



## **Die a Hero in Langemarck. Flanders in the Nazi Poetry of Heinrich Anacker**

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**Abstract:** This contribution focuses on the representation of Flanders in the propaganda poetry of the Nazi writer Heinrich Anacker (1901–1971) and its role in mythologising heroes in National Socialism. The analysis of a selection of poems from Anacker's anthology *Die Fanfare. Gedichte der deutschen Erhebung* reveals Flanders as an important topos in his poetry. The symbolic value of this topos will be explained from a literary theoretical point of view: the idea of Flanders/Langemarck as a German memory space in a World War I past will be linked to the debate on whether National Socialism should be considered a political religion. Within this debate, Klaus Vondung identified the notion of 'blood' as one of the six 'articles of faith' of the Nazi creed, which appears in Anacker's poetry in connection with the Flanders topos. This combination of *blood* and the Flanders topos serves to depict the death of the fallen soldiers as a so-called Nazi martyrdom.

**Keywords:** Heinrich Anacker, propaganda poetry / propagandapoëzie, National Socialist literature / nationaal-socialistische literatuur, Flanders / Vlaanderen, topos

This contribution focuses on the representation of Flanders in the propaganda poetry of the Nazi writer Heinrich Anacker (1901–1971) and its role in mythologising heroes in National Socialism. Although the quote from the title suggests otherwise, Anacker does not provide detailed information regarding location and landscape in his poems. However, Flanders does appear to be an important topos – or an *Erinnerungsort* – in his poetry. Before the actual poetry analysis, this topic will be approached from a literary theoretical point of view. On the one hand, a very brief and general overview will show that Flanders/Belgium as a neighbouring country to Germany is mostly neglected in German literary history. On the other hand, and despite the absence of geographical or cultural details, Flanders does occasionally appear as a topos in German literature in general and specifically in Nazi propaganda. The analysis of different poems from Anacker's anthology *Die Fanfare. Gedichte der deutschen Erhebung* [1936,<sup>1</sup> *The Brass Band. Poems on the German Rise*; henceforth termed *Die Fanfare*] will illustrate that in this specific anthology Flanders is exclusively mentioned – directly or indirectly – in a World War I context in order to provide an opportunity to present the fallen soldiers as heroes or even martyrs. Therefore, the article will very briefly link up with the debate on National Socialism as a political religion and its 'articles of faith', as identified by Klaus Vondung. In this context, the Flanders topos is presented as an important symbol in connection with *blood* as an 'article of faith', an evocation of the bloodshed in Flanders during World War I depicting the death of the fallen soldiers as a so-called Nazi martyrdom that assumed mythological proportions.

## The Representation of Flanders in German Literature

In May 1998 the annual conference of the *Belgischer Germanisten- und Deutschlehrerverband* (BGDV)<sup>2</sup> did not revolve around a literary, linguistic or didactic topic. It focused instead on the – at that time – rather new and interdisciplinary field of German 'Landeskunde'.<sup>3</sup> In the preface of the 49th issue of the journal *Germanistische Mitteilungen* (1999), which contains the papers presented at that conference, the editors explain that it was the aim of the conference to gain insight into the minimal presence of Belgium in the German collective memory from an imagological point of view.<sup>4</sup> According to literary historian Roland Duhamel, Belgium is hardly seen as an interesting subject in German literature. Duhamel states that no other neighbouring country to German-speaking regions is given less coverage than Belgium. And even when Belgium (or Flanders) appears as a subject, it is mostly in negatively charged settings.<sup>5</sup> However, eighteen years later, Duhamel still stands by this interpretation. In a lecture about the

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<sup>1</sup> First published in 1933. All translations are mine unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> Belgian Association of German Literary Scholars and Teachers.

<sup>3</sup> Within German didactics, the German concept 'Landeskunde' refers roughly to 'cultural studies'. In 'Landeskunde' classes students observe a wide range of aspects of the geography, history, institutions and culture of a region, in this case those of German-speaking countries.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. Bosse and C. Ruthner, 'Vorwort', *Germanistische Mitteilungen. Zeitschrift für Deutsche Sprache, Literatur und Kultur* 49 (1999), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. R. Duhamel, 'Belgien in der deutschsprachigen Literatur', in *ibid.*, p. 9.

presence of Antwerp in German literature in 2016,<sup>6</sup> he reiterated his conclusion that Belgium or Flanders are barely considered as an interesting neighbouring region in German literature. Furthermore, he observed, the occasional mentions of this region appear mostly in a negative context and then often without further clarification or geographical description, but rather with a symbolic meaning.<sup>7,8</sup>

Duhamel's general analysis of the image of Flanders also applies to the representation of Flanders in Nazi writings, since Nazi writers drew a very specific image of Flanders that was suitable for propaganda purposes. In Nazi ideology the symbolic significance of the Flanders topos was twofold. As the Nazis' urge for expansion grew, Flanders began to appear in Nazi imperialistic thinking. Hitler was not only looking for more *Lebensraum* in Eastern Europe; he was also seeking it in the west because he wanted to unify the German race in a single nation. Although Thomas Müller describes Flanders and Switzerland as 'bastions' of the *Westland*, he stresses that discursive key words such as *Westraum*, *Westland* and *Westmark* – as complementary spatial concepts to *Ostraum* and *Ostland* – did not necessarily describe a current or historical region. Instead, they were useful for the abstract and discursive creation of a German nation that exceeded the Reich's then existing boundaries.<sup>9</sup>

At the BGDV conference in 1998, Ine Van Linthout approached the German image of Flanders during 1933 and 1945 from this discursive perspective. She examined the extent to which a specific discourse about Belgium and Flanders had contributed to the German concept of nation during the Nazi regime.<sup>10</sup> Van Linthout interprets the image of Flanders as a discourse that seeks to prove the presupposed 'Germanic essence' of the region and its – at least spiritual – connection to the Reich. According to Van Linthout, the image of Flanders is used – in this particular case – as a *Rechtfertigungsdiskurs* [justification discourse] to prepare for and

<sup>6</sup> In 2015–16 the Urban Studies Institute of the Literature Department of the University of Antwerp organised a series of lectures about 'Literary Antwerp in Five Languages'. On 19 May 2016 Roland Duhamel gave a lecture on the presence of Antwerp in German literature. Because Antwerp is barely mentioned, Duhamel extended this topic by giving a general overview of the presence of Belgium/Flanders in German literature. In this overview he repeated his findings from his 1998 lecture.

