Begriff des Rechts, den friedlichen Geist des Dichters”.²³⁷

This is very true, as *Recht* in Hoffmann’s works mirrors *Freiheit*: it is a particularly private concept, which may also be applied to the wider community, as the word *Einigkeit* without doubt intends to convey.²³⁸ In Hoffmann’s vision of a German identity, the duties and rights of the individual *have* to underpin the nation, just as the nation as the sum of the community *has* to be the ultimate goal of the individual.²³⁹

That leads us to the first line of the poem, the one that has made it notorious. “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles”, surely that can mean only one thing? Well, not really. It is highly significant that Hoffmann chose *not* to include an enemy in the poem, another country or culture to elevate Germany above.²⁴⁰ This *is* how the Nazis interpreted the *Lied*, but then they could not have been further removed from Hoffmann, both in aspirations and intentions. The line emphasises the centrality of

²³⁶ Many have debated the themes of the *Lied*. See for example Neureuter, H.P, “Hoffmanns >>Deutscher Sang<<. Versuch einer historischen Auslegung”. In G. Häntzschel (ed), *Gedichte und Interpretationen*, vol. 4, pp. 222-34; Eyck, F, *The Voice of Nations*, pp. 163-79.

²³⁷ Sengle, F, *op.cit.* vol. 2, p. 537.

²³⁸ Moreover, Hoffmann links *Recht* and *Freiheit* in other poems. See for example Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Auswanderungslied”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 5, pp. 35-6.

²³⁹ Seeba, H.C, “‘Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit’: The German Quest for National Identity in the Nineteenth Century”. In P. Boerner (ed), *Concepts of National Identity. An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, p. 157

²⁴⁰ Sengle, F, *op.cit.* vol. 2, p. 537.

the *Vaterland*, but particularly of the community, the *Volk* in Hoffmann's vision. He makes this clear in the third and fourth lines of the first verse,

“Wenn es stets zu Schutz und Trutze
Brüderlich zusammenhält”.²⁴¹

Again one encounters this emphasis on the unity, or more precisely, the fraternity of all Germans. The idea that the first verse exhorts Germans to conquer lands is, in a word, absurd. The geographical features mentioned are just there to give a broad idea of where Germans live, and we have already noticed just how imprecise Hoffmann was with regard to geography.²⁴² There is, furthermore, some evidence that the references to rivers owe their inclusion to Hoffmann's obsession with the medieval poet, Walther von der Vogelweide.²⁴³

That Hoffmann meant the German people rather than the German state or states can be seen in the second verse. Here we encounter again the true stars of Hoffmann's vision for a German identity,

“Deutsche Frauen, deutsche Treue,
Deutscher Wein und deutscher Sang
Sollen in der Welt behalten
Ihren alten schönen Klang,
Uns zu edler That begeistern
Unser ganzes Leben lang”.²⁴⁴

The poet of ‘Wein, Weib und Gesang’: it is an apt title. Significantly, this verse reveals that it is, indeed, the German people whom Hoffmann had in mind, the ordinary people who came out unscathed in his poem *Armin*, who could stand up to the scrutiny of the German past. German women, trust, wine and song – these are the essential elements of a German identity, and Hoffmann is concerned about their well-being. The fight to keep these ingredients and, what is more, to preserve their world-

²⁴¹ Appendix Two.

²⁴² “Von der Maas bis an die Memel, Von der Etsch bis an den Belt”. Appendix Two.

²⁴³ Brunner, H, “Hoffmann von Fallersleben und Walther von der Vogelweide”. In *Behr*, pp. 236-8.

²⁴⁴ Appendix Two.

wide reputation, was at the heart of his life's endeavours, as reflected in the last two lines quoted.²⁴⁵

The whole *Lied*, indeed Hoffmann's entire oeuvre, is drenched in an "utopisch-poetischen Ausdruck".²⁴⁶ His was essentially a beautiful vision, one in which a whole population could live in a rural idyll, drinking wine and beer, eating homely food, singing songs and indulging in pranks. In a way, this was a child-like world. He expressed this as follows to Emilie Milde,

"Die Kinderwelt ist eine schöne Welt! Glücklich, wer in ihr sein ganzes Leben zu leben vermag!"²⁴⁷

It is at this juncture that his vision for a German identity ran into difficulties. In a letter to Theodor Ebeling of 12 August 1870, Hoffmann wished,

"Erfreulicher wäre mir dagegen, wenn jetzt endlich einmal mein Lied 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles' zu allgemeiner Geltung gelangte, also das würde, was es jetzt endlich sein kann, ein Lied für ganz Deutschland!"²⁴⁸

Unfortunately for Hoffmann, his prayer was fulfilled, albeit at a later stage. Reality then bit hard, for, as Kurzke noted, Hoffmann's texts, including that of the *Lied*, are open to interpretation.²⁴⁹ Luckily, Hoffmann was, by then, resting in his grave at Corvey, blissfully unaware that his vision of a happy German nation had been turned into a nightmare.

²⁴⁵ It is interesting to note that he showed significant interest in the Germans in North America. See for example, Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, *Texanische Lieder*. At one point he even considered emigrating to the USA.

²⁴⁶ Rohse, E, *op.cit.* p. 54.

²⁴⁷ Gerstenberg, H, *An meine Freunde*, pp. 115-6.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 321-2.

