



## Paul de Man as Translator and 'Intercultural Mediator' in Occupied Belgium (1940-1944)<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** The contribution of future Belgo-American university professor Paul de Man (1919-1983) to the collaborationist press in occupied Belgium has not been studied from the perspective of cultural transfer research. This essay offers a comprehensive analytical approach to de Man's work as an 'intercultural mediator' during World War II, considering his numerous articles on foreign literatures published in *Le Soir* and other French- and Dutch-language Belgian newspapers under German occupation as well as his translations from German and Dutch/Flemish into French. The study will necessarily take the systemic context of intellectual collaboration into consideration, especially as far as the networks of editorial life and of transnational Franco-German cultural relationships during the Nazi regime are concerned.

**Key words.** Cultural transfer / Cultuurtransfer; literary translation and cultural life in Nazi Germany / literaire vertaling en cultureel leven in Nazi-Duitsland; Franco-German cultural exchange / Duits-Franse culturele bemiddeling; Paul de Man; editorial life in occupied Belgium / uitgevers in bezet België; intellectual collaboration in occupied Belgium / intellectuele collaboratie

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It was not until 1987, four years after his death, that the young art and literary critic Paul de Man, who would later become one of the major representatives of the intellectual school of deconstruction, was revealed to have gained great cultural influence during World War II. He, indeed, published quite intensively in the French- and Dutch-language Belgian press, particularly in the influential daily publication *Le Soir* that had been 'taken over' by the Germans. In 1988, a corpus of almost 300 articles and shorter book reviews, re-published in the collection *Wartime Journalism 1939-1943*,<sup>2</sup> caused widespread controversy, particularly within deconstruction philosophers and theorists, who felt completely undermined by the revelation of the collaborationist background of one of their most famous colleagues.<sup>3</sup>

In particular the article titled *Les Juifs dans la littérature actuelle* [Jews in Current Literature] (*Le Soir*, 4 March 1941) attracted attention. Still under the shock of reading this text, Jacques Derrida described the last paragraph as revealing 'de l'antisémitisme avéré, un antisémitisme plus grave que jamais dans une telle situation, un antisémitisme qui ne serait pas loin de pousser aux exclusions, voire aux déportations les plus sinistres' [recognized antisemitism, an antisemitism more serious than ever in such a situation, an antisemitism that would have come close to urging exclusions, even the most sinister deportations].<sup>4</sup> In particular, de Man found it 'réconfortant' [comforting] that western intellectuals were 'capables de se sauvegarder de l'influence juive dans un domaine aussi représentatif de la culture que la littérature' [capable of preserving themselves from the Jewish influence in a field as representative of culture as it is of literature] which therefore proved 'leur vitalité' [their vitality].<sup>5</sup>

Beyond his unequivocal and repeated condemnation of de Man's text, Derrida engages in a deeper analysis of the young critic's contradictory reasoning and syllogisms, which are at times poorly developed.<sup>6</sup> He also refers to the particular conditions of the context of the publication: 'Qui saura comment, quelques mois plus tôt, 'Les Juifs dans la littérature actuelle' fut écrit et publié? Qui peut exclure ce qui se passe si souvent dans les journaux, et surtout à cette époque, dans ces conditions, quand la rédaction peut toujours intervenir au dernier moment?' [Who will ever know how, some months earlier, 'Les Juifs dans la littérature actuelle' was written and published? Who can exclude what happens so often in newspapers, and especially during that period, and in those conditions, when editors can always intervene at the last moment?].<sup>7</sup> This is