<sup>7</sup> According to Duhamel, Friedrich Schiller's *Don Carlos* (1787), for example, can easily be interpreted as an ode to the 'paradise' of Flanders and its oppressed people. However, Duhamel states that it is not the region as such that is important, but rather Flanders as a symbol of oppression in general. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 12. For further examples, I refer to *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Apart from the BGDV conference in 1998 and the resulting special issue of *Germanistische Mitteilungen* in 1999, further in-depth research on the image of Flanders in German literature seems to be lacking. In September 2016 CERES (the Centre for Reception Studies at the KU Leuven) made an appeal for papers for a two-day international conference in April 2017 on the cultural transfer(s) between Belgium and Germany between 1940 and 1944. The appeal stipulated that one of the focal points was to be the image of Belgium in Germany and the possible German perception of Belgium as a nation. Cf. <https://networks.h-net.org/node/73374/announcements/142488/kulturtransfer-zwischen-belgien-und-deutschland-1940-1944>). Jan Ceuppens, one of the organisers, informed me by mail about the programme of the one-day workshop that would take place instead of the originally planned two-day conference. Furthermore, it became clear that the image of Belgium in German literature would once again not be elaborated on further.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. T. Müller, *Imaginerter Westen: Das Konzept des 'deutschen Westraums' im völkischen Diskurs zwischen Politischer Romantik und Nationalsozialismus* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015), p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Van Linthout bases her statements on her research on the concept of 'nation' in a specific corpus of six non-fictional German works about Flanders, written by one Flemish and five German authors. Cf. I. Van Linthout, 'Eine Nation in der Nation. Das Nationskonzept im deutschen Flandernbild zwischen 1933 und 1945', *Germanistische Mitteilungen. Zeitschrift für Deutsche Sprache, Literatur und Kultur* 49 (1999), 32.

legitimise in the German minds the Nazis' potential foreign political ambitions.<sup>11</sup> This interpretation of the Flanders topos proves to be very valuable for the analysis of propaganda poetry immediately before and during World War II. Anacker's anthology *Über die Maas, die Schelde und Rhein! Gedichte vom Feldzug im Westen* [*Across the Maas, Scheldt and Rhine! Poems on the Campaign in the West*, first published in 1940] adopts the Flanders topos mostly from this point of view. However, poems such as 'Flandern' [p. 12, Flanders], "Mohn im Drahtverhau" [p. 21, Poppies in the Barbed Wire Fencing] und "Dem Führer!" [p. 32, To the Führer!] also include a second interpretation of the Flanders topos. With clear references to the German losses during World War I, Anacker calls a completely different image of Flanders to mind, namely that of the dying soldiers in the fields of Flanders. It is precisely this image that is important for interpreting the poems in Anacker's anthology *Die Fanfare: Flanders*, not as an imperialistic objective but as the stage for World War I, is important for its symbolic value in these poems. It should be stressed that the first edition of this anthology was published as early as 1933, at the very beginning of the Nazi period. While in the late 1930s Nazi imperialistic thinking was becoming omnipresent in the propaganda, the propaganda of the early Nazi years was more about consolidating the key ideological concepts. One of these key concepts was the idea of German *blood*, which fits in with the Nazi racial ideology. In his anthology *Die Fanfare* Anacker draws on the traumatic experiences of World War I, which were still fresh in the memory of the German readership. This is how the Flanders topos – and more precisely the bloodshed in Flanders during World War I – became a propaganda tool in the consolidation of *blood* as an ideological Nazi concept.

### Langemarck: A German *Erinnerungsort*

In 2001 Étienne François and Hagen Schulze published the first edition of their reference work *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte* [*German Memory Spaces*, vols. I, II and III].<sup>12</sup> This reference work is a collection of over one hundred icons of German history – mythical figures, buildings, memorials, institutions, concepts, etc., which are considered representative of the German collective memory because of their symbolic function.<sup>13</sup> One of these *Erinnerungsorte* is Langemarck, a small town near Ypres in the west of Flanders. But what is a Flemish town doing in a reference work on German memory spaces? Gerd Krumeich, author of the 'Langemarck' contribution in *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, wonders at the beginning of his article whether

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 33.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. É. François and H. Schulze (eds.), *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, Band I, II, III (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2001). The German word *Erinnerungsort* and its English equivalent 'memory space' go back to the original French concept of *lieu de mémoire* as developed by the French historian Pierre Nora. With his work in seven volumes *Les lieux de mémoire* (published in the 1980s and 1990s), he sought to describe the 'identity of the French nation' (François and Schulze, p. 15). Nora summarised the aim of his work as follows: 'La disparition rapide de notre mémoire nationale m'avait semblé appeler un inventaire des lieux où elle s'est électivement incarnée et qui, par la volonté des hommes ou le travail des siècles, en sont restés comme les plus éclatants symboles: fêtes, emblèmes, monuments et commémorations, mais aussi éloges, dictionnaires et musées. (P. Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), p. 13). His work led to the publication of similar works in other European countries, including François and Schulze's three volumes about German memory spaces.

<sup>13</sup> François and Schulze, 'Einleitung', pp. 17–8.

Langemarck should be considered a ‘German memory space’ at all. To him, this place no longer carries an immediate association with German history. Some people may possibly vaguely remember performances or recitations at school during the Third Reich, yet for experts in World War I-history, the post-war period and National Socialism, this memorialised location has a very significant – even mythical or legendary – meaning.<sup>14</sup> According to various researchers – for instance Baird, Krumeich, Ketelsen and Aichele – the seeds that gave birth to the Langemarck myth was planted in the communiqué of the Supreme High Command of the German Army of 11 November 1914: ‘West of Langemarck young regiments singing “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles” attacked the first line of enemy positions and overran them’.<sup>15</sup>

The fact that the content of this communiqué had probably been made up is not a subject under discussion in this paper.<sup>16</sup> It is, however, important to note that in the collective memory of World War I, Langemarck is associated with the image of advancing ‘young regiments’ while singing the Germany Song – an image that during this war had already assumed mythical proportions in Germany.<sup>17</sup> According to Krumeich, this topos was so strong because it symbolised both farewell and hope: ‘Farewell to the heroic war with individual and collective enthusiasm; dying for a clearly defined and compelling purpose: the defence of the fatherland; infectious vigour of a group that pulls the others forward; hope that precisely this spirit of sacrifice continues or is rekindled’.<sup>18</sup>

Very soon after the events in Langemarck, they become the subject of war poems that quickly found their way into education.<sup>19</sup> Yet, after the war, Langemarck disappeared from the public interest. The few writings by former soldiers – such as Ernst Jünger – about their war experience were not receiving much public attention yet. However, with the resurgence of war literature by the end of the 1920s, Langemarck became a popular topic again.<sup>20</sup> For example,

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. G. Krumeich, ‘Langemarck’, in *ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in J.W. Baird, *To Die for Germany. Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander Aichele disputes that the two main points of this communiqué – the singing of the *Deutschlandlied* [Germany Song] and the young age of the soldiers in the regiments – were in fact true. Cf. A. Aichele, ‘Singend sterben – mit Fichte nach Langemarck: Authentischer Fichteanismus im Ersten Weltkrieg’, *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 81.4 (2007). 619.