²⁴⁹ Kurzke, H, *Hymnen und Lieder der Deutschen*, p. 50.

“Van Ulenspieghels leven”?²⁵⁰

Without a doubt Hoffmann von Fallersleben’s life and contribution to the development of national identities are amongst the most complex and ambiguous to be found anywhere in nineteenth-century Europe. A passionate believer in German unity, he was deeply disappointed by the unity of post-1871 Germany. A strong fighter for cultural and political freedom, he managed somehow to allay his conscience and work for some of the leading establishment figures in Germany. To cap this all, he could not even confine himself to one national identity. Hoffmann was a serious researcher, who could never take himself very seriously. Laughter was his most characteristic trait. Almost in a Flemish tradition, however, there lurked something more serious underneath that laughter: his was a smile with a bite.²⁵¹ Hoffmann clearly had discovered an age-old role, that of the jester: seemingly nonsensical, in reality deeply disturbing and questioning. It is little wonder that of the five men who have appeared on these pages, he was the one who suffered most from persecution *and* who was the most popular with a wider audience. This latter fact was no doubt helped by his self-deprecating style, such as in the following story from *Mein Leben*,

“Daß mein Singen den Menschen nicht immer und überall angenehm war, wußte ich längst; daß es aber auch den Thieren mißfallen könnte, war mir neu. Unterweges bei dem schauerlichen Herbstwetter, das einen leicht verstimmen konnte, fing ich an zu singen. Da hielt der Postillon still, kam an den Kutschenschlag und bat mich um Gotteswillen nicht zu singen; sein Handpferd könne es durchaus nicht vertragen, es würde flüchtig”.²⁵²

Hidden amongst the welter of information in his autobiography one of the main inspirations behind his character can be found. On 29 September 1841 Hoffmann paid a visit to the grave of another famous jester, that of Dyl Eulenspiegel in Möllen

²⁵⁰ The quote comes from the first Middle Dutch edition of the *Uilenspiegel* story, with which Hoffmann was also familiar. Geeraedts, L. (ed), *Het volksboek van Ulenspieghel*, p. 42.

²⁵¹ There is a strong tradition, both in medieval and modern Flemish literature, of a comical hero opposing almost overwhelmingly strong social pressures. Arguably the two most famous exponents of this are the medieval *Van den vos Reynaerde*, and the early twentieth-century novel by Felix Timmermans, *Pallieter*.

²⁵² *ML*, vol. 3, pp. 323-4.

near Lübeck.²⁵³ The night before he had been unable to sleep, or so he claimed, owing to the smell from the cesspit.²⁵⁴ The visit did much to lift his spirits,

“Nach der traurigen Nacht wird mein Humor erst wieder lebendig durch den Gedanken an Eulenspiegel”.²⁵⁵

Quite. One can follow Hoffmann snooping around the stone and graveyard in almost antiquarian fashion, deciphering its inscription, which ran as follows,

“Anno 1350 is dat steen vpgehaven
vnde vlenspiegel leit dar vnder begraben.
Marcket wol vnde *dencket dran ...*”.²⁵⁶

Hoffmann surely did. Here was a medieval prototype, a hero, but an anarchic one. A person who was never afraid to stand up to authority, whose life was one satire on the existing world, who never conformed. A hero, moreover, who was popular in Germany as well as in Flanders, where *Uilenspiegel* was closely associated with Damme, and in many respects, formed the human counterpart to *Reinaert de Vos*. It does not stretch the evidence too far to argue that Hoffmann played an *Eulenspiegel/Uilenspiegel*-type role. One only has to recall the prank with the megaphone and then turn to the medieval text to read,

“Van Ulenspieghels leven ... ende wonderlijcke avontueren die hi hadde want hi en liet hem gheen boeverie verdrieten”.²⁵⁷

What were these adventures? Mainly pranks, such as his claim that he was going to fly from the town hall of Magdeburg. He flapped his arms and shouted to the assembled crowds,

“Ic meende datter gheen sotten meer en waren dan ic, maer hier isser een stadt vol”.²⁵⁸

²⁵³ Ibid, pp. 219-20.

²⁵⁴ This is reminiscent of the scatological humour to be found in *Uilenspiegel*.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 219.

²⁵⁶ Ibid. The italics are mine.

²⁵⁷ Geeraedts, L. (ed), *op.cit.* p. 93.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 109.

The people left, some laughing, some angry, with the remark,

“tis een scalck sot want hi seyt die *waerheyt*”.²⁵⁹

This last line reveals *Eulenspiegel's raison d'être*, and that of August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben. His was a life dedicated to the *waerheyt* as he saw it, the truth about contemporary Germany and Flanders, but also the truth from the past and for the future; the truth of how Germans and Flemings could become ‘true’ to their national identities. It was an uncomfortable message that he bore, and he was aware that proclaiming it would bring him much discomfort and hostility. In a poem from the second volume of his *Unpolitische Lieder* he effectively prophesied his future, at least until he found some rest at Corvey,

“Der Dichter ist ein Seher,
Er sieht gar gut und weit;
Wer sieht so gut und eher
Das große Spiel der Zeit?

Doch will man nur den Seher
Der nach dem Munde spricht;
Zum andern sagt man: geh’ er!
Zu uns hier paßt er nicht”.²⁶⁰

It was only towards the end of his life that the authorities began to realise that Hoffmann had indeed understood “Das große Spiel der Zeit”: the search for national identities.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. The italics are mine.

