



## **Friedrich Nietzsche in Dutch-speaking Belgium during the Interwar Period: Odiel Spruytte and the Benefits of Micrological Reception Studies**

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**Abstract:** Reception studies tend to favour broad corpora and they have many reasons to do so. However, in some cases, it may be better to follow slowly, by means of close reading, the traces of an intensive reception over a certain period of time. An example of this is the case of the Flemish nationalist priest Odiel Spruytte, who was one of the most in-depth connoisseurs of Nietzsche in Dutch-speaking Belgium in the later interwar period. The analysis of the articles he published in the Flemish cultural-philosophical periodical *Kultuurleven* between 1934 and 1940, the time of his death, uncovers the subtle changes in Spruytte's solid Nietzsche interpretations and allows us to discover the gradual rapprochement and alienation between conservative Catholic and national-socialist Nietzsche appropriations.

**Keywords:** Friedrich Nietzsche, Belgium / België, Flanders / Vlaanderen, National-Socialism / Nationaal Socialisme, Conservative Catholicism / conservatief katholicisme

## ***Contact Zones and Cultural Emancipation***

The printed version of the 2002 monumental *Weimarer Nietzsche Bibliographie* (WNB) has quite an impressive fifth volume covering the ‘Wirkungs- und Forschungsgeschichte’ of Nietzsche’s writings from 1867 until 1998. It displays large sections on the reception history in France, Italy, the UK, North America and Russia, and shorter sections on countries and regions such as the Arabic world, Bulgaria, Latvia and Hungary. There is a tiny section on the reception in Belgium, focusing exclusively on probably the most internationally renowned Nietzschean in Belgium, Henry Van de Velde.<sup>1</sup> The electronic version<sup>2</sup> is evidently more exhaustive, also with respect to Belgium. But even then, we have to conclude that a lot of research remains to be done with respect to Nietzsche-reception in Belgium, particularly in the Dutch-speaking community in Flanders, and predominantly with respect to the second (or third) phase of reception: the reception during the interbellum, with specific attention for the reception after 1933, Hitler’s assumption of power, and 1934, the first violent confrontations in Austria between Fascist and Nazi-partisans.

When we overlook the research that is available, it rapidly becomes clear that most of the cultural recipients in Belgium belong to the country’s French speaking academic, cultural and artistic elites, who derive a crucial part of their intellectual impulses from their fellow Nietzscheans in France. These impulses are far from homogeneous, which is of course due to the versatility of the reception in that country over the years and in different intellectual communities. When we want to get a clearer picture of the ways in which the French reception prefigures the reception in Belgium, we need to have a detailed picture of the ideological and cultural background of the intermediates and the assimilators, since most of them use Nietzsche’s writings as an instrument to make their own convictions more explicit. The situation for the Dutch-speaking community in Flanders was, however, very different – particularly for those who were involved in the politics of Flemish cultural and linguistic emancipation. The *Flamenpolitik* and the Von Bissing-initiative to establish a Dutch-speaking university in Ghent had made German support for the Flemish ‘cause’ in this zone of intense intercultural contact utterly precarious, but in the aftermath of the First World War and the massive devastations in the south of West-Flanders the struggle for cultural emancipation had even intensified. From this perspective, it is no surprise that there is a deep chasm between the urban elites, who discovered in Nietzsche a relentless critic of traditional morality and a skilful stylist, and those, often of rural origin, whose connections with new modes of thought from the German-speaking world were very diverse and often depended on idiosyncratic circumstances. Particularly this last observation makes it difficult to put the experiences of the ‘rural’ Nietzsche readers in a larger perspective or to generalize them in some way. On top of that, there are hardly any comprehensive discussions available of their modes of reception: monographs, in-depth articles, or book chapters. Insofar as such comprehensive discussions are available, they display a

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<sup>1</sup> Susanne Jung et al. (eds.), *Weimarer Nietzsche-Bibliographie. Band 5 – Sekundärliteratur: Wirkungs- und Forschungsgeschichte* (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2002), pp. 269-432, 434-436, 458, 476-482. The author wishes to thank Linde Lapauw (Ghent University) and Liesbeth Deprez (KULAK Library) for their help in gathering the necessary research material for this article, and Bruno De Wever, Zoë Ghyselincx, Hans Vandevoorde, Carl Niekerk and Simon Richter for their valuable comments. All translations in this article are made by the author.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. <http://ora-web.swkk.de/swk-db/niebiblio/index.html>.

predictable measure of internal consistency and coherence, which is logical from the point of view of intellectual debate, but at the same time, this wipes out diachronic aspects of reception and indications of responsiveness to contextual tendencies and events.

### ***A Man-to-man Duel***

One of the most exceptional Nietzsche-readers in this respect is the West-Flemish priest Odiel Spruytte. Spruytte's Nietzsche reception is not unknown, but there is hardly any research about it. Spruytte's biographer, Pieter-Jan Verstraete – who has established himself quite a reputation as a chronicler of the so-called *Flemish movement*, puts it as follows: 'It would definitely deliver an important contribution to the ideological evolution of Flemish nationalism in the 1930s if research would show to what extent specific aspects of Nietzsche's teachings have influenced on it.'<sup>3</sup> Due to some historical and biographical coincidences, we have the possibility to more or less reconstruct the vicissitudes of Spruytte's confrontation with Nietzsche, and even more: not only to discover the influence of Nietzsche, but also its development over time. Fully in line with the rhetoric of that time, this confrontation is described in the 1940 'In memoriam weleerwaarde heer Odiel Spruytte' by Oscar Verhaeghe, a fellow priest from the small West-Flemish parish of Eernegem (near Ostend and Bruges), as a 'man-to-man duel', in which Spruytte engaged in an 'uninhibited, daring, chivalrous, compassionate' fashion.<sup>4</sup> Some three years later, this image of a heroic warrior was transformed into the slightly less military image of an 'unselfish' ('onbaatzuchtig') 'wrestler for his people' ('kamper voor zijn volk'), who threw himself in a dangerous 'vortex of thoughts' ('in den maalstroom der gedachten wierp').<sup>5</sup> The heroic vocabulary characterizes the introduction of a small book, entitled *Nietzsche's Kringloop* (*Nietzsche's cycle*), which was published in February 1944 by the Antwerp publisher Die Keure, commissioned by the 'West-Flemish Cultural Service' ('den Westvlaamschen Cultuurdienst'), for the third anniversary of Spruytte's death. The book is an interesting artefact: it displays the death mask of Spruytte as a reference to the iconic representation of the deceased Nietzsche that had been circulating since 1900 and thus ties in with the iconography of intellectual martyrdom that was in vogue at that time. Some sources suggest that the occupying forces' censor had supervised the content of the book. In 1941, the German conservative Catholic periodical *Hochland*, to which Spruytte was subscribed in the 1920s, was banned, ostensibly because in one of the articles Nietzsche had been called the 'murderer of god' ('Gottesmörder') – this was only two years after another incident with *Hochland*, when one issue was taken out of circulation.<sup>6</sup> That the editor of the book, who signed with the pseudonym G. Van de Woude (also spelled as Vandewoude), had to be cautious, is likely to be true. When we have a closer look at the text of the book, we see that the editor practiced the interventionist philological methods that were quite common in the handling of Nietzsche's unpublished writings as well. He actively changed phrasings, reordered