<sup>17</sup> Krumeich states that the war propaganda during World War I deliberately tried to create a ‘Langemarck Myth’. The most important element of this myth was its message of hope. The sacrifice of youth was presented as a victory and remained the soldiers’ only positive war experience until 1918. Cf. Krumeich, ‘Langemarck’, p. 300.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295: ‘Abschied vom heroischen Krieg individueller und kollektiver Begeisterung; Sterben für ein klar definiertes und mitreißendes Ziel: die Verteidigung des Vaterlandes; kommunikativer Elan einer Gruppe, die die anderen mit sich fortreißt; Hoffnung auf ein Fortwirken oder Wiedererwachen eben dieses Opfergeistes.’

<sup>19</sup> Dithmar notes that as early as 1915 the recommended reading list for high-school students contained 25 titles of collections of war poetry. Cf. R. Dithmar (ed.), *Der Langemarck-Mythos in Dichtung und Unterricht* (Neuwied, Kriftel, Berlin: Luchterhand, 1992), p. xi.

<sup>20</sup> In 1936, the 48th edition of the famous collection *Auswahl deutscher Gedichte* [Selection of German Poems] by Echtermeyer was edited by Richard Wittsack. Dithmar notes that, compared with the 1926 edition, the number of war poems is strikingly high. This collection also contains a series of poems with the title ‘Langemarck’ by Hans Schwarz. Around 360,000 copies of this collection were printed. Cf. Dithmar, p. xiii.

the German Student Union [*Deutsche Studentenschaft*] proclaimed 19 November 1928 as ‘Langemarck Day’.<sup>21</sup> Subsequently the idea of Langemarck was turned into an instrument of propaganda in the Third Reich. As both Krumeich and Ketelsen point out, the power of the Langemarck topos lies in the confluence of youth, sacrifice and nation.<sup>22</sup> Ketelsen illustrates the strength and the general knowledge of this topos by referring to Ernst Jünger’s work *The Peace* [1941–1943, in German *Der Friede*], in which Jünger mentions the Flemish toponyms ‘Douamont’ and ‘Langemarck’ only once and without further explanation. Ketelsen concludes that in those days these names were so present in the readers’ mind that simply mentioning them was sufficient to help them understand the context of the story.<sup>23</sup> With the end of World War II and therefore also the end of the Third Reich, the paradigm ‘youth-sacrifice-nation’ in connection with ‘Deutschland, Deutschland über alles’ disappeared. Krumeich claims that it is for this reason that the Langemarck myth could not remain a German *Erinnerungsort*.<sup>24</sup>

## Flanders in Heinrich Anacker’s Nazi Poetry: Collective Memory as a Tool for Propaganda

Heinrich Anacker was born in Aarau in Switzerland to a Swiss mother and a German father. During his studies in Zürich and Vienna in the early 1920s, he became acquainted with the ideas of local Nazi divisions. In 1928 he moved to Germany, where he became a member of the NSDAP and in 1939 he voluntarily renounced his Swiss citizenship.<sup>25</sup> Anacker started writing at a young age and by 1931 he had published seven volumes of poetry, mainly on nature and love themes. It was, however, not until his politically inspired publications during the Nazi period that he became a popular poet. To our knowledge, he had published twenty-two anthologies by the end of World War II. Many of his poems became folk songs and were either sung throughout the Reich or used as marching songs by the *Wehrmacht*. Anacker probably owed his popularity to the political – pointedly National Socialist-biased – content of his poems and songs. This bias also explains why many of his texts were exploited for propaganda.<sup>26</sup> Because Anacker was living in Switzerland during World War I and did not fight for the German cause alongside other young soldiers, one can assume that he had not personal experience with the

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Krumeich, ‘Langemarck’, pp. 306–7.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 309; U.-K. Ketelsen, “Die Jugend von Langemarck”. Ein poetisch-politisches Motiv der Zwischenkriegszeit’, in *‘Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit’ Der Mythos Jugend*, ed. by T. Koebner, R.-P. Janz and F. Trommler (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp), p. 75.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>24</sup> This does not mean, however, that Langemarck as a topic disappears completely. Dithmar states that the uncritical scholarly application of war poetry outlived the Nazi regime. Twelve years after the end of World War II it came alive again and, interestingly, again in close connection with the – also uncritically received – Langemarck myth. Cf. Dithmar, *Der Langemarck-Mythos in Dichtung und Unterricht*. p. XII. To this very day, the Langemarck topos appears in diaries, stories and movies about the World War I past. However, for Krumeich, it loses its significance as a genuine German *Erinnerungsort* with the end of World War II. Cf. Krumeich, ‘Langemarck’, p. 309.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. V. Schulz, ‘Heinrich Anacker – der “lyrische Streiter”’, in *Dichter für das ‘Dritte Reich’. Band 2. Biografische Studien zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Ideologie*, ed. by R. Düsterberg (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2011), pp. 25–6.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 21.

Langemarck events. Nonetheless, as a topos, it appears in his early Nazi propaganda anthology *Die Fanfare*. This could confirm Ketelsen's statement that because of the rise of war literature by the end of the 1920s, the Langemarck topos was already part of the German collective memory. Because of that, it is not improbable that Anacker, as a foreign author moving to Germany, could easily adopt this topos.

As mentioned earlier, Anacker also embraced the imperialistic perspective on Flanders in his later poetry. However, in his anthology *Die Fanfare* he mentions Flanders – implicitly or explicitly – only in a World War I context. In this anthology, Anacker portrays the rise of the Third Reich. He therefore compiled the poems in five thematic sections that describe the gradual elevation – or 'resurrection' – of the German state. Within the scope of this article, the first two thematic compilations – 'Verfolgt und verboten' [Persecuted and Forbidden] and 'Der Soldat singt' [The Soldier Sings] – are especially interesting. These poems describe – often also in covert terms – Germany's traumatic war history. The life of a soldier and especially his honourable death were popular topics in Nazi propaganda. On the one hand, propaganda writers called on the *Volk* to fight for the new Reich; on the other, writers often referred to the World War I soldiers as examples for the Germans to follow, just as they had sacrificed their lives for the German cause. The opening poem 'Dem Führer!'<sup>27</sup> [To the Führer!], which precedes the first thematic compilation, is one of only two poems in this anthology that mention Flanders by name. The title and the combination of an oath of loyalty and the Führer's name in the last line indicate that this poem is an ode to Adolf Hitler. The date under the poem – 31 January 1933 – suggests that Anacker wrote this poem in one sitting overnight as an immediate result of the Nazis seizing power and the appointment of Hitler as chancellor the day before. Although the World War I context seems to be off topic in a poem that is clearly written to praise the new Führer, Anacker does refer explicitly to Germany's war history in the fourth verse. Thus, he depicts Hitler as the long-awaited saviour of the fatherland after years of bitterness, waiting and struggle.

**Dem Führer!**<sup>28</sup>

[...]

Nun legst du den Grundstein zum Dritten Reich,  
für das ein Horst Wessel gestorben,  
Und alle, die tapfer und löwengleich  
In Flandern und Rußland zerschossen und bleich  
Sich den blutigen Lorbeer erworben.

**To the Führer!**

[...]