²⁶⁰ Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, “Der Dichter ein Seher”. In *Gerstenberg*, vol. 4, p. 159.

Conclusion.

The development of national identities in Germany and Flanders was, as this thesis has shown, a process marked by great complexities of which the permutations are far too great to be captured by four case studies alone. Nevertheless, the previous chapters have shed considerable light on one essential aspect of the process through which the 'nation' was codified, namely, the contribution of writers. Such was their impact, that it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that they actually 'wrote' the nation. This 'writing' should be seen in as broad a sense as possible. All five men examined in this thesis were primarily writers, but their contributions to the shaping of a national identity in Germany and Flanders went far beyond this. Jan Frans Willems literally 'thought' the Flemish nation into being. The brothers Grimm codified what they believed to be the essence of a German identity. Rodenbach and Hoffmann von Fallersleben went further again: they not only 'wrote' the nation, they 'lived' it.

This thesis has not just been concerned with the lives of five men. To move beyond the prosaic, these lives had to tell the story of the shaping of the national identities of two European nations. Of particular interest, are the similarities and differences between the process amongst the Germans and Flemings, as they have emerged from amongst the life stories of the five writers. It is here that the wider story of the development of national identities in nineteenth-century Europe may be found. The contrasting outcome from this development, as postulated by many theoretical models of nationalism, is one of the nation-state versus the region. It is, however, the process of shaping national identities which has been central here, and there the differences are less glaringly obvious than in the outcome. Whereas Germany and Flanders ostensibly seem to have arrived at different points of political emancipation, this thesis, and the lives of the five men, indicate that they travelled a largely similar road to get there.

The process of shaping a national identity in Germany and Flanders had many remarkable meeting points, but few are as striking as the fact that they both commenced at almost the same time. That this was the case could hardly have been

predicted. In Germany, there had been a tradition of writing about the national for a century or more before a concerted effort at defining took place. In Flanders, by contrast, few had ever given any thought to the national. Here, allegiances were to locality, which was also true of Germany, but there was no over-arching sense of loyalty amongst the 'Flemings'. The Germans had the *Reich*, the 'Flemings' nothing. In short, whereas Germans could already think of themselves as 'German', Dutch-speakers in the southern Low Countries did not even have a collective name for themselves.

The trigger for the concerted effort of shaping a national identity amongst both peoples was outside aggression. The all-pervasiveness of French culture had already given rise to serious debates about the intrinsic value of German culture, and, hesitatingly, of Dutch culture in the southern Low Countries. From the 1790's, French military occupation inserted a completely new vigour into this process. Young men like Willems and the Grimms, who were born during the final days of the *Ancien Regime*, reacted with anxiety and with great determination to this perceived threat to their culture. That this threat was very real – if inefficient – clearly emerges from the previous chapters: national identities and nationalism were born in a climate of fear and, at times, of very real persecution. The dismissal of Willems' father from government employment is but one example of this.

Paradoxically, the collapse of the political structures of the *Ancien Regime*, and the promotion of French at the expense of local languages, elevated them to become the quintessential symbol of resistance, the rallying call of the nation. For the first time language became the common denominator of a group identity, as opposed to the ruler, the guild, town or religion. Amongst the Germans, this initially posed very few problems. Here the brothers Grimm and Hoffmann von Fallersleben formed part of a veritable movement, one which wished to unite all Germans – defined as those who spoke German – in a single country. The rapid thwarting of this dream at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 did not alter this essential sense of unity, but it did cause a deep rupture amongst those who dreamt of German political unification.

In the southern Low Countries, the situation was much more complex. Here, as chapter one showed, the collapse of the *Ancien Regime* also caused intellectuals to attempt to define the organic unity of all people speaking Dutch. Strangely, they

thereby adopted the model of their conquerors: the nation-state was transported to the subject peoples on the back of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic armies. In contrast to Germany, this was a new departure in the Low Countries, but, as was the case in Germany, it was an idea that rapidly encountered the harsh requirements of *Realpolitik*. Consequently, political unity based on language never materialised, neither in Germany, nor in the Low Countries. In Germany it failed because political necessity intervened at the Congress of Vienna, during the revolutions of 1848, and, finally, in the *Kleindeutsche Lösung* of 1871. In the Low Countries it stranded on the deeply ingrained incompatibilities between north and south, which, by 1830, had reached breaking point.

From these chapters evidence emerges that whereas language was an important first touchstone of identity for both Germans and Flemings, it soon accommodated political necessity. In this, the writers under consideration, more particularly Willems and the Grimms, played a central role. They managed to bestow academic respectability upon the compromises that followed each challenge to what they believed to be the organic unity of their people. They also helped to shape two national identities that were no longer solely dependent on language.

The writers in this thesis were also motivated by another impulse in their drive to define and shape the national identities of Germany and Flanders. All five shared a fear that the culture of their people was being eroded to the point of disappearance by the demise of the old social order. Willems was, perhaps, least pronounced in this, but we saw Jacob Grimm appealing to Dutch collectors to note down old stories before they disappeared, and we witnessed the two brothers compiling what they believed were threatened oral histories in the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Hoffmann also saw himself as an archaeologist of the German literary past, and Rodenbach went even further when he described the *Blauwvoeterie* as a reincarnation of the *Kerels*. As such, these men formed part of a movement, inspired by the writings of Chateaubriand, who wished to construct a more perfect model of the past in the present. This hankering after the past, this need to preserve and rescue, even to emulate and improve upon the past, characterised not just the German and Flemish shaping of a national identity, but that of most European nations.