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<sup>2</sup> P. de Man, *Wartime Journalism*, ed. by W. Hamacher, N. Hertz and T. Keenan (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> The volume *Responses. On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism*, ed. by W. Hamacher, N. Hertz and T. Keenan (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989) contained some 40 essays written as critical responses to the socio-historic and theoretical implications of de Man's involvement in the collaboration, emanating from a large number of people who later supported his critical work. The publishers presented it as 'a not unrepresentative sampling of the research and thinking, interpretive and polemical, that the discovery of Paul de Man's Belgian writings has elicited' (foreword, p. viii). One may also find here the English version of the extended essay that Jacques Derrida devoted to 'Paul de Man's war' in 1988, which he included in the publication of three conference texts he had given in de Man's honor shortly after his death in 1984: J. Derrida, 'Comme le bruit de la mer au fond d'un coquillage. La guerre de Paul de Man', in idem, *Mémoires. Pour Paul de Man* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), pp. 147-232.

<sup>4</sup> Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 188. I quote from the English translation of this essay by Peggy Kamuf: J. Derrida, 'Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War', in *Responses*, p. 142.

<sup>5</sup> De Man, *Wartime Journalism*, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the in-depth analysis by Derrida, *Mémoires*, pp. 187-201.

<sup>7</sup> Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 200; Derrida, *Responses*, p. 147.

indeed where the crux of the matter resides. De Man was hired as an art critic by the editor-in-chief of *Le Soir*, Raymond De Becker, on 24 December 1940. However, in his publication on 4 March 1941, he delves outside of this artistic and literary topic, as the incriminating article is located in the context of the aggressively and sordidly anti-Semitic page ten of the journal, entitled ‘Les Juifs et nous. Aspects culturels’ [The Jews and Us. Cultural Aspects].<sup>8</sup> Indeed, we see a clearly anti-Semitic turn at this time in the Belgian occupation, De Becker and others striking out with theses establishing Jews as a ‘race’ that negatively influences European thinking.<sup>9</sup> Although de Man might not have had control over the final version of the text or over the choice of the other articles in that section, it should be noted that he was given a large amount of space in the editorial landscape of the collaboration press. He also found himself at the very heart of the publishing sector in occupied Belgium, having been simultaneously employed by three publishing houses and active media groups at that time.<sup>10</sup> Until 1943, de Man was undeniably a rising star in the intellectual landscape under the occupation. Again, along with Raymond De Becker, he would have, according to Evelyn Barish’s biography, influenced the conception of a prestigious, but eventually unrealized publication project entitled *Cahiers Européens*.<sup>11</sup> Finally, his work as a translator, which will be one focus of our analysis, also proves his strong links to the Belgian publishing world, which experienced significant developments under the occupation.

### **De Man as ‘(inter)cultural mediator’ in the French-(Belgo)-German ‘in-between’**

Let us first question de Man’s work as a translator and intellectual mediator in occupied Belgium from the theoretical and methodological point of view of cultural transfer. Following the work of other researchers Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink recently presented the thesis that particular war time contexts can contribute to ‘intensifying inter-cultural exchange and produce [...] effects that are unexpected and at the same time paradoxically create contact’. War and occupation are therefore able to cause ‘forms of curiosity and interest, even fascination and identification, for their neighboring country’.<sup>12</sup> They redefine, by means of direct and intense contact, paradigms of perception and representation of one another.

Lüsebrink’s approach proves compatible with and complementary to de Man expert Ortwin de Graef’s reflection in his standard work *Serenity in Crisis*, whose first part intends to articulate de Man’s *Wartime Journalism* with his critical work to come, the selected essays of the 1950s and the 1960s.<sup>13</sup> Although my particular perspective intentionally leaves aside de Man’s

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<sup>8</sup> The reproduction of this newspaper page and its articles is included in De Man, *Wartime Journalism*, pp. 286-92.

<sup>9</sup> E. Barish, *The Two Lives of Paul de Man* (New York: Liveright, 2014), p. 118-9.

<sup>10</sup> Barish, *The Two Lives*, p. xviii.

<sup>11</sup> Barish, *The Two Lives*, p. 135.