Now you lay the cornerstone of the Third  
Reich,  
for which a Horst Wessel died,  
And all, who bravely and lionhearted  
in Flanders and Russia shot to pieces and pale  
earned the bloody laurel.

This verse credits Hitler with the rise of the Third Reich because he laid its cornerstone. But it seems that he was neither the only one nor the first one who wanted to devote himself to a new German Reich. In the following verse, Anacker recalls the death of the legendary Brown Shirt leader Horst Wessel in 1930, which led Joseph Goebbels to creating the saga of the fighting and

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<sup>27</sup> Heinrich Anacker, *Die Fanfare. Gedichte der deutschen Erhebung* (München: Verlag Eher, 1936), pp. 11–2.

<sup>28</sup> As I have chosen to translate these poems literally, the original rhyme and metre have been lost.

dying Brown Shirt hero. According to Jay W. Baird, a new myth was born and the name Horst Wessel became synonymous with heroism.<sup>29</sup>

In this poem heroism is not limited only to Horst Wessel but is extended to all the others who fought and died 'bravely and lionhearted' for their fatherland. Although the defeat in World War I had left Germany with a large-scale trauma, Anacker does not describe the fallen soldiers as losers but rather as victors. This becomes apparent in the last line of this verse, where the fallen receive the 'laurel', which is an ancient literary symbol for divinity, immortality and victory.<sup>30</sup> Although Anacker is referring to historical facts, the lack of further clarification is striking. First, Horst Wessel is mentioned without further embellishment, which implies that his story is very well-known among the readers and does not require further explanation. Secondly, Anacker refers to all those who were killed 'in Flanders and Russia', again without providing detailed information.

Anacker mentions the region of Flanders a second time in his poem 'Wir zogen heim aus Flandern'<sup>31</sup> [We Went Home from Flanders], which is the fourth poem of the section 'The Soldier Sings':

	<b>Wir zogen heim aus Flandern</b>	<b>We Went Home from Flanders</b>
	Wir zogen heim aus Flandern – Oh, daß ich dich verließ, Du Schönste vor allen andern, Marie-Louise!	We went home from Flanders – O, that I left you, you the prettiest before all others, Marie-Louise!
5	Es blitzten die Gewehre; Die dumpfe Trommel wies Auch mir den Weg der Ehre, Marie-Louise!	The guns were flashing; The dull drum showed Me too the road of honour, Marie-Louise!
10	Wenn wir am Feuer blieben, Und Wind von Westen blies, Hab' ich dir oft geschrieben, Marie-Louise!	Whenever we stayed at the fire, And the wind was due west, I wrote to you many times, Marie-Louise!
15	Die Feuer sind verglommen; Der Schritt verklang im Kies – Dein Brief ist nie gekommen, Marie-Louise!	The fires were slowly extinguished; The step faded away in the gravel – Your letter never arrived, Marie-Louise!
	In Flandern stehn Zypressen ... O du, die ich verließ! Nie kann ich dich vergessen, Marie-Louise ...	In Flanders stand cypresses ... O you, whom I left! Never can I forget you, Marie-Louise ...

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Baird, *To Die for Germany*, p. xiii.

<sup>30</sup> 'Lorbeer', in *Metzler Lexikon literarischer Symbole*, pp. 209–10.

<sup>31</sup> Anacker, *Die Fanfare*, p. 33.



At first sight, this does not seem to be a straightforward propaganda poem, but rather the tragic love story of a man who sings his love for Marie-Louise, a woman whom he apparently met but also abandoned in Flanders. The lyrical 'I' addresses his beloved Marie-Louise, whom he describes as 'the prettiest before all others' (L. 3). With its lamenting 'O' (L. 2), the first verse announces the tragic end of this story: he left Marie-Louise in Flanders. Although the third verse tells us that he wrote to her 'many times' (L. 11), his love for Marie-Louise seems to have remained unrequited, as the fourth verse informs us that Marie-Louise's 'letter never arrived' (L. 15). The first line of the fifth verse offers the only – and a very brief one at that – description of Flanders in Anacker's anthology: 'In Flanders stand cypresses ...' (L. 17). This description raises doubts as to whether this love was actually unrequited, as in literary symbolism cypresses have a long history as a symbol of mourning and death,<sup>32</sup> being popular cemetery trees. Could it be that Marie-Louise had died? Although the poem does not mention Marie-Louise's death literally, this last verse is filled with sadness. Anacker recaptures the lamenting exclamation from line two – while slightly changing the structure of the phrase (cf. L. 2–18) – and he ends the poem with a dramatic exclamation that captures the tragedy of loss of the loved one: 'Never can I forget you' (L. 19). While the name 'Marie-Louise' was always followed by an exclamation mark in the first four verses, the fifth and final verse ends with an ellipsis, as if Marie-Louise's name keeps echoing in the memory of the mourning lover.

Although Flanders appears primarily as the setting of a tragic love theme, Germany's war history – and actually the very topic of this poem – is not very well concealed beneath it. The second verse portrays the war zone at the front while mentioning the flashing 'guns' (L. 5) and the 'dull drum' (L. 6) that shows the soldier 'the road of honour' (L. 7). As 'the fires were slowly extinguished' (L. 13) and 'the step faded away in the gravel' (L. 14), the war seems to be over in the fourth verse. But then the reader runs into the image of the cypresses, which calls to mind a very specific image of Flanders: that of the well-known military cemeteries near Ypres – like the one in Langemarck – filled with graves of German soldiers who had died in the fields of Flanders during World War I. The ellipsis at the end of line 17 emphasises this image, eliciting a short pause in the reading. Just as the reader believes that the soldier – the lyrical 'I' – has died, it becomes clear that Marie-Louise herself has died. This poem, hence, tells a slightly different story from many other propaganda poems that refer to the loss of soldiers during World War I.

The only explicit reference to the dramatic events in Langemarck can be found in the poem 'Ewiges Deutschland'<sup>33</sup> [Eternal Germany]:

#### **Ewiges Deutschland**

Du Deutschland, das Jene gewollt,  
Die für dich starben –  
Noch tragen wir eingerollt  
Deine unvergänglichen Farben.

#### **Eternal Germany**

You Germany, that those ones wanted,  
who died for you –  
Still we carry rolled up  
Your everlasting colours.

<sup>32</sup> 'Zypresse', in *Metzler Lexikon literarischer Symbole*, p. 443.

<sup>33</sup> Anacker, *Die Fanfare*, p. 28.

5	Denn wer von uns ist so stark, Und so heilig-trunken, Wie die, die bei Langemarck Singend dahingesunken?	Because who among us is so strong, And so holy-drunk, as those, who near Langemarck, Went down while singing?
10	Der Blutweg, den alle gemußt, Die opfernd frommen – Er wird erst denen bewußt, Die nach uns kommen.	The path of blood that all had to take, The sacrificing pious ones – Only those will become aware of it, Who come after us.
15	Einst wächst in die Sterne der Baum, Und nichts kann die Krone ihm rauben – O Deutschland, du ewiger Traum, An den wir glauben!	One day the tree will grow into the stars, And nothing can rob it of its crown – O Germany, you eternal dream, In which we believe!