The threat that those giving form to national identities believed to exist, stemmed from the merciless march of 'modernity' in the form of factories, urbanisation and transportation. They believed the 'essential' characteristics of their people to be vulnerable to modernity, and set out to safeguard or rescue them. Instead, they actually assembled, or helped to assemble, a canon of what it meant to be German or Flemish. This taking from the past to create the present, like the intense interest in language and the fear of the impact of change, were all phenomena shared by intellectuals in Germany and Flanders, and beyond. Chateaubriand had formulated the wish to salvage and restore the glorious achievements of a vanishing past, and to impart these to the present with a view of shaping this present in accordance with a particular worldview. The five writers of this thesis, all familiar with Chateaubriand's writings, knew what that worldview entailed: the 'restoration' of the nation. Of course, they were not restoring anything. Like nineteenth-century architects 'restoring' gothic buildings, they re-interpreted the past through contemporary glasses. What they achieved was not a revived past, but something new: a *Neo-gothic* version of the medieval ideal.

There were not just major similarities in the way in which the process of shaping a national identity occurred amongst the Germans and Flemings. The elements which combined to form this process also resembled each other in both nations. In the nineteenth century, the national was being defined through several major areas. With lesser or greater intensity, Willems, the Grimms, Rodenbach and Hoffmann tried to imagine a national landscape and a national character, for which they turned to the heroes of the past. They also selected a national past and pantheon of national 'greats'. This pinning down of the 'what' of a German or Flemish identity was accompanied by a more philosophical element: the attempted definition of the national virtues and the description of the relationship between the individual and the communal. These latter two elements were of greater concern to Hoffmann and Rodenbach than the other three, and may be seen as a next step, after the philologists had laid the foundations of a national identity. The similarity of the themes in Germany and Flanders, and indeed in Europe as a whole, must once more be emphasised: the preceding chapters offer evidence of just how international the development of nationalism actually was.

This international element was pulled up short by the inevitable accompaniment of a national identity: national borders. Here the seeds of conflict lay. Curiously, the five men in question did not allow their concern for borders to dominate other interests; at various stages in their lives, however, all five were much agitated by the issue. This had one unpleasant side effect: the tolerance that they normally displayed towards other cultures vanished like snow before the sun when the question of borders arose. None of the five, however towering their intellect, managed to square this particular circle, with devastating consequences for the future.

This intrusion of the political reality onto the cultural dreams of the five points to the intensity that marked the relationship between culture and politics during the period under examination. There is always an interaction between the two, separating them is arguably even unjustified. The political *process* and culture are, however, separate entities, and these *do* relate to one-another in varying degrees of intensity. In regimes that wish to control a people's way of thinking in particular, culture is of the greatest concern. One may think of communist Eastern Europe between 1945 and 1989; of Reformation Europe, indeed of any period in which there is a debate about the identity of a country. Such situations normally cause conflicts between those in control of the political decision-making process and intellectuals who formulate this identity. This was certainly the case in the nineteenth century, and the lives of the five tell their own stories in this respect. Yet again one cannot fail to be struck by the similarities between Germany and Flanders: exile, persecution, censorship and political involvement characterised the lives of Willems and Rodenbach, just as they marked the lives of the Grimms and Hoffmann. In return, the works of these men helped politicians and populations alike to conclude what their identity and that of the countries they were building should look like.

Although the intellectual had a much more elevated status in Germany than in the Low Countries, they managed to alter the identity of their people to an equal extent, if not with equal speed. Scholars took central stage in the process of shaping a national identity, in Flanders as in Germany. The debates were driven by scholars, were by their very nature intellectual exercises. The conduit between these scholars and the wider public at whom their messages of national identities were ultimately aimed, was the associated fellowship of novelists, poets, playwrights and other

artists. They moulded the academic discourse on the national into a more palatable and less qualified version. Typical of the ambiguous character of the process under examination, it is often difficult to distinguish between academic and populariser, frequently impossible to indicate who initiated what. Sir Walter Scott serves to illustrate this point perfectly, as does Hoffmann. Scott could be called the most influential historian ever, whilst Hoffmann's songs managed to inform many of his enormous cultural knowledge in a register accessible to most. Even the Grimms and Willems indulged in more populist publications, such as the *Kleine Ausgabe* of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* or the school edition of the *Reinaert*.

In this thesis, we have seen our five representative writers interact at frequent intervals with others who played an important role in the definition of national identities. This is a reminder that writers did not have a monopoly on shaping the national, and here again the German situation was the same as the Flemish. Again, ambiguity rears its head, for who can say who inspired whom? Rodenbach was definitely inspired by the murals depicting the Battle of the Golden Spurs which he saw in Kortrijk, but who inspired the painter? Had he read Conscience's *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen*? Probably, but then Conscience drew much of his inspiration from the neo-Gothic craze sweeping contemporary architecture.