<sup>3</sup> 'Het zou beslist een belangrijke bijdrage tot de ideologische evolutie van het Vlaams nationalisme in de jaren dertig leveren, mochten andere studies aantonen in welke mate bepaalde facetten uit Nietzsches leer invloed erop uitoefenden.' Pieter Jan Verstraete, *Odiel Spruytte. Een priesterleven in dienst van het Vlaams nationalisme* (Antwerpen: De Nederlanden, 1990), p. 260.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Verstraete, *Odiel Spruytte*, p. 255: 'een tweestrijd'.

<sup>5</sup> G. Van de Woude, 'Inleiding,' in Odiel Spruytte, *Nietzsche's Kringloop* (Antwerpen: Die Keure, 1944), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Verstraete, *Odiel Spruytte*, p. 116.

the texts and even reproduced some of Spruytte's digressions in his own introduction to the biography, the works and the philosophy of Nietzsche, not to actively forge or alter the original versions, but rather to make the 'mosaic' more 'complete' (as was the argument of one of Nietzsche's editors, Friedrich Würzbach).<sup>7</sup> Whether Van de Woude, who in reality was another West-Flemish priest with Flemish nationalist convictions, Gaston Lambrecht, did so to meet the expectations of the censors, is from our contemporary perspective undecidable. For the current project, it is also irrelevant, since we cannot attribute the authorship of the book unequivocally to Spruytte. Nevertheless, it remains to be scrutinized in detail what changes and interventions Van de Woude actually carried out, in order to make sure that *Nietzsche's cycle* indeed fitted better to National Socialist ideology of the mid 1940s than Spruytte's original texts had done.

### ***Dynamite, once again***

Spruytte had indeed published quite some material on Nietzsche. These texts, albeit in a drastically altered way, made the ingredients for the book that was published posthumously to honour the deceased friend and colleague. But due to the untimely moment of publication it actually was (co-)responsible for Spruytte's disappearance in the dungeons of National Socialist history. So what is there left to say about Spruytte?

The context in which Spruytte became acquainted with Nietzsche as an intellectual personality and as a writer, was typical for the Catholic community in Belgium in the early twentieth century. Nietzsche was well known and, in some respect, even notorious as a 'prosateur', as he was called by Georges Dwelshauvers, professor of philosophy at the Free University in Brussels.<sup>8</sup> His highly quotable phrases about the death of god, the last man and the destruction of the prevailing moral values resonated frequently both in artistic circles and in Catholic communities, albeit in the latter with disapproval and contempt. Spruytte, who was born in 1891 in the West-Flemish town Rumbeke, went to school in the *kleinseminarie* of the neighbouring city of Roeselare, a breeding ground for future priests (1902-1910), and subsequently became a seminarian in Bruges, was ordained a priest shortly before the end of the First World War. Between 1919 and 1921 he studied theology at the Catholic University in Leuven, where he was immersed in the Neo-Scholastic and Neo-Thomistic philosophies that dominated the debate at that time and were actively supported by the Belgian academic and episcopal authorities.<sup>9</sup> We are sure that his first acquaintance with Nietzsche goes back to this time. In

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<sup>7</sup> Würzbach's collection was published only months before *Nietzsche's Kringloop* (Friedrich Würzbach, *Das Vermächtnis Friedrich Nietzsches: Versuch einer neuen Auslegung allen Geschehens und einer Umwertung aller Werte* (Salzburg: Pustet, 1943). Cf. Benjamin Biebuyck, 'Het legaat van de filosoof met de hamer: een historische vergissing', in: *De Gids* 157/2 (1994), pp. 96-106. An interesting observation in this context is the fact that Spruytte's full text is preceded by one and followed by two mottos from 'H. Wolfs'. The quotes turn out to be taken from a 1934 book by the German teacher and Spinozist Herman Wolf (Leiden, 1893-1942): *Nietzsche als religieuze persoonlijkheid*. This book does not seem to have been part of Spruytte's Nietzsche library. Hence, it is probably an insertion by the editor. We will come back on this.

<sup>8</sup> Georges Dwelshauvers, 'Notre Bilan Philosophique,' in *Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles* 2 (1896-1897), p. 505 – quoted in Joost Hansen, 'Zicht op Morgenrood. Een receptiegeschiedenis van Nietzsche in Fin de siècle België 1892-1918,' unpublished MA Thesis, Catholic University of Leuven (2005), p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. a review published in a 1902 volume of the Leuven-based journal *La revue néo-scholastique* by the later archbishop Joseph-Désiré Mercier, who in the 1880s held the chair of Thomistic philosophy in Leuven and repeatedly cautioned, both in lectures and in episcopal letters, for the amoral temptations of Nietzsche's philosophy. Cf. Luis Cortest, *The*

1919, Jozef Bittremieux published in the periodical *Dietsche Warande* an article on Nietzsche's moral theory of power ('Nietzsche's krachtzedeleer'), to which Spruytte also referred in a letter to his friend Liefoghe.<sup>10</sup> Despite the patriotic and anti-German trends in the Belgian Catholic establishment, which held Nietzsche co-responsible for the imperialist strand of Wilhelminism and thus for the outburst of the First World War, Spruytte continued to deal with Nietzsche's writings while he was active as a priest. In the local parishes of Izegem, Zwevegem, Wervik and later on in Slijpe, he organized evening courses for local workers, farmers, war veterans and sympathizers of the 'Flemish cause'.<sup>11</sup> In Izegem, a small industrial town near Kortrijk, Spruytte's initiative caused a schism within the Catholic workers' community. Spruytte's engagement hence became more and more political, even though he never aspired a position under the political footlights – not only because the episcopal authorities urged him to act accordingly, as they indicated with his removal to the tiny parish of Slijpe, near Middelkerke, in 1935, but also because he held the opinion that it was his duty to assume a kind of aristocratic unapproachability.<sup>12</sup> In spite of his uninterrupted adherence to Neo-Thomistic thinking, Nietzsche's vocabulary entered Spruytte's discourse. In a letter of 9 September 1925, he referred to Nietzsche's self-characterization as 'dynamite'<sup>13</sup> and in the same month, he held a presentation about 'the psychology of the class struggle'.<sup>14</sup> Spruytte sympathized increasingly with the anti-modernist politics of the 'conservative revolution', in which he perceived a restorative, instead of a destructive and nihilistic, force.<sup>15</sup> His main source of influence undoubtedly was the Viennese economist and sociologist Othmar Spann and his plea for a corporatistically organized society. In his works, Spann proved himself a radical opponent of all individualist ideologies, because they disrupt the organic cohesion within a community. In Nietzsche's critique of slave morality and his philosophy of the will to power and the 'Übermensch', Spruytte found support for his synthetic and organicist worldview. Very much in line with what happened to Spann himself, Spruytte's corporatist views gave rise to a progressive rapprochement with Fascist and National Socialist factions, supporting an authoritarian concept of leadership and declining contemporary liberal democracy, whose 'political parties' in fact instigate and organize the decay of society. Spruytte manifested himself as one of the most powerful advocates of Flemish nationalist