With respect to the topic of this article, the first three verses – and in particular the second one – are the most interesting. In the first verse the phrase ‘who died for you’ (L. 2) already implies a voluntary and therefore sacrificial death of those who really ‘wanted’ (L. 1) Germany. Although further determinations of time and location are missing in this verse, Anacker seems to be describing the soldiers who fought and died for Germany’s sake. By switching from the past tense in the first two verses, until the adverb ‘still’ (L. 3, ‘noch’ in German), to the present tense in the third verse, Anacker connects the past heroes with the present people. The collective ‘wir’ (L. 3, ‘we’) that appears in numerous propaganda texts represents the German people in general. In the third verse one observes a similar structure. The former sacrifice is stated expressly with the verb ‘opfern’ (L. 10, ‘to sacrifice’).<sup>34</sup>

In the next two lines Anacker bridges the generations while mentioning the ones ‘who come after us’ (L. 12). The second verse, however, gives more detailed information on the whereabouts of said heroes: ‘as those, who near Langemarck/went down while singing?’ (L. 7–8). Not only does Anacker specify the location – ‘Langemarck’ – he also describes how these heroes met their end, that is, ‘while singing’. Although this clarification seems to be rather limited, these two verses would most likely immediately bring to mind for readers in the 1930s the image of the advancing young regiments while ‘singing’ (L. 7) the ‘Song of Germany’. Just naming the toponyms Flanders and Langemarck without any further historical or geographical specification seems to confirm Ketelsen in his opinion that in those days these names simply belonged to the collective memory of German readers and did not require additional context in order to be understood.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Sabine Behrenbeck points out that in German it is not possible to distinguish between ‘victim’ and ‘sacrifice’, as there is only one word ‘Opfer’. Cf. S. Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden* (Vierow bei Greifswald: SH, 1996), p. 71. Because the verse ‘die für dich starben’ (L. 2, ‘who died for you’) implies a voluntary and therefore sacrificial death, I prefer to translate the verb ‘opfern’ (L. 10) as ‘to sacrifice’.

<sup>35</sup> Ketelsen, ‘Die Jugend von Langemarck’, p. 69.

## National Socialist Ideology in Anacker's Poetry: 'Articles of Faith' of a Political Religion

Not only does Anacker adopt the Langemarck topos in the poem 'Eternal Germany' without additional explanation, it is further embedded in a quasi-religious context. The thread in the first three verses is the sacrificial death that connects the past with the future. Only those 'who come after us' (L. 12) – the future generations, so to speak – will truly understand the sacrifice of the World War I heroes. Whereas their lives end with death, the colours of Germany are 'everlasting' (L. 4). The last verse leaves the past sacrifices aside and offers a glance into the future. The poem ends with a kind of credo, stating a belief in Germany as an eternal entity that continues beyond time and death.

This sacralisation of Germany is not an isolated example in Anacker's poetry. First, he incorporates various key concepts of National Socialist ideology in his politically biased poetry. Secondly, he does not always present these ideological concepts as mere political ideas, but often also as dogmatic concepts with a certain, almost religious, value. In the poem 'Eternal Germany', for instance, the religious meaning of words such as 'heilig' (L. 6, 'holy'), 'Blutweg' (L. 9, 'path of blood'), 'opfernd' (L. 10, 'sacrificing') and 'glauben' (L. 16, 'believe') is striking. In Anacker's anthology, this kind of vocabulary is not an exception by any means; on the contrary, in various poems he ascribes a certain sacredness to other key Nazi concepts. For instance, he talks about 'holy flags'<sup>36</sup> or 'the holy Third Reich'.<sup>37</sup> The title alone of the poem 'Deutsche Ostern 1933'<sup>38</sup> [German Easter 1933] immediately reveals the intertwining of political content with religious concepts: the political situation of Germany in 1933 is related to the Christian Easter. Instead of the Christian Passion of the Christ, this poem tells of the Passion of Germany. Anacker even literally compares Germany to Christ in the last two verses of this poem: 'Deutschland ist, wie der Heilige Christ,/Leuchtend auferstanden' (L. 29–30, 'Germany is, like the Holy Christ,/brightly resurrected').

Germany, the German flag and Adolf Hitler as *Führer* occur in numerous propaganda poems, not only those written by Heinrich Anacker but also by other propaganda writers such as Baldur von Schirach, Gerhard Schumann and Herybert Menzel. Because those writers often imbue these National Socialist concepts with Christian attributes and symbols, these concepts become central ideological concepts and they increase in importance.<sup>39</sup> The presence of a religious dimension in National Socialism has resulted for decades in a debate among scholars as to whether National Socialism should be considered a political religion.<sup>40</sup> This article does

<sup>36</sup> In the poem 'Zur Freiheit!' [p. 58, To Freedom!] Anacker writes 'Die heil'gen Fahnen flattern vor den Stürmen' (L. 13, 'The holy flags flutter in the face of storms'). In 'Die Blutfahne' (p. 87, Blood Flag) the flag is called 'ein heil'ges Tuch' (L. 5, 'a holy cloth').

<sup>37</sup> In 'Die Fahnen verboten' [p. 14, The Forbidden Flags] Anacker calls on the people to fight bravely for the resurrection of Germany: 'Wir wollen tapfer fechten/für Deutschlands Auferstehn' (L. 11–12, 'We want to fight bravely/for Germany's resurrection'). Seven lines further, he describes this resurrection: 'Aufsteigt aus Schmach und Trümmern/Das heil'ge Dritte Reich' (L. 19–20, 'Rising from disgrace and ruins/the holy Third Reich').

<sup>38</sup> Anacker, *Die Fanfare*, pp. 112–13.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. P. Hasubek, *Das Deutsche Lesebuch in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* (Hannover: Hermann Schroedel, 1972), p. 39.