It would be disingenuous, to say the least, to argue that the whole process of defining the national was the prerogative of scholars and writers. The writers were *not* working and thinking in isolation, as Willems' co-operation with Van Bree shows. The foundation of *national* museums, the erection of *national* monuments and statues, the creation of *national* graveyards even, are all illustrative of the increasing nationalisation of European societies. Rodenbach, for one, wished to have a national theatre, Willems, a national institute of further education. All this found its culmination in the erection of a statue to Hoffmann in Hamburg, where the statement he made in writing and through his life was repeated in stone. If it is not argued here that writers were alone in constructing a national identity, it is suggested that their role was pivotal. In an age that communicated primarily through the word, they literally 'wrote' the nation, in Germany as well as in Flanders.

The differences in the actual process of shaping the national identity in Germany and in Flanders were marginal. These were normally caused by unsynchronised

political developments, such as the revolutions of 1830 and 1848, which both revolved around the same issues, both emanated from Paris, but which, in turn, passed either Germany or Belgium by. The main distinction between the two was the fact that 'Germany' pre-existed the quest for a national identity, whereas 'Flanders' did not. Germans could conceive of political independence: the *Reich* was their example. Flanders, on the other hand, had not existed as a political entity before. As a result, the Germans could and did aspire to a nation-state, whereas the Flemish could and did not, at least not during the period under consideration. However, these differences only affected the outcome and the timing of the process: they did not affect the process itself.

The Germans had a nation-state; the Flemings did not. There the differences cease. Both were now equipped with fully-fledged national identities, which were destined to last until the end of the First World War. Indeed, many elements within these identities have stood the test of time, and survive until today. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the third verse of Hoffmann's *Lied der Deutschen*, with its emphasis on freedom, unity and justice, themes that few Germans would quarrel with even now. In Flanders, the legacy is even stronger: the disparate group of Dutch-speakers that lived in the southern Low Countries have been transformed to the point that they now cannot but think of themselves as Flemish.

It has been stated several times that the development of national identities was a Europe-wide phenomenon. From the Baltic to the Mediterranean and from Iceland to the Balkans, intellectuals were engaged in thinking, painting, acting and writing the nation. During this process, there was an enormous amount of cross-fertilisation. The Grimms worked with Nordic and Balkan scholars, learned from Scottish ones. Rodenbach was inspired by Lord Byron and Goethe, as was Hoffmann. Willems learned from Dutch colleagues, and all were indebted to Chateaubriand. Rarely, though, was there such an exchange of ideas as between Germany and Flanders. This was primarily a one-way traffic. The greater depth of the foundations on which the Germans could build ensured that the Flemings always looked up to the achievements of their larger neighbours.

The two Flemish writers of this case study illustrate this point. Willems craved the approval of German professors such as Franz-Jozef Mone, and was delighted when

Jacob Grimm expressed his approval for his research on the *Reinaert*. This desire to form a part of, and to be approved by the German *Germanisten* establishment, typified Willems' generation in Flanders. In addition, they borrowed heavily from the methodologies developed across the border, and pointed internal critics towards Germany when these questioned the validity of their approach. Rodenbach's life and works show this process at its full maturity. The young activist consciously copied his German role models, Goethe and Wagner, and aspired to the latter's achievements in incorporating the totality of the national message in one complete artwork. At various points Rodenbach gazed across the border to find hope, for by then the Germans had achieved cultural security.

Flanders also influenced the development of a national identity in Germany, but in a much less significant way. Here it was mainly a question of a perceived shared cultural ancestry, and an admiration for the cultural achievements from Flanders' past. Hoffmann, for one, was enormously inspired by the cultural legacy which he discovered in the Low Countries, indeed contributed to a contemporary understanding thereof. As with the brothers Grimm, he could never quite bring himself to see Flanders as 'foreign', in the way he could with the Netherlands. Perhaps the fact that Flanders had formed part of the old *Reich* until the 1790's played some role in this, and it was definitely enforced by a shared antipathy towards the French. Whatever the cause, the German view of Flanders as it emerges from chapters two and four is almost one of a small cousin, certainly one of sympathy.

This sympathy and shared cultural ancestry in turn contributed to the ambiguity that has so often been encountered in the process under consideration. Wagner illustrates this well, for several of his works were inspired by Low Countries themes. His *Fliegende Holländer* springs to mind, but more appropriate in this context is his use of the *Lohengrin* theme, with its medieval provenance. Part of his cycle on pan-Germanic heroes, it brought a Low Countries' figure into the German pantheon. Rodenbach, in turn, transported this figure back to Flanders, a process that entitles one to question the validity of the notion of origins of inspiration. The same is true of the role played by Goethe: he was after all seen as an example across Europe, and drew his inspiration from all corners of the continent. Nevertheless, as far as *direct* inspiration is concerned, this thesis shows the intensity of the interaction between

leading figures in the German and Flemish push to shape their respective national identities.

Comparing the process through which the national identities of Germany and Flanders were given shape allows us to draw one final conclusion: there was nothing inevitable about the 'march' of nationalism. Time and again, one witnesses the accidental nature of the process: Jan Frans Willems having to rethink his idea of a southern Dutch-speaking identity after the great powers created Belgium; Hoffmann having to adjust to the failure of his dream after 1871; Rodenbach struggling to contain the competing demands of Liberal and Catholic ideologies. The brothers Grimm form somewhat of an exception to this. Through their oeuvre, they set out to define, what they called in their own words, 'Das Wesen der Deutschen', and never deviated from this. Political developments were a mere sideshow. Nevertheless, they too had to acknowledge the political world in which they were living, had to cope with the capriciousness of history; this was never more the case than when the Frankfurt parliament sank beneath the weight of its own contradictions.