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*Disfigured Face: Traditional Natural Law and Its Encounter with Modernity* (New York: Fordham UP, 2008), pp. 77-78 and Hansen, 'Zicht op Morgenrood', pp. 15-25.

<sup>10</sup> Verstraete, *Odiel Spruytte*, pp. 254-255.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Bruno De Wever, *Greep naar de macht. Vlaams-nationalisme en Nieuwe Orde. Het VNV 1933-1944* (Tielt: Lannoo, 1994), p. 112 about Reimond Tollenaere's attendance in Zwevegem in 1933. Tollenaere was at that time propaganda leader of the Flemish nationalist party VNV ('Vlaams Nationaal Verbond', 'Flemish National League') and later became active in the Waffen-SS.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Spruytte's advice to VNV-frontman Staf De Clercq about authoritarian leadership, De Wever, *Greep naar de macht*, p. 238.

<sup>13</sup> Verstraete, *Odiel Spruytte*, p. 163. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo. Wie man wird, was man ist*. (Kritische Studienausgabe der Werke, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari, vol. 6, München: dtv/Berlin: De Gruyter 1988<sup>2</sup>), p. 365: 'Ich bin kein Mensch, ich bin Dynamit' ('I am not a human being, I am dynamite').

<sup>14</sup> Verstraete, *Odiel Spruytte*, p. 125. Similar collocations with 'psychology' occur frequently in Nietzsche's late works (e.g. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, pp. 352-353: 'Psychologie des Christentums' ('psychology of Christianity'), 'Psychologie des Gewissens' ('psychology of conscience'), and 'die erste Psychologie des Priesters' ('the first psychology of the priest').

<sup>15</sup> De Wever, *Greep naar de macht*, p. 239.

radicals, striving for a re-unification with the North and organizing themselves to gain power in the Belgian political establishment; his societal utopia was the re-establishment of a technocratic, non-party *medieval democracy*.<sup>16</sup> Particularly between 1927 and 1931, Spruytte wrote numerous articles for the radical journal *Jong Dietschland*, under the pseudonym 'H. Verdonck'.<sup>17</sup> In January 1934, he gave a presentation about Italian Fascism and its leader Mussolini. From 1936 onwards, he was committed to the journal *Volk en Staat*, which was linked to the Flemish nationalist VNV.<sup>18</sup> At this point in time, Spruytte reached his political summit: he gained the confidence of Staf De Clercq, leader of the VNV, who was re-elected in the Belgian Parliament in 1936. Spruytte is believed to have been the driving force behind the further radicalization of the VNV, as claims De Wever, also on the basis of documents in the archives of the Belgian secret services.<sup>19</sup> In September 1936, the VNV negotiated with Flemish nationalist Catholic partisans to launch a 'Flemish concentration' ('Vlaamse concentratie'). Spruytte attended some of the meetings and eventually advised De Clercq not to accept the agreement with the 'too moderate' Catholics. A further political initiative was Spruytte's textual contribution to the VNV convention ('Landdag') in June 1937.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Kultuurleven***

While deploying these political activities and strategies, Spruytte had also found connection with the philosophical periodical *Kultuurleven*. The periodical was founded around 1930 at the Higher Institute of Philosophy at the Catholic University of Leuven and had the ambition to popularize the intellectual horizon of Neo-Thomistic thought (its full name being: 'Thomistisch tijdschrift voor katholiek Kultuurleven') and hence a complementary medium to the other Leuven based journal *Revue de Philosophie Néo-Scolastique*. It found its inspiration from the Dominican priest Felix Morlion and his adherence to the 'Catholic offensive'-movement, which aimed at the re-Christianization of contemporary society. The periodical had a broad European scope, devoted

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Othmar Spann, *Der wahre Staat: Vorlesungen über Abbruch und Neubau der Gesellschaft* (Jena: Fischer, 1938<sup>4</sup>). See also: De Wever, *Greep naar de macht*, p. 263.

<sup>17</sup> Verstraete, *Odiel Spruytte*, pp. 182-183, 186ff. and De Wever, *Greep naar de macht*, p. 76.

<sup>18</sup> Verstraete collected 26 article titles in *Volk en Staat*, of which 18 were published in 1937 (cf. Verstraete, *Odiel Spruytte*, p. 338).

<sup>19</sup> De Wever quotes in this respect at length a letter from Spruytte to De Clercq: 'We have to push through this concentration within the people behind their backs, and drag along with us all that is not frozen or old by means of our dynamism and our loyalty. Meanwhile, they will learn. You, no less than I, do not deem necessary that the vnv takes over the government already tomorrow. We have a lot of engaging to do, a lot of work to do in breadth and even more in depth, so that we are resistant and strong enough of mind and heart, without drowning the danger of taking in hand the rule of the state. As a party of unswerving loyalty and braveness, we become every day more and more the real Flanders and they ... the rotten Flanders.' ('Wij moeten die concentratie achter hun rug in het volk doordrijven en wel door langs de weg van ons dynamisme en onze trouw alles mee te slepen wat niet star en oud is. Intussen zullen zij leren. Gij, niet meer dan ik, vindt niet dat het nodig is dat het vnv morgen reeds de regering in handen neemt. Wij hebben nog veel te werven, veel werk in de breedte en nog meer in de diepte moet gedaan worden, opdat wij zouden bestand en sterk genoeg zijn van geest en hart, zonder gevaar te verdrinken het staatsbestuur in handen te nemen. Als partij der onwrikbare trouw en der dapperheid worden wij iedere dag meer en meer het ware Vlaanderen en zij... het vermolmde Vlaanderen.' (De Wever, *Greep naar de macht*, p. 231)).