<sup>40</sup> The presence of a certain religious dimension in the Nazi ideology has never been doubted. Already by the end of the 1930s, contemporaries such as the German political philosopher Erich Voegelin and the French sociologist Raymond

not attempt to comment on the validity of this designation. It is, however, interesting that within this debate Klaus Vondung identified six key concepts of the Nazi ideology, which he describes as possible ‘articles of faith’ of the National Socialist political religion:<sup>41</sup>

Thus at the centre of Nazi symbolism and creed stood the ‘Blood’; then came the ‘People’ as the substantive bearer of the blood; the ‘Soil’, the land, which nourishes the people; the ‘Reich’, in which it finds its political realization; the ‘Führer’ as the representative of people and Reich; the ‘Flag’ as the most holy material symbol.<sup>42</sup>

A thorough analysis of Anacker’s anthology *Die Fanfare* shows that these ‘articles of faith’ appear as thematic focal points in his poems. For example, poems such as ‘German Easter 1933’ and ‘Eternal Germany’ clearly focus on the Reich as a possible ‘article of faith’, whereas the opening poem ‘To the Führer!’ revolves primarily around the Führer. However, in most cases Anacker combines different ‘articles of faith’ in one and the same poem. Although ‘To the Führer!’ is clearly an ode to the Führer, in the fourth verse cited above Anacker also adds references to the *people* who sacrificed their *blood* for their Fatherland. This is also the case in the poem ‘Wintersonnwend’ 1931<sup>43</sup> [Winter Solstice 1931]. This short poem of fifteen lines that belongs to the first thematic compilation ‘Persecuted and Forbidden’ describes how the German Reich is heading straight towards a turning point after an indefinite age of persecution and repression. However, the last verse shows that the poem is not merely announcing that something is going to change; it also contains a direct appeal to the nation to take an active part in this turning point:

#### Wintersonnwend 1931

[...]  
Heldisches Sterben – den Feigling nur reut's...  
Kampf sei uns heilige Wonne!  
Hört ihr? Die Stimme der Toten gebet's:  
15 Aufwärts mit Hitler und Hakenkreuz!  
Aufwärts im Zeichen der Sonne!

#### Winter Solstice 1931

[...]  
Heroic dying – only the coward regrets it...  
Battle is our holy delight!  
Do you hear? The voice of the dead commands  
it:  
Upwards with Hitler and the Swastika!  
Upwards in the sign of the sun!

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Aron described National Socialism as a political religion. Whether this label is appropriate has been the subject of discussion since then. Especially since the 1990s, the discussion has grown significantly. Various scholars proposed different labels – anti-religion, pseudo-religion or secular religion, to name a few. Furthermore, scholars have not been able to agree on a univocal definition of the label ‘political religion’. Cf. A. Van Hertbruggen, ‘Methodische Annäherungen an die politische Theologie als Interpretationsansatz für nationalsozialistische Propagandadichtung’, *Focus on German Studies* 20 (2014), 24–37; *ibid.*, ‘Glaube und Propagandadichtung. Religionsdimensionen im Nationalsozialismus’, *Kritische Ausgabe. Zeitschrift für Germanistik & Literatur* 19 (2015), pp. 51–5.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. K. Vondung, ‘National Socialism as a Political Religion: Potentials and Limits of an Analytical Concept’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6.1 (2005), 89.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>43</sup> Anacker, *Die Fanfare*, p. 21.

Although the *Reich* appears as the main ‘article of faith’ of this poem, this last verse calls attention to a second ‘article of faith’, namely the *Führer*, by mentioning ‘Hitler’ (L. 14) by name. This poem also shows that the different ‘articles of faith’ do not always have to be mentioned explicitly. For example, line 11 mentions the heroic death of soldiers during the war. Although there is no explicit mention of ‘bloody’ details, once again Anacker praises the soldiers who sacrificed their blood for their fatherland. Furthermore, Anacker emphasises the sacred dimension of this implicit bloodshed by describing the ‘battle’ (L. 12) as a ‘holy delight’ (L. 12). Only ‘cowards’ (L. 11) would regret dying in such a battle. Anacker urges his readers – or the German nation in general – to participate in the battle to reach this turning point. In line 13 he recalls the sacrifice of former ‘heroes’ by mentioning the ‘voice of the dead’ that ‘commands’ (L. 13) the living to go to battle – except for that, they remain nameless. Thus, based merely on vocabulary, this poem does not appear to be about *blood*. Thematically, however, one could interpret the whole war-and-sacrifice theme as an elaboration of the first of Vondung’s ‘articles of faith’, namely *blood*. In this light, one could also interpret the poem ‘We Went Home from Flanders’, which conceals the war theme under a tragic love story, as a poem on *blood*. Because ‘Flanders’ only appears in Anacker’s propaganda poetry in connection with the fate of German soldiers at the front in World War I, this article will focus only on *blood* as an ‘article of faith’.

### Die a Hero in Langemarck: The Consolidation of *Blood* as an ‘Article of Faith’

All but one of Anacker’s poems on *blood* refer to the German blood.<sup>44</sup> His Nazi background becomes very obvious in ‘Nun stoßen wir das Geld vom Thron’<sup>45</sup> [Now We Drive the Money from the Throne], when he writes specifically ‘Das deutsche Blut muß siegen’ (L. 2, ‘German blood must triumph’). In the majority of poems the blood theme is used to refer to the so-called heroes who died for the German cause and who are depicted as victors, not as losers. This is made clear, for instance, in the combination of the adjective ‘bloody’ with the literary symbol of the ‘laurel’ (L. 17) in the opening poem ‘To the Führer!’. Although *blood* is not directly labelled as ‘holy’ or ‘eternal’, the combination with the laurel also implies a certain sacredness of the German blood that was sacrificed for the Third Reich. Since the end of World War I was still reverberating in the collective memory of the German nation, implicit references without specific location or time frame would have sufficed for the reader to make the necessary associations. The poem ‘Der Freiheit Morgenrot’<sup>46</sup> [Dawn of Freedom], for example, contains only one line that evokes an image of a wounded soldier: ‘Es blieb der Bruder auf blutigem Feld’ (L. 8, ‘The brother remained on the bloody field’). In ‘Volksgericht’<sup>47</sup> [People’s Tribunal], too, Anacker evokes the war:

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<sup>44</sup> In the poem *Macht Schluß* [p. 74, ‘Put an End to It!'] Anacker writes ‘Macht Schluß mit dem blutigen Sowjetstern’ (L. 1, ‘Put an end to the bloody Soviet star’). This poem does not talk about the victory of the German blood, but calls for the extinction of Soviet – that is, communist – blood.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

**Volksgerecht**

[...]  
 10 Denk' an die Brüder auf blutiger Bahre,  
 Denk' an die Witwen in Tränen und Flor!

**People's Tribunal**

[...]  
 Think of the brothers on bloody stretchers,  
 Think of the widows in tears and bloom!<sup>48</sup>

It is highly likely that the poems' audience in the 1930s included widows or perhaps a parent or a sibling of a deceased soldier. For today's reader – who has no vivid recollection of the Great War – the absence of more details renders the interpretation of these isolated sentences more difficult. However, the few explicit references to the front in Flanders and the mention of the little town of Langemarck in 'Eternal Germany' do guide the reader's interpretation automatically to Germany's wartime past.