At many points during the nineteenth century, German and Flemish identity could have taken any number of directions: history's infamous 'ifs'. Yet at the time these 'ifs', these options, were real and occasionally they took the process into directions no one could have foreseen. The final shape of German and Flemish national identities – if such things actually exist outside the mind of intellectuals – was determined not only by coincidences and human failures, but also by incredible human endeavour. Jan Frans Willems, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Albrecht Rodenbach and August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben are names behind which such phenomenal human endeavours are hidden, writers without whom the imagined communities of Germany and Flanders would have looked considerably different, and without whom the diversity of Europe would have been much impoverished.

Appendix One.

Albrecht Rodenbach: *Het Lied der Vlaamsche Zonen gezeid "De Blauwvoet"*
(1875-1877).¹

Dits de geschiedenis
van den
Westvlaamschen studentenkampe
ofte vulgo
"Blauwvoeterie"
in drie avontueren

op musiik van Johan de Stoop.

Opdracht van den "Blauwvoet".
Aan Amaat Vyncke.

U, die ons Raad- en Leidsman waart,
toen dwang met zeemend verraad gepaard
dit lied, uit hijgende borsten, wrong;
u, die het zoo dikwijls voorenzongt,
bij 't klinken der schuimende minneschaal
bij Klauwaarts vergâringe en Gildemaal;
u, die waneer het klaroen opgaat,
de wind ons vane in plooiën slaat,
vol vroomheid, tot spijt van die 't benijdt,
aan 't hoofd der tiegende bende zijt;
op zijn germaansch: met raad ende daad
bestierende wijl gij uw slagen slaat,
den vervelenden "Krijgsdans" nimmer moe, -
u komt dit lied zijne opdracht toe.

Version I

Het Lied der Vlaamsche Zonen.

1) Nu het lied der vlaamsche zonen,
nu een dreunend Kerelslied,
dat in wilde noordertonen
uit het diepste ons herten schiet.

¹ All three versions are taken from *Rodenbach Gedichten*, pp. 32-9.

Repeat.

2) Ei, het lied der Vlaamsche zonen
met zijn wilde noordertonen,
met het oude vlaamsch Hoezee:
Vliegt de Blauwvoet – storm op zee!

3) Priester, gij waardeert ons herten
minnend 't oude Kerelsland;
priester, gij waardeert ons smarten
over 't oude Vlaanderland.

Refrain.

Daarom nu een lied gezongen,
vlaamsche herten, vlaamsche tongen,
met het oude vlaamsch Hoezee:
Vliegt de Blauwvoet – storm op zee!

4) Gij waardeert den zucht der zonen
van het vrije Kerelsvolk,
toen ze elkander Vlaanderen toonen
in der oude tijden wolk.

Refrain.

5) Gij waardeert ons woelig blaken,
onzer herten somberen spijt,
gij waardeert ons brandend haken
naar het deelen in den Strijd.

Refrain.

6) Gij waardeert ons. 't Is gebleken
als gij voor den Dichter stondt
en ons tale wildet spreken
en zulke edele woorden vondt.

Refrain.

7) Priester, wil den dank ontvangen
van het dankbaar vlaamsche kind
in zijn wilde woeste zangen,
omdat gij zijn vlaamsch-zijn mint.

Repeat.

8) Dat is 't lied der vlaamsche zonen,
't dankbaar lied der vlaamsche zonen,
met het oude vlaamsch Hoezee:
Vliegt de Blauwvoet – storm op zee!

Version II

Het Lied der Vlaamsche Zonen gezeid *De Blauwvoet*.

1) Nu het lied der vlaamsche zonen,
nu een dreunend Kerelslied,
dat in wilde noordertonen
uit het diepste ons herten schiet.

Refrain.

Ei, het lied der vlaamsche zonen,
met zijn wilde noordertonen,
met het oude vlaamsch Hoezee:
Vliegt de Blauwvoet – storm op zee!

2) 't Wierd gezeid dat Vlaanderen groot was,
groot scheen in der tijden wolk,
maar dat Vlaanderland nu dood was
en het vrije Kerelsvolk.

3) Maar dan klonk een stemme krachtig
over 't oude noordzeestrand,
en het stormde grootsch en machtig
in dat doode Vlaanderland.

4) En hier staan wij 't hoofd omhoog,
vuisten sidderend, kokend bloed,
vlamme in 't herte, vlamme in de ooge,
en ons naam ons trillen doet.

5) Van de blonde noordsche stranden,
dwang en buigen ongewend,
onze vaders herwaarts landden,
leden, streden ongetemd.

6) Ja wij zijn der Vlamen zonen,
sterk van lijve, sterk van ziel,
en wij zoûn nog kunnen toonen
hoe de klauw des Klauwaards viel.

7) Op ons vane vliegt de Blauwvoet
die voerspelt het zeegedruisch,
en de Leeuw er met zijn klauw hoedt
't zegepralend Christi Kruis.

8) Weg de bastaards, weg de lauwaards!
Ons behoort het noorderstrand,
ons, den Kerels, ons, den Klauwaards.
Leve God en Vlaanderland!