<sup>20</sup> De Wever, *Greep naar de macht*, p. 234.

issues to current developments in politics<sup>21</sup> and welcomed contributions by prominent conservative (and often vehemently anti-communist) Catholics, such as the Flemish nationalist priest Cyriel Verschaeve, the future Belgian Prime Minister Gaston Eyskens, the theologian Charles De Koninck and the German poet Gertrud Von Le Fort. When looking at the whole spectrum of titles from the issues published between 1930 and the German invasion in May 1940, the periodical has no specific German bias, although the philosophical and ideological orientation is clear. In 1931, for instance, several contributions dealt with the recently deceased phenomenologist Max Scheler, the priest and moral philosopher Joseph Mausbach, the anti-Semitic advocate of cultural Catholicism Julius Langbehn and, more critically, the pacifist writer Erich Maria Remarque. Later on, some authors focused on the cultural pessimist Oswald Spengler, the Jesuit theologian Heinrich Pesch, on the evangelical Church father Karl Barth, the mystagogical poet Friedrich Hölderlin (with whom Martin Heidegger was also engaged at that time), and in 1939 even on Sigmund Freud, who passed away that year in London. Several articles address political issues, such as Hitler and National Socialism or, prophetically, the 1940-issue: the phenomenon of war. Many of the authors do not hide their sympathy for Spann's corporatism and its synthetic, anti-atomistic worldview as well as for Catholic rejuvenation projects in Belgium and abroad.

Spruytte published his first article in *Kultuurleven* in 1934. It is a standard entry of a new contributor to this new print medium: a review of an Aquinas monograph by the German Jesuit Edelbert (not Engelbert, as is misspelled in the article) Kurz (*Individuum und Gesellschaft beim Hl. Thomas von Aquin*, 1932) under the programmatic title: 'Individual and Community' ('Individu en Gemeenschap'), and it deals with the relationship between *bonum commune* and *bonum privatum*.<sup>22</sup> Kurz's objective clearly was to move away from an individualistic reading of Aquinas and hence to move his theology closer to contemporary corporatism and anti-individualism. His conclusion is clear: individual humans are subservient to the state in earthly matters, but in religious matters, they are to be incorporated in the community of the body of Christ. It is remarkable with what ease early twentieth century authors hark back to romantic organicist rhetoric in the style of Adam Müller.<sup>23</sup> Spruytte adopted this very same vocabulary, as he would do in all his other contributions to the periodical, but he went one step further. He called individualism a 'fraud' and supported Kurz's critique, but he found his division of earthly and religious matters artificial and mechanistic – a noticeable reproach.<sup>24</sup> From the perspective of natural law, the only true state is the 'ethical' state, founded upon supernatural justice and thus stemming from the individual rights that do not come to their full expression but in a communal environment.

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<sup>21</sup> In 1937, an issue focused on Bolshevism and Communism, as a response to the outburst of the Spanish Civil War and to the propaganda to mobilize international volunteers.

<sup>22</sup> Odiel Spruytte, 'Individu en gemeenschap,' in *Kultuurleven* 5/6 (1934), pp. 781-788.

<sup>23</sup> Here, again, the influence of Spann is conspicuous: Spann was one of the editors of the critical edition of the works of Adam Müller. Cf. Benjamin Biebuyck, 'Interkulturalität und Krise: Erlebtes Europa bei Thomas Mann und Annette Kolb.' In Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf and Florian Kläger (eds.), *Europa gibt es doch... Krisendiskurse im Blick der Literatur* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2016), pp. 164-167.

<sup>24</sup> Spruytte, 'Individu en gemeenschap,' p. 781, 786.

## ***More to Come***

The editorial board was very enthusiastic about Spruytte's first contribution. In a letter to the author Ferdinand Lauwers, a key figure in the journal before the Second World War, wrote: 'Thank you very much for your very topical and very solid article. I have sent it immediately to the publisher so that it can appear in the January-issue. Articles such as this one make one long for more...'<sup>25</sup> And more was about to come. Between 1934 and 1940, Spruytte published no less than twelve substantial articles in *Kultuurleven* and hence proved to be one of the most prolific authors in the periodical. In 1936, he published a second review, this time about Victor Leemans' book *Politieke sociologie*, which had appeared in that same year.<sup>26</sup> Leemans was a Catholic corporatist politician and editor-in-chief between 1926 and 1930 of *Jong Dietschland*, the conservative Flemish nationalist newspaper Spruytte had contributed more than 80 articles to in the 1920s and the early 1930s; he sympathized with the legal philosophy of Carl Schmitt and vulgarized it in Belgian political circles. The overall tone of the review is enthusiastic: Leemans succeeds in clarifying that sociology should not be a purely academic discipline, but rather be at the service of the political tendencies in society. He should be careful, Spruytte added, not to forget the metaphysical dimension of the questions it investigates, 'the essential interconnectedness of the universal order'.<sup>27</sup> But on the whole, Leemans – who would carry political responsibility during the Second World War and became a senator for the Christian Popular Party (CVP) afterwards – displays a kind of reflection addressing the needs of our time: 'a thinking that struggles and a struggle that thinks' ('een vechtend denken en een denkend vechten').<sup>28</sup>

Yet, already in 1935, *Kultuurleven* offered Spruytte a forum for his own line of thought. In two separate issues he unfolded what he considered to be a 'new philosophy' ('De nieuwe denkhouding') and a 'new ethical stance' ('De nieuwe ethische houding'). Both texts went back to a lecture Spruytte had given in January 1934 for the Saint-Thomas-society in Ghent, a Dominican initiative for students at the university that had replaced French as the official language by Dutch only a couple of years before and hence could be considered a fertile environment for the 'Flemish movement'. The articles obviously have a strong Thomistic undercurrent with a manifestly corporatist tone. Spruytte diagnosed contemporary society as 'rotten, corrupt and dead' ('voos, onwaar, dood')<sup>29</sup> and observed in recent political changes the signs of a spiritual turn, which may set free a 'new human type': the '*human of the full living truth*' ('*de mensch der volle levende waarheid*').<sup>30</sup> Thinkers should not complacently lag behind in abstract philosophy, but should use analogical reasoning to seek the intrinsic cohesion between the micro- and the macrocosmic.

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<sup>25</sup> 'Hartelijk dank voor uw zeer actueel en zeer degelijk artikel. Ik heb het onmiddellijk naar den drukker doorgestuurd opdat het nog in het januari-nummer zou kunnen verschijnen. Zuke artikelen doen verlangen naar meer...'. Quoted in Verstraete, *Odiel Spruytte*, p. 256.

<sup>26</sup> Odiel Spruytte, "'Politieke Sociologie' door Victor Leemans,' in *Kultuurleven* 8/4 (1936), pp. 434-440.

<sup>27</sup> Spruytte, 'Politieke Sociologie,' p. 438.

<sup>28</sup> Spruytte, 'Politieke Sociologie,' p. 440.