The analysis of the poems 'Eternal Germany' and 'Winter Solstice 1931' revealed that Anacker does not exclusively approach the *blood* topic from a racial perspective. In connection with religious discourse, he presents the German *blood* within the context and concept of the sacrificial death and therefore he elevates this ideological and political concept to a religious dimension. In both poems, Anacker addresses his readers in the name of a similar cause: whereas in 'Winter Solstice 1931', he calls for battle which is presented as a 'holy delight' (L. 12), in 'Eternal Germany' the people are summoned to sacrifice themselves like the soldiers in Langemarck who were 'holy-drunk' (L. 6). It seems that both fighting at the front and dying for the German cause are surrounded by a certain sacred – indeed, 'holy' – aura. The third verse of 'Eternal Germany' continues the concept of sacredness by calling the dead soldiers who sacrificed their lives the 'pious ones' (L. 10). For Catholic or Protestant readers the German word 'Blutweg' (L. 9, 'path of blood') could also evoke spontaneous associations with Christ's 'Kreuzweg' [Way of the Cross] or 'Leidensweg' [calvary]. In National Socialism the sacralisation of the deaths of those who gave their lives for the German cause led to a genuine cult,<sup>49</sup> which Sabine Behrenbeck describes comprehensively in her book *Der Kult um die toten Helden. Nationalsozialistische Mythen, Riten und Symbole* (1996). Within the debate on National Socialism as a political religion, Behrenbeck considers this hero worship as a religious phenomenon. She explains that every cultural system of symbols that deals with human suffering and death tries to cope with existential problems. And, to that end, they take on a religious heritage.<sup>50</sup> The most important achievement of a hero is the fact that he gave – or rather sacrificed voluntarily – his life for a good cause and in the public interest, for which he receives gratitude and worship from the ones who were saved. Because of his voluntary death,

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<sup>48</sup> This sentence creates some translation difficulties. 'In Flor stehen' means 'being in bloom'. Figuratively speaking, one could translate 'im Flor sein' also as 'being pregnant'. Which translation should be preferred is not clear. However, this ambiguity could simply underline the youthfulness and fertility of the disconsolate widows, which makes the 'sacrifice' even more tragic. Furthermore, the German word 'Flor' could also be short for 'Trauerflor', a black armband or ribbon which is a mourning symbol.

<sup>49</sup> This Nazi cult was not limited to the cult of the fallen during World War I. Other Nazi 'martyrs' were Horst Wessel, Albert Leo Schlageter and the sixteen 'Nazi immortals' that died during the Beer Hall Putsch on 9 November 1923. Cf. Baird, *To Die for Germany*.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden*, p. 18.

he will be remembered eternally by the community, which leads to the immortal status of the hero:<sup>51</sup>

That is how the mythical hero becomes a saviour, working beyond death and cancelling profane time. He conquered death or, rather, he rose from the dead. In that respect, heroism gives an additional answer to the question of how one copes with the fact of death. The myth interprets the heroic death as change in existential being, this transformation makes it bearable.<sup>52</sup>

As is shown in the poems above – and as Behrenbeck illustrates<sup>53</sup> – the political instrumentalisation of the heroic ideal is not that difficult. Although Nazi poets such as Heinrich Anacker have obvious ideological and political motives when adopting the theme of heroism and sacrificial death in their propaganda poetry, they still seem to draw their imagery from Christian tradition. Heinz Schreckenbergr points out that the Nazi worship of martyrs was constructed after the example of the Catholic Church.<sup>54</sup> Esther Roßmeißl, too, observes that, for the stylisation of their martyrs, Nazi writers adopted religious motifs originating from Christian tradition following the example of Christ.<sup>55</sup> However, in Anacker's poetry the German hero does not die on the cross like Christ, but in the fields of Flanders – and more specifically in Langemarck – during World War I. The last poem, 'Frontweihnacht' 1931<sup>56</sup> ('Christmas at the Front 1931') shows the intertwining of religious – Christian – imagery with the ideological – Nazi – background in the poetry of Heinrich Anacker:

#### **Frontweihnacht 1931**

Nun ist es wieder wie vor fünfzehn Jahren:  
So feierten die Weihnacht sie im Feld,  
In Not und Blut, vom Lärm der Schlacht umgellt,  
Und doch das Herz bereit dem Wunderbaren ...

Ergriffen lauschte mancher harte Held  
Den Liedern, die ihm lang versunken waren;  
Und noch den Sterbenswunden auf den Bahnen  
Ward wundersam die bange Nacht erhellt.

#### **Christmas at the Front 1931**

Now it is again just like fifteen years ago:  
That's how they celebrated Christmas in the field,  
In need and blood, surrounded by the noise of the battle  
And still the heart prepared for wonder.

Touched, many a hard hero listened  
to the songs, that had faded away a long time ago;  
and even for the fatally wounded on the stretchers  
The frightening night was wonderfully lit.

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*: 'So wird der mythische Held zum Heilbringer, der über den Tod hinaus wirkt und die profane Zeit aufhebt. Er hat den Tod überwunden bzw. ist vom Tod auferstanden. Insofern gibt der Heroismus auch eine weitere Antwort auf die Frage, wie der Mensch mit der Tatsache des Todes umgehen kann. Der Mythos deutet den Tod des Helden als Wechsel der Existenzweise, diese Transformation macht ihn erträglich.'

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. H. Schreckenbergr, *Ideologie im Alltag im Dritten Reich* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 472.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. E. Roßmeißl, *Märtyrerstilisierung in der Literatur des Dritten Reiches* (Tausenstein: Driesen, 2000), p. 44.

<sup>56</sup> Anacker, *Die Fanfare*, p. 23.

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|----|--|--|
| 10 | Wir aber sind die Erben jener Front.<br>Auch wir vertauschten mit dem Schwert die Leier,<br>Von deutschem Zukunftsglauben übersinnt.         | We though are the heirs of that front.<br>We, too, exchanged for the sword the lyre,<br>Sun-drenched with belief in the German future.                 |
|    | So treten wir zur stillen Christnachtfeier ...<br>Empor den Blick, du Volk! Am Horizont<br>Aufsteigt dein Stern: Auch dir naht der Befreier! | So we approach the quiet Christmas night celebration ...<br>Look up, you people! At the horizon<br>Your star rises: Your saviour is coming to you too! |