Version III

Het Lied der Blauwvoeterie.

herdicht om te akkoord te staan met het huidig slaan sommiger pianos.

1) Hoort een lied van vlaamsche zonen,
hoort het westvlaamsch Kerelslied,
de oude vrije noordertonen
uit den mond van 't jeugdig diet.

Refrain.

Ei, wi siin dier Kerelen sonen,
zingen 't in die oude tonen,
roepen naer elkaer: "Hou'see!
Vliegt die Blauwvoet – storm op see!"

2) Vlaanderen ja was aan 't *Bewegen*,
edoch dat *Bewegen* liep
wijd uiteen al duizend wegen,
en Westvlaanderen sliep – zeer diep.

3) Al met eens weêrklonken stemmen,
't waaide een Vlagge², 't leefde alhier,
en die poogden ons te temmen
stortten olie op het vier.

4) En hier staan wij 't hoofd omhoog,
vuisten sidderend, kokend bloed,
vlamme in 't herte, vlamme in de ooge,
en ons name ons trillen doet.

5) Wikings naamden eerst onze Ouderen,
Kerels, Klauwaards naderhand:
nooit en knelde een jok hun schouderen,
dwingers plette hun kolf in 't zand.

² Rodenbach makes an allusion to the periodical *De Vlaamsche Vlagge* here.

6) Kerelskamp en Gilde baarde
Nering, Burg, Gemeenebest,
't schoonste en grootste volk der aarde,
wijd geëerd in Oost en West.

7) Zulker vaderen zijn wij zonen,
sterk van lijve, sterk van ziel,
g'reed, als 't nood deed, eens te toonen
hoe gepast hun knotse viel.

8) Spijts al die ons temmen wilden,
ei, Studenten, rond de vaan !
In 't gelid, verboden Gilden,
en de Skalden voorenaan !

9) Hoog in wind de Klauwaardsvane,
't alverwinnend Kruis in top,
en, spijts gaais en franschen Hane,
met een blauwen Blauwvoet op.

10) Steekt den hoorn en zwaait den vanen !
Allen hier die Vlaanderen mint !
Laat pedanten staan vermanen !
Slaat den Bardit in den wind !

11) Horkt ! het lied uit Vlaanderens gouwen
antwoordt op het Kerelslied:
ziet alom de vane ontvouwen,
scharen in 't vlaamsch Studentendiet.

12) 't Kerelslied wekt Vlaanderens krachten:
't heir groeit aan, zijn hoop, zijn deugd !
Ziet, zij grijnzen reeds die lachten:
Vlaanderens Toekomst hoort der jeugd !

13) Volk met averechtsche plichten,
zonder u zal 't ook wel gaan.
Zucht nu wat, doch wilt u zwichten
nog in onze weg te staan.

14) Gijnder daar die 't volk woudt paaien
met uw helden – landverraârs,
g'hebt bij God ! gedaan met zaaien,
uitgekochte leugenaars !

15) Gij die ons hebt uitgezogen,
fransch gebroed alhier gemest,
g'hebt genoeg op ons gespogen !
Ziet: ons zweep ! – en ginds, uw nest !

16) Blonde Skalden, dicht ons koren,
zingt ze vooren weer in hand,
Vlaanderen stijgt, herkwikt, herboren,
uit het oud Kerlingaland !

Appendix Two.

August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben: *Das Lied der Deutschen* (1841).¹

1) Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles,
Ueber Alles in der Welt,
Wenn es stets zu Schutz und Trutze
Brüderlich zusammenhält,
Von der Maas bis an die Memel,
Von der Etsch bis an den Belt —
Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles,
Ueber Alles in der Welt!

2) Deutsche Frauen, deutsche Treue,
Deutscher Wein und deutscher Sang
Sollen in der Welt behalten
Ihren alten schönen Klang,
Uns zu edler That begeistern
Unser ganzes Leben lang —
Deutsche Frauen, deutsche Treue,
Deutscher Wein und deutscher Sang!

3) Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit
Für das deutsche Vaterland!
Danach laßt uns alle streben
Brüderlich mit Herz und Hand!
Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit
Sind des Glückes Unterpfand —
Blüh' im Glanze dieses Glückes,
Blühe deutsches Vaterland!

¹ The text is taken from Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H. *Deutsche Lieder aus der Schweiz*, pp. 16-7. Fourth Edition, Verlagsbureau, Leipzig, 1848.

List of Abbreviations.