<sup>29</sup> Odiel Spruytte, 'De nieuwe denkhouding,' in *Kultuurleven* 6/1 (1935), p. 49; cf. Odiel Spruytte, 'De nieuwe ethische houding,' in *Kultuurleven* 7/4 (1936), pp. 458-467.

<sup>30</sup> Spruytte, 'De nieuwe denkhouding,' p. 43. Italics in original.



Thus, they may become parts (cf. the platonic *methexis*) of the richness and beauty of all that is and reinforce the ‘lifting power’ (‘stijgkracht’) of society.<sup>31</sup> Their knowing will be a form of ‘con-naître’, of ‘coming into the world together’, and of ‘intus-legere’: to see (and read) inwardly.<sup>32</sup>

In particular, the third article that appeared in *Kultuurleven* in 1935 (‘Het Staatsbegrip van het Universalisme’) presents a comprehensive exposition of Spann’s political theory.<sup>33</sup> It displays the way in which Spruytte operationalizes Spann’s holistic rhetoric, such as the ‘Ganzheit’ (totality), ‘Wertgemeinschaft’, ‘Wertwelt’ and ‘Wertkosmos’ (communities based on shared sets of values), ‘Stand’, ‘Vorstand’ and ‘Vollstand’ (‘class’, ‘order’), and ‘Gezweigung’.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the article celebrates an ethics of courage and bravery, but also of measure, prudence, and spiritual nobility, a social model of technocratic elitism and authoritarian leadership and a ‘living thinking’ that acknowledges all that goes up (‘opgaat’) and goes under (‘ondergaat’ – this conceptual pair resonates the rhetoric of ‘Untergang’ and ‘Übergang’ in *Zarathustra*).<sup>35</sup> This connection, which necessitates destruction as a precondition for a new beginning, was not an ironic reference to the fact that Spann, who enjoyed the support of the German National Socialists in the 1920s, had already fallen from grace and that only a few years later (in 1938), he would end up in a concentration camp himself.<sup>36</sup> It definitely was a sign of Spruytte’s renewed interest in Nietzsche, whom he explicitly mentioned. Spruytte would devote in the following years no more than one article to his own philosophical trajectory: a contribution on the importance of the Thomasian notion of *magnanimity*.<sup>37</sup> But even this article fundamentally testifies of his long-term and renewed engagement with Nietzsche, up to the conclusion that pleads for a combination of bestowing love and the willingness to struggle – the vocabulary itself could have been directly borrowed from Nietzschean writings.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Catholic without his Knowing***

As already mentioned above, Spruytte was exiled by the Belgian episcopate to the tiny parish of Slijpe in 1935. His priestly responsibilities were limited and he found ample opportunity to reread his Nietzsche-library, taking notes and underlining in his volumes, indexing quotes and comments in his extensive filing card system (in Luhmannian style) and going through the

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<sup>31</sup> Spruytte, ‘De nieuwe denkhouding’, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> Spruytte, ‘De nieuwe denkhouding’, p. 50.

<sup>33</sup> Odiel Spruytte, ‘Het Staatsbegrip van het Universalisme,’ in *Kultuurleven* 6/2 (1935), pp. 178-208.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. e.g. Spann, *Der wahre Staat*, p. 21.

<sup>35</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* (Kritische Studienausgabe der Werke, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari, vol. 4, München: dtv/Berlin: De Gruyter 1988<sup>2</sup>), p. 17.

<sup>36</sup> Sabine A. Haring, ‘Spann, Othmar,’ in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (NDB), vol. 24 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2010), pp. 629-630.

<sup>37</sup> Odiel Spruytte, ‘De moderne Heldenvereering en de Deugd van Grootmoedigheid,’ in *Kultuurleven* 10/1 (1939), pp. 4-17.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. e.g. Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, p. 97.

relevant secondary literature.<sup>39</sup> The collection of the KULAK university library in Kortrijk includes a number of volumes that can be traced back to Spruytte: the two volumes of the Nietzsche-biography by his sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche (the 1913 edition); the six volumes of the extensive pioneering study by the French scholar Charles Andler, a monograph by Ernst Horneffer, who took part in the historical-critical editions of Nietzsche's works, supervised by his sister, an introductory work by Raoul Richter, comparative studies by Joseph Bernhart and Karl Löwith, who was the colleague and friend of Heidegger in Marburg, but had to leave Germany during the national-socialist dictatorship, and the famous book by Ernst Bertram, a scholar from the George-Kreis, in French translation.<sup>40</sup> In none of these books, we have found substantial annotations, only underlined passages. Unfortunately, it was impossible to systematically inspect Spruytte's proper volumes of books written by Nietzsche, since only few of them could be localised. What we do know, is that he consistently refers to the so-called *Großoktavausgabe*, a twenty-volume edition of Nietzsche's collected works (commissioned by the Nietzsche-archive in Weimar and published from 1899 until 1909 by Naumann and from 1909 onwards by Kröner)<sup>41</sup>, which is crucial to understand some of the misreadings Spruytte makes. We also know that his filing system was anything but infallible – there are quite some corrupt quotes and references, for instance<sup>42</sup> –, but that is not the point here. We do know for sure that Spruytte had also read Karl Jaspers' *Nietzsche: Einführung in das Verständnis seines Philosophierens*, which was published in 1936, but is not part of the KULAK collection. Spruytte's reading of Jaspers proves the persistency with which he pursued his philosophical path.<sup>43</sup> All this reading and investigating resulted in no less than six articles, all published between 1937 and 1940. Nietzsche was quite popular at that time as a representative of anti-establishment politics, particularly in right-wing contexts, all over Europe. Spruytte is no exception in this sense – he was, for instance, well

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<sup>39</sup> In a letter to Wieber, Spruytte indicates that he was rereading his entire Nietzsche library ('herlezen van a tot z'), albeit in 'small doses' ('kleine dosis'), to prevent 'choking and suffocation' ('verslikt en versmacht men eraan') (quoted in Verstraete, *Odiel Spruytte*, p. 255).

<sup>40</sup> These are the titles from the Spruytte collection (with the friendly help of Liesbeth Deprez): Förster-Nietzsche, *Das Leben Friedrich Nietzsches*; Bernhart, *Meister Eckhart und Nietzsche: ein Vergleich für die Gegenwart*; Andler, *Les précurseurs de Nietzsche*; *La jeunesse de Nietzsche jusqu'à la rupture avec Bayreuth*; *Le pessimisme esthétique de Nietzsche: sa philosophie à l'époque wagnerienne*; *La maturité de Nietzsche jusqu'à sa mort*; *Nietzsche et le transformisme intellectualiste: la philosophie de sa période française*; *La dernière philosophie de Nietzsche: le renouvellement de toutes les valeurs*; Richter, *Friedrich Nietzsche: sein Leben und sein Werk*; Löwith, *Kierkegaard und Nietzsche oder theologische und philosophische Überwindung des Nihilismus*; Bertram, *Nietzsche: essai de mythologie*; Horneffer, *Nietzsche als Vorbote der Gegenwart*.