This sonnet describes the hope of a better future or a new era. Once again, Anacker links past (the reference to the war front) and present (1931) and, in this poem, even the future. The two quatrains depict the situation at the front during World War I, whereas the first tercet switches to the present day. The second tercet announces the coming of a saviour and thus closes with a sort of prophecy for the future. This poem clearly exemplifies how Anacker transfers religious – Christian – imagery to his propaganda poetry. The actual political message of this poem is hidden in the last tercet: the German people await a saviour. Considering other poems in the same anthology, such as ‘To the Führer!’, this coming ‘saviour’ (L. 14) could be interpreted as Adolf Hitler and therefore this poem seems to be a poem about the *Führer*. However, the two quatrains pick up on the war-and-death theme which make this poem – despite the lack of bloody details – also one about a second ‘article of faith’: *blood*. Although neither Flanders nor Langemarck is referred to by name, the first two verses allow an unambiguous association with the war front in Flanders. First, the time indication ‘just like fifteen years ago’ (L. 1) situates the content of the first two verses in 1916. Secondly, the Christmas theme also plays an important role in the association. Like ‘Langemarck’, ‘Weihnachten’ [Christmas] is considered a German *Erinnerungsort*. Doris Foitzik not only explains the evolution of Christmas as a typical German family feast, but also of the Christmassy war propaganda during World Wars I and II that had its roots in the 1870 Franco-German War, when the Christmas tree was used as a symbol for the fatherland and family ties. According to Foitzik, the Christmassy war propaganda of World War I faced a constant quandary: was it about longing for peace or about pursuing warfare zealously? Because it was hard to motivate the soldiers at the front with mere Christmas songs, a ‘Weihnachtsfeier im Felde’ [Christmas feast in the fields] was staged.<sup>57</sup> It is precisely this memory that Anacker tries to reawaken in the second line of the poem above. However, Anacker does not describe an idyllic Christmas feast; on the contrary, the horror of the war is ever present. The soldiers are ‘in need and blood’ and ‘surrounded by the noise of the battle’ (L. 2). Many are even ‘fatally wounded’ (L. 8). The attitudes of these soldiers, however, do not seem to be those of warriors: they are touched by songs that they had forgotten (L. 5–6) and their hearts were prepared for a wonder (L. 4). It appears as if Anacker has uncoupled the soldiers from the war context: they seem unaffected by the surrounding war and are simply waiting for something wonderful – perhaps even divine – to happen. In the last tercet the Christmas theme continues, but instead of referring to the historical ‘Christmas feast in the fields’ Anacker now uses a traditional symbol of the Christian religion, the star: in the Gospel of Matthew the star of Bethlehem announces the birth of Jesus to the magi (Mt 2: 1–12).

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<sup>57</sup> D. Foitzik, ‘Weihnachten’, in *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte III*, ed. by Étienne François and Hagen Schulze (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2001), pp. 159–160.



## Conclusion

The focus on the Flanders topos in Heinrich Anacker's propaganda poetry has revealed two different interpretative approaches. In the propaganda poetry of the late 1930s and that of World War II, the Flanders topos is often employed from an imperialistic perspective. However, the same topos also appears in a completely different setting, that is, as the stage of World War I. It is precisely this second interpretation that has proven to be useful in the interpretation of the propaganda poetry from the early beginnings of the Nazi period. In Anacker's anthology *Die Fanfare*, first published in 1933, Flanders appears only as a war zone where brave soldiers died on the battlefield. However, the explicit mentions are rather scarce. Only in three poems – 'We Went Home from Flanders', 'To the Führer!' and 'Eternal Germany' – is this region named explicitly, either with the toponym 'Flanders' or with that of 'Langemarck'. It is striking that further geographical or historical references are lacking completely. 'We Went Home from Flanders' is the only poem that provides one single geographical detail, namely the presence of cypresses. But this literary symbol, too, presents Flanders in a war context, as it refers to military cemeteries.

The absence of further information regarding this region neighbouring Germany is, however, not surprising. First, this depiction of Flanders fits in the general tradition of German literature. As Roland Duhamel observed, Flanders as a neighbouring region is not very present in German literature and, when it is, it is usually not because of its geographical or historical importance but rather because of its symbolic value. In the case of Anacker's propaganda poetry, the symbolic value of Flanders is connected to the German trauma of World War I. This leads immediately to a second explanation for the absence of further details: especially in the two decades following World War I, Flanders produced a very specific association in German minds. The battles fought by German soldiers in the fields of Flanders were still fresh in the collective memory of the German nation. Anacker does not focus on the trauma of the German losses in general or on the final defeat of Germany in 1918; instead, he adopts the well-known story of the battle of Langemarck, where German soldiers gave their lives for their fatherland. During World War I, the report of this battle was already exploited for propaganda purposes by presenting these soldiers as true martyrs for the German cause. Thus, not the historic events but the adapted propaganda version of the Langemarck events is of importance. Because of this exploitation both during World War I and in the war literature of the 1920s, this story assumed mythological proportions. Ketelsen observes in respect of Ernst Jünger's mention of Langemarck that it is not situated in Flanders but simply in the productive fantasy.<sup>58</sup>

By the late 1920s the toponym Langemarck had become part of the German collective memory and the simple mention of Flemish toponyms was sufficient to rekindle the underlying memory. Because of this spontaneous association of German history with a Flemish toponym, Langemarck is even considered an *Erinnerungsort* – a German memory space. It is precisely the idea of Langemarck as an *Erinnerungsort* that explains why Flemish toponyms appear in Nazi propaganda – as, for instance, in Anacker's poetry – without further explanation. Furthermore, the fact that a foreign author such as Anacker was able to use the Langemarck topos without providing any background information underlines yet again the power of this *Erinnerungsort*.

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Ketelsen, 'Die Jugend von Langemarck', p. 70.

In Nazi propaganda a certain topos was only interesting to the extent that it could be made into an instrument of propaganda. The analysis of a selection of poems of Anacker's anthology *Die Fanfare* has shown that the Langemarck topos lent itself as a propaganda tool to cement *blood* as a concept in Nazi racism. Within the debate on National Socialism as a political religion, Klaus Vondung identified *blood* – together with *Führer*, *Reich*, *people*, *flag* and *soil* – as an 'article of faith' of the Nazi ideology. An analysis of this poetry has revealed that Anacker frequently combines *blood* as an 'article of faith' with a World War I context. Flanders in general and Langemarck in particular evoked the idea of a mythical place where German heroes fought and sacrificed their lives – their *blood* – which was extensively elaborated on in the Langemarck myth.<sup>59</sup> Sabine Behrenbeck pinpoints the power of this myth to the combination of archaic elements such as the symbols of 'hero', 'blood' and 'sacrifice' with the recent German past.<sup>60</sup> In this respect, the almost mythological region of Flanders – and specifically Langemarck – is presented as the setting for the 'holy' sacrifice of the German soldiers. With the decisive use of religious discourse and the adaptation of Christian imagery, Anacker elevates the soldiers' death in the fields of Flanders to a sacred dimension. These soldiers did not simply die during World War I: they sacrificed their lives in Flanders for the German cause. This interpretation sits well with the idea of Nazi martyrdom, as researched and described elaborately by Sabine Behrenbeck. Nonetheless, Behrenbeck points out one important difference from the martyrdom of Christ: whereas God converted Christ's death into victory, which enabled the believers to start a new bond with God, the descendants of the deceased soldiers still have to convert their deaths into victory if they are to ensure that those deaths were not meaningless.<sup>61</sup>

In conclusion, it should be noted that Anacker did not simply describe this sacrificial death of soldiers in World War I from a mere poetic point of view. As a propaganda writer, his main objective was to disseminate Nazi ideology. In this respect, he used the Langemarck topos to consolidate the Nazi key concept of *blood* and, in essence, he almost summoned his readers to follow in the footsteps of those who had died in Langemarck.

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<sup>59</sup> The creation of political myths was a very important propaganda tool in National Socialism. Besides the Langemarck myth, other myths were also elaborated on for propaganda purposes, such as the *Führer* myth, the Blood-and-Soil myth and the myth of the nation state.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden*, p. 47.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 189.

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