- AAvN&V* *Antwerpschen Almanach van Nut en Vermaek.*
- AGN* Blok, D.P. et al, *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 15 vols, Haarlem, 1977-1983.
- Antonsen* Antonsen, E. H. et al, *The Grimm Brothers and the Germanic Past*. Amsterdam-Philadelphia, 1990.
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- Behr* Behr, H.-J. et al, *August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben 1798-1998. Festschrift zum 200. Geburtstag*. Bielefeld, 1999.
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- BGG* Denecke, L. (ed), *Brüder Grimm Gedenken*, 7 vols. Marburg, 1963-1987.
- Borchert* Borchert, J, *Hoffmann von Fallersleben. Ein deutsches Dichterschicksal*. Berlin, 1991.
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- Deprez 1993* Deprez, A, *Jan Frans Willems*. Brussel, 1993.
- DS (1816/1818)* Grimm, J. and Grimm, W, *Deutsche Sagen. Herausgegeben von den Brüdern Grimm*, 2 vols. Berlin, in der Nicolaischen Buchhandlung, 1816-1818.
- DuG* Ippel, E. (ed), *Briefwechsel zwischen Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, Dahlmann und Gervinus*, 2 vols. Berlin, 1885-1886.
- EVB* Deleu, J. et al, *Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*, 2 vols. Tielt, 1973-1975.
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- GW* Lauer, B. (ed), *Die Brüder Grimm und die Geisteswissenschaften heute. Ein wissenschaftliches Symposium der Brüder Grimm-Gesellschaft e.V. in der Paulinerkirche zu Göttingen am 21. und 22. November 1997*. Kassel, 1999.
- H-E* Gottzmann, C.L. (ed), *Briefwechsel der Brüder Grimm mit Hans Georg von Hammerstein-Equord*. Marburg, 1985.
- HKZMTLG* *Handelingen der Koninklijke Zuidnederlandse Maatschappij voor Taal- en Letterkunde en Geschiedenis*.

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- JGS* Grimm, J, "Selbstbiographie". In W. Schoof (ed), *Jacob Grimm - Reden und Aufsätze*, pp. 5-23. München, 1966.
- Jost* Heinrich-Jost, I, *August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben*. Berlin, 1982.
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- KHM (1819)* Grimm, J. and Grimm, W, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen. Nach der zweiten vermehrten und verbesserten Auflage von 1819*, 2 vols; facsimile reprint by H. Rölleke, Köln: 1982.
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- Kroniek* Bruyne, M. de and Gevers, L. (eds), *Kroniek van Albrecht Rodenbach (1856-1880)*. Brugge, 1980.
- KVATL* *Koninklijke Vlaamsche Academie voor Tael- en Letterkunde.*
- Lachmann* Leitzmann, A. (ed), *Briefwechsel der Brüder Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm mit Karl Lachmann*, 2 vols. Jena, 1927.
- Lissens Brieven* Lissens, R.F, *Brieven van Albrecht Rodenbach*. Antwerpen, 1942.
- Loverkens* Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, *Loverkens*; facsimile reprint by R.F. Lissens, Hasselt: 1964.
- Meusebach* Wendeler, C. (ed), *Briefwechsel des Freiherrn Karl Hartwig Gregor von Meusebach mit Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*. Heilbronn, 1880.
- ML* Hoffmann von Fallersleben, A.H, *Mein Leben. Aufzeichnungen und Erinnerungen von Hoffmann von Fallersleben*, 6 vols. Carl Rümpler, Hannover, 1868.
- NBW* Koninklijke Academiën van België (ed), *Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek*, 15 vols. Brussel, 1964 --
- NDB* Historische Kommission der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (ed), *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, 20 vols. Berlin, 1953 --
- NEVB* Schryver, R. de et al, *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*, 1998 ed. 3 vols.
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- Rooses Brieven* Rooses, M, *Brieven van Jan Frans Willems aan Jer. De Vries, K. A. Vervier, E.J. Potgieter, F.H. Mertens, J.B. David, enz.* Gent, 1874.

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- TNTL* *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*.
- Tydeman* Reifferscheid, A. (ed), *Briefe von Jakob Grimm an Hendrik Willem Tydeman*. Heilbronn, 1883.
- Unbekannte* Schoof, W. (ed), *Unbekannte Briefe der Brüder Grimm*. Bonn, 1960.
- Vanlandschoot* Vanlandschoot, R, *Albrecht Rodenbach. Biografie*. Tielt, 2002.
- VM KANTL* *Verlagen en Mededelingen Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, Gent.
- VM KVATL* *Verlagen en Mededelingen Koninklijke Vlaamsche Academie voor Tael- en Letterkunde*.
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- ZfDP* *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*.
- ZLL* *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*.

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Webology.

Unfortunately many internet sources are by their very nature rather instable. Only those which have been available for some considerable time have been added here.

www.davidsfonds.be

The central website of Flanders' leading Catholic cultural organisation, named after Willems' friend, Jan Baptist David.

www.deutsche-maerchenstrasse.de.

This is a site from the Kassel tourist information using the figures and characters of the Grimms' fairytales to promote the region.

www.geocities.com/belgianarmypre1914/zoeaaf.html

A page on the official website of the Belgian army, with the only available detailed information on the Zouaves.

www.grimms.de

The website of the Brüder-Grimm Museum and Brüder Grimm-Gesellschaft, and a useful portal to all things Grimm on the internet.

www.hoffmann-von-fallerleben-gesellschaft.de

The website of the Hoffmann von Fallersleben-Gesellschaft, dedicated to upholding his name and perpetuating his memory.

www.jongknapen-knapen.ksabuggenhour.be/geschiedenis-KSA.pdf

A website dedicated to the history of the student movement in Flanders.

www.kadoc.kuleuven.ac.be/nl/actieviteiten/25jaar/25jaar_directeur.htm

Kadoc is the website of the Univesity of Leuven, dedicated to opening its archives to online investigations. This page concerns one of the leading Ultramontane families in Belgium, the De Hemptinne.

www.museum.antwerpen.be/amvc_letterenhuis

The website of the most important archive and museum of Flemish culture, literature, and of the Flemish movement.

www.willemsfonds.be

This is the web portal of the main liberal cultural organisation in Flanders, named after Jan Frans Willems.