<sup>41</sup> The commentaries to the texts were written by Arthur Seidl, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, Heinrich Köselitz, Ernst Holzer, Ernst and August Horneffer, Otto Weiß, Otto Crusius and Wilhelm Nestle. The twentieth volume was a register, edited by Nietzsche's nephew Richard Oehler, which was not added to the edition until 1926. The fact that Spruytte mentions a twenty-volume edition (e.g. Odiel Spruytte, 'Nietzsche's Posing tot een "Godelooze Mystiek"' (part I) in *Kultuurleven* 8/5 (1937), p. 524) suggests that he had this version. The KULAK collection consists of three volumes: vol. 15, 16 (both from the second edition, published in 1911) and vol. 20 of the *Großoktavausgabe*.

<sup>42</sup> Odiel Spruytte, 'Nietzsche's Posing tot een "Godelooze Mystiek"' (part II) in *Kultuurleven* 8/6 (1937), p. 684.

<sup>43</sup> Spruytte mentions Jaspers in the second part of his 1937 article: Spruytte, 'Godelooze Mystiek (II),' p. 690.

acquainted with the writings of the French critic Thierry Maulnier.<sup>44</sup> But what is remarkable, is that these six articles have delivered us a kind of intellectual diary of Spruytte's Nietzsche-reception in those unfathomable years before the outbreak of the Second World War – the years in which the Austro-Fascist movement with which Spann had been associated, was definitively eliminated, in which the Flemish nationalists negotiated their coalition with anti-Belgian and anti-establishment conservative Catholics<sup>45</sup> and eventually had to decide whether or not they saw their future in a grand alliance with German National Socialism, and potentially incorporated in the German Reich with its imperial allure, or rather in a much more modest form of 'self-government' ('zelf-regering'<sup>46</sup>) within a Belgian confederate construction.

Spruytte's contemporaries were affirmative: Spruytte was beyond any doubt the most notable and the most exceptional of Flemish, Dutch-speaking Nietzsche-specialists.<sup>47</sup> It is true that his discussions of Nietzsche's texts, although they irrefutably bear witness to the (multi-faceted) intellectual context in which his reception took place, display solid research and attentive reading. In 1937, *Kultuurleven* published in two instalments Spruytte's confrontation with Nietzschean mysticism ('Nietzsche's Poging tot een "Godelooze Mystiek"'). Spruytte called Nietzsche's philosophical trajectory 'demonic', 'promethean' and 'Luciferian', because it sees nor accepts any limitations.<sup>48</sup> He accurately described the different phases in Nietzsche's thinking and emphasized that Nietzsche ends up in a straddle between profane rationalism and a nihilistic and mythical celebration of the instincts. Spruytte ascribed this partially to Nietzsche's Protestant asceticism and sees him in one line with Renan and Schopenhauer, as his philosophy teachers in Leuven had done some twenty years before. However, at the same time, Spruytte concluded that Nietzsche's 'tragic atheism' has a fundamentally mystical orientation. Particularly in the second part, Spruytte observed that Nietzsche's critique of Christianity in fact was a critique of the petty-bourgeois superficiality of nineteenth-century Protestantism, and that Nietzsche's conclusions may have been erratic – which was eventually proven by his own self-destruction (like many of his contemporaries, Spruytte failed to acknowledge the possibility that Nietzsche may simply have been ill), yet his diagnoses of the state of affairs were essentially accurate. Whereas the general tone of the two articles is one of dismissal, we can observe in the latter half of the argument that Spruytte develops a form of prudent sympathy. Nietzsche was, after all, not well-informed about Catholicism, and where he is, there are in his works enthusiastic acclamations of its historical importance as well as of the significance of the historical Christ. In the end, Spruytte can just refrain from stating that Nietzsche had been a Catholic without his knowing, but the conclusion is clearly that his struggle with Christian spirituality is nothing else than a testimony

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. e.g. Thierry Maulnier, *Friedrich Nietzsche* (Paris: Librairie de la revue française, 1933). See: Mary Ann Frese Witt, *The Search for Modern Tragedy: Aesthetic Fascism in Italy and France* (Ithaca/London: Cornell UP, 2001), pp. 140-142.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. De Wever, *Greep naar de macht*, pp. 225-231: the agreement between VNV and the Rexist movement and the negotiations to come to a 'concentration' with the Catholic Union ('Katholieke Unie') and its subdivision, the Catholic Flemish Popular Party ('Katholieke Vlaamse Volkspartij').

<sup>46</sup> De Wever, *Greep naar de macht*, p. 239.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Verstraete, *Odiel Spruytte*, p. 254.

<sup>48</sup> Spruytte, 'Godelooze Mystiek (I),' pp. 524-525.

of his suppressed life-long adherence to it.<sup>49</sup> This may explain why Spruytte did not classify Nietzsche's thought as an actual form of 'godless mysticism', but, as the title of the articles indicate, as an 'attempt towards' ('poging tot') it. The article ends in a cautious tone: beware of the abyss in which Nietzsche has jumped, but be inspired by the courage of his leap – a courage that is necessary to establish the overall restoration to which only Catholic faith can lead.

### ***Politics and Race***

One year later, Spruytte continued his philosophical search and published his third article on Nietzsche in *Kultuurleven* ('Fr. Nietzsche en de Rastheorie'). In the late 1930s, the National Socialist seizure of Nietzsche's thought in Germany was more or less complete. Charles Andler had already claimed that Nietzsche had been an enthusiastic reader of Gobineau, and Marius-Paulin Nicolas' 1936 monograph *De Nietzsche à Hitler*, which according to Verstraete was part of Spruytte's library (and which Spruytte quotes in the article), compellingly claimed that Nietzsche's writings on race had had a huge influence on Rosenberg's racial theories and on Bäumler's assertions on the Germanic (*Nietzsche als Philosoph und Politiker*, 1931).<sup>50</sup> On top of that, Spruytte realized that Nietzsche's thinking had to be situated in the context of the biological theories of Darwin and Lamarck.<sup>51</sup> Whereas the priest had until this point strongly supported the prevailing reading of Nietzsche as a form of heroic spiritual nobility, Spruytte here actually went against the grain. Nietzsche's references to race, he stated, were not to be read as instances of biological descent, but rather as considerations with respect to culture and education. There is no 'racial dogmatism' in Nietzsche's writings ('Nietzsche doet niet aan rasdogmatisme'), he claims, there is nothing biologicistic to it.<sup>52</sup> If Nietzsche may have had an influence on National Socialism, he concludes, it must have been on the field of ethics, and not on that of natural sciences.<sup>53</sup> The remarkable thing about this is not simply that Spruytte's reading was correct, but much rather that he argued against the scholarly consensus that was establishing itself at that time. It is impossible to find out why exactly Spruytte wanted to make this corrective public, but it can be seen as a symptom of his shifting appreciation for Nietzsche. In the first two articles, Nietzsche was wrong, Spruytte argued, but in his wrongness, there was still something right. The third article balances on the public statement that the National Socialist reading of Nietzsche was essentially erroneous, and perhaps instrumentalised Nietzsche to question the widespread racial concepts of this time.

In 1939, Spruytte once again published two extensive Nietzsche articles. The first addressed Nietzsche's relevance with respect to the prevailing political crisis.<sup>54</sup> In general, Spruytte returned to the corporatist rhetoric of his earlier publications and repeated in (consequently) anti-democratic mode his critique of twentieth-century cultural degradation. Nietzsche had by now

<sup>49</sup> Spruytte, 'Godelooze Mystiek (II)', p. 687.

<sup>50</sup> Odiel Spruytte, 'Fr. Nietzsche en de Rastheorie,' in *Kultuurleven* 9/5 (1938), p. 652.

<sup>51</sup> Spruytte, 'Rastheorie,' p. 657.

<sup>52</sup> Spruytte, 'Rastheorie,' p. 666.

<sup>53</sup> Spruytte, 'Rastheorie,' p. 668: 'Nietzsche is rather the philosopher of "Grand Politics" than the philosopher of racism.' ('Nietzsche is meer de filosoof van de "grootte politiek" dan de filosoof van het racisme.')

<sup>54</sup> Odiel Spruytte, 'Fr. Nietzsche en de Politieke Crisis,' in *Kultuurleven* 10/4 (1939), pp. 412-432.

become an increasingly positive source of inspiration: his view that democratic politics favour a weak type of human and subject the intrinsic qualities of the strong to the power of the sheer number, is brought in line with Spannian corporatism, to the extent even that Nietzsche becomes an organic corporatist himself.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Thomas Aquinas, who in the earlier articles had been a beacon of intellectual stability against Nietzsche's wild speculations, now is staged as a kind of supporter of Nietzsche, who defends the primacy of the will over ratio<sup>56</sup> – even if Nietzsche had failed to see that 'greatness' is not a virtue in itself, but a meta-virtue that actively infects other virtues. This does not mean that Spruytte actually reinvented or even falsified his earlier readings of Thomas, but it is a noticeable observation that he no longer confronted them in a bipolar opposition, but rather as allies against contemporary decadence. Spruytte goes on to indicate that Nietzsche did not support any nationalist logic, but instead defended a European model of the new human, who is and will be an essentially mixed and hybrid being, and a European league of nations as a new form of 'grand politics'.<sup>57</sup> Whether or not this is a true intuition, Spruytte could not conclude, but what he could and did state is that Nietzsche accurately predicted the political crisis in Europe, the ruin of the state because of the introduction of democratic values, and the metamorphosis of the current political order into a form of new 'Caesarism'.<sup>58</sup> Hence, the readers should not be afraid of Nietzsche, but should rather be 'grateful' for his (in essence anti-Christian) plea for 'furthest-love' ('versten-liefde'<sup>59</sup>). The accuracy of this prediction hints at a new role that is attributed to Nietzsche in Spruytte's changing reception mode: that of the prophet who went down under the pressure of his own prophecies.

### ***A Critique of Imperialism***

The second article published in 1939 is the first part of a larger analysis of Nietzsche's views of (political and military) imperialism. It obtained its full range in Spruytte's sixth and last article, a long contribution that remained probably unfinished, as emerges from the compilation of quotations in the last part of the text. The article appeared in the May issue of 1940, shortly after which Spruytte deceased.<sup>60</sup> Conspicuously, Spruytte did not refer in the title of his article to the significance of imperialism as such, but rather to 'modern imperialism' and thus clearly alluded to Nazi-expansionism in Austria, Sudetenland and Poland. Before unfolding his argument, Spruytte acknowledged Nietzsche's huge impact on present-day politics. The central question for Spruytte was: what does Nietzsche mean when he says that war elevates humankind?<sup>61</sup> Spruytte

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<sup>55</sup> Spruytte, 'Politieke Crisis,' p. 418.

<sup>56</sup> Spruytte, 'Politieke Crisis,' p. 418: 'The principle of order is not reason, as in the adage of Saint Thomas: *rationis est ordinare*. It is the will.' ('Het princip van orde is niet het verstand, volgens het adagium van St. Thomas: *rationis est ordinare*. Het is de wil.')

<sup>57</sup> '[E]en Europeesche volkenbond', Spruytte, 'Politieke Crisis,' p. 423.

<sup>58</sup> Spruytte, 'Politieke Crisis,' p. 430.

<sup>59</sup> Spruytte, 'Politieke Crisis,' p. 431.

<sup>60</sup> Odiel Spruytte, 'Nietzsche en het modern Imperialisme', part I: 'Méér dan politiek,' in *Kultuurleven* 10/6 (1939), pp. 696-709, and part II: 'Vervolg: Het ééne Europa,' in *Kultuurleven* 11/3 (1940), pp. 280-296.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Benjamin Biebuyck, 'On War and Warriors: Friedrich Nietzsche,' in Danny Praet (ed.), *Philosophy of War and Peace* (Brussels: VUB Press, 2017), pp. 165-180.

demonstrated that Nietzsche considered nationalism to be a form of illness and that war in his use means a struggle of values and thoughts, hence a spiritual, but never an imperialist warfare. Modern imperialism on the contrary has nothing to do with Nietzsche, who criticized its predatory attitude: it focuses on the destruction of the other, instead of on the elevation of the self. Hence, the author concluded the first part, Nietzsche demonstrated that ‘the imperialist synthesis ends up in fragmentation,’ instead of in organic cohesion.<sup>62</sup> Spruytte did not use so many words, but the conclusion seems to be that modern imperialism will not end the crisis of democracy. Instead, Nietzsche propagated to overcome ‘nationalist narrow-mindedness’<sup>63</sup> and to establish a ‘European class of rulers,’ which will have to incorporate its ‘Germanic,’ ‘Slavic,’ ‘French’ and ‘Jewish’ components and not enclose itself in German-nationalist navel-gazing.<sup>64</sup> To reach this goal, Europe will not have to wage war, but rather explore forms of ‘heroic pacifism,’ a ‘spiritual struggle,’ which sees the symbolical potential in all reality and transforms (abstract) concepts into (concrete and tangible) images.<sup>65</sup> The only critique Spruytte had, was that Nietzsche deconstructed the natural character and natural rights of people as ‘fictions’ (‘fictieve dingen’<sup>66</sup>) and thus indirectly supported the political practice of imperialism. Having been a Flemish nationalist forever, Spruytte could obviously not disagree more, but then again, he presaged the glorious future of organized youth movements (‘de fantastische grootscheepsheid van nieuwe jeugdbewegingen in de toekomst’), a kind of future that had been the objective of Catholic rejuvenation all along.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, looking at this last article as a whole, we can summarize that Nietzsche had become a major source of inspiration who can lead contemporary humankind away from the crisis in which it finds itself.

### ***The Great Teacher and Saint***

It is correct that Spruytte never was an unconditional or unquestioning Nietzschean.<sup>68</sup> I think it is safe to state that his Thomistic evaluation of Nietzsche’s philosophy essentially remained unchanged until his sudden death in November 1940. Yet by showing us the gradual shifts in the way in which he brought Nietzsche to bear in his relationship to the political tendencies of the late 1930s, Spruytte’s writings offer us an opportunity to track his idiosyncratic Nietzsche-reception in much more detail than is the case in most other reception studies, simply because we have no less than six voluminous articles at our disposal that subtly reflect the vicissitudes of his assessment of the philosopher, as well as his relation towards the political circumstances of that time – and probably of others at that very time. The case of Odiel Spruytte bears witness to the possibilities of reception studies on a micrological level, to which we admittedly only seldom have access. In this respect, *Nietzsche’s cycle* – the book attributed to Spruytte by his posthumous

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<sup>62</sup> Spruytte, ‘Méer dan politiek,’ p. 709.

<sup>63</sup> [D]e afschaffing “der nationale geborneerdheid”,’ Spruytte, ‘Het ééne Europa,’ p. 280.

<sup>64</sup> [D] Europeesche heerschskaste,’ Spruytte, ‘Het ééne Europa,’ p. 282.

<sup>65</sup> [H]eroïsch pacifisme,’ ‘geestelijke kamp,’ Spruytte, ‘Het ééne Europa,’ pp. 294-295.

<sup>66</sup> Spruytte, ‘Het ééne Europa,’ p. 295.

<sup>67</sup> Spruytte, ‘Het ééne Europa,’ p. 296.

<sup>68</sup> Verstraete, *Odiel Spruytte*, p. 256.

editor Gaston Lambrechts, alias G. Van de Woude – gives us yet another understanding of this matter: not how Spruytte responded to the societal developments of his time, but how those who were responsible for his legacy, tried to conform these latest writings to the ideological mood they ascribed to the occupying forces and their censors. The philological interventions of the textual heirs were generically speaking of three main types: a subtle removal of the critical assessment in the early texts by Spruytte on Nietzsche; a reinforcement of the positive evaluation in the later texts; and the toning down of Spruytte’s qualification of Nietzsche as a child of his time – these elements seem to have been considered not to be expedient in February 1944, and this for reasons I am inclined to understand.<sup>69</sup> The textual differences between the articles published in *Kultuurleven* and the text in *Nietzsche’s kringloop* are so blatant that a systematic comparison is hardly feasible. The posthumous compilation is characteristic for the interventionist ‘philology’ of this time, which considered an entire stylistic makeover acceptable in order to make the quintessential content of the text more visible – not critically assessing, of course, what that quintessential message might have been. *Nietzsche’s cycle*, drawing back on the six Nietzsche articles, not surprisingly begins with an excerpt from the 1938 article on Nietzsche and race. Yet, the entire passage in which Spruytte demonstrates that Nietzsche’s concept of ‘Volk’ differs fundamentally from that of National-Socialism and that he uncovers any racial or racist politics as a lie (‘Elke poging tot terugkeer naar een ideaal van raszuiverheid stoot af bij de werkelijkheid en steunt op leugen’<sup>70</sup>), was deleted resolutely from Van de Woude’s commemorative artefact.<sup>71</sup>

What remains remarkable, however, is that Spruytte never addressed Nietzsche’s only explicit reference to the writings of Thomas Aquinas. It occurs in the work most readers consider to be Nietzsche’s most important philosophical text, but to which Spruytte for one reason or the other in any case referred reluctantly: *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), in which he amongst others analyses the psychology of the ‘ascetic priest’.<sup>72</sup> The *Genealogy* was published in volume 7 of the *Großoktav*, together with *Beyond Good and Evil*, which Spruytte abundantly quoted. In all the articles, I have found one single and discreet reference to the *Genealogy*: ‘Our attitude towards God is *hybris*.’<sup>73</sup> This quote proves that Spruytte had indeed read and annotated the polemical book. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche exposed that the Christian love for the neighbour is in fact no less than the enjoyment of the suffering of others. To criticize this implicit sadistic hunger for power, characterizing the entire Christian tradition, Nietzsche used the words of the ‘great teacher and saint’<sup>74</sup> Aquinas, disguised as a lamb: ‘Beati in regno coelesti

<sup>69</sup> What Van de Woude probably did not know, is that Herman Wolf, from whom he had taken the mottos in *Nietzsche’s cycle* was of Jewish descent – a potentially compromising allusion in 1944. Wolf died in May 1942 from a brain tumour, only months before the Dutch government started the concentration of Jews in Westerbork (cf. Paul Scheffer, *Alles doet mee aan de werkelijkheid. Herman Wolf (1893-1942)* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2013) – Wolf was Scheffer’s grandfather). Taking the overall tone of the Spruytte-edition into consideration, it is implausible that the reference to Wolf was a statement of subdued resistance; rather, the whole configuration must be seen as a case of ironic ignorance.

<sup>70</sup> Spruytte, ‘Rastheorie,’ p. 662.

<sup>71</sup> Spruytte, *Nietzsche’s Kringloop*, p. 25.

<sup>72</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral. Wie man wird, was man ist.* (Kritische Studienausgabe der Werke, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari, vol. 5, München: dtv/Berlin: De Gruyter 1988<sup>2</sup>), pp. 361-363.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Onze houding tegenover God is *hybris*,’ Spruytte, ‘Godelooze mystiek (II),’ p. 652; ‘*Hybris* ist unsre Stellung zu Gott,’ Nietzsche, *Genealogie*, p. 357.

<sup>74</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogie*, p. 284.

videbunt poenas damnatorum, ut beatitudo illis magis complaceat.<sup>75</sup> Such irony, in the end, went beyond the scope of what was feasible for Spruytte, in any circumstances.

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<sup>75</sup> The quotation comes from Aquinas' *Super Sententiis* (lib. 4 d. 50 q. 2 a. 4 qc. 1 co.); the standard translation goes as follows: 'the blessed in the kingdom of heaven will see the punishments of those who are damned, in order that their bliss may be more delightful to them.'



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