<sup>12</sup> H.-J. Lüsebrink, ‘Introduction’, in *Europa zwischen Text und Ort – L’Europe entre Texte et Lieu. Interkulturalität in Kriegszeiten (1914-1954) – Interculturalités en temps de guerre (1914-1954)*, *Jahrbuch des Frankreichzentrums der Universität des Saarlandes*, ed. by V. Deshoulières et al. (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013), vol. 12, pp. 100-1 and 103 (my translation).

<sup>13</sup> O. de Graef, *Serenity in Crisis: A Preface to Paul de Man* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), pp. 3-42.

academic career for a better historical contextualization, de Graef's instructive considerations on de Man's paradoxical 'profile' as a propagandist via literary criticism need nevertheless to be taken into account. If de Man certainly has been too much of an aesthete to serve as a 'self-style propagandist who used the literary review as convenient excuse for the exposition of a contemporary ideology', it is true that his interest lies not only in literature and art but also in social and political sciences, so that in his reviews, he wants 'to expound on the state of the world',<sup>14</sup> a viewpoint which cannot be unaffected by the so-called *Weltanschauung* [vision of the world] of the Nazis which had to be internalized, at least implicitly, by all journalists under the occupation. This is especially true for instance, as far as the questions of psychology and sociology, which de Man's literary criticism directly tackles, are concerned.

De Man's particular situation in the context of a journal labelled as politically and intellectually collaborationist can therefore generate contradictory positions. Whereas some will unequivocally reject any intellectual work constrained by imposed violence, others will assert that it is possible to 'preserve culture' in these conditions and go beyond the political yoke to create an intercultural dialogue that is as authentic as possible. To evaluate this, we first need a comprehensive overview and analysis of all activities of de Man as (inter)cultural mediator. On the one hand, we will take a significant sample from the 300 articles devoted to the literary critique of foreign literatures, which de Man wrote in *Le Soir* and other newspapers approved by the national-socialist regime. On the other, we will look at de Man's work as a translator. De Man translated from German to French (a novel by Paul Alverdes and a text on the *Spirit of the Nations* by art historian Albert E. Brinckmann), from Dutch to French (the historical novel *De soldaat Johan* [Johan the Soldier] by Flemish writer Filip De Pillecijn), and from English into Dutch (Hermann Melville's *Moby-Dick*).

I shall maintain the complementarity of literary critical activities and translation, as well as the table of structural elements of cultural transfer, as proposed by Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink in his work *Interkulturelle Kommunikation*. The dynamics of transfer consists of three processes which are distinct and simultaneous: the selection of works and information (*Selektionsprozesse*), the mediation processes (*Vermittlungsprozesse*) by individuals and collective institutions and the reception processes (*Rezeptionsprozesse*) to which literary translations undeniably belong.<sup>15</sup>

On a purely quantitative level de Man's literary criticism clearly centers around contemporary works and mainly focuses on the literatures of the three closest geo-cultural regions: Belgian literature (including Flemish literature), French literature and German literature (even if he also shows a marginal interest in the English novel and Italian poetry). The confrontation between French and German cultures is the hallmark of de Man's critical work. This 'intercultural' encounter is not without impact on the Belgian cultural and literary field to him; it is even directly linked to the Belgian historical metaphor of the 'in-between' (*entre-deux*) that de Man wishes to redefine in the particular context of the war.

The terms of this encounter are clearly laid out in a review published on August 5, 1941 entitled 'Regards sur l'Allemagne' [Views on Germany]. In de Man's comments on the translation of *Die Magd des Jürgen Doskocil* [Jürgen Doskocil's Maid] by Ernst Wiechert, which had just appeared in Paris under the title *La Servante du Passeur* [The Ferryman's Maid] (Plon

<sup>14</sup> De Graef, *Serenity in Crisis*, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> H.-J. Lüsebrink, *Interkulturelle Kommunikation. Interaktion, Fremdwahrnehmung, Kulturtransfer* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2016), pp. 145-53.

Publishing House),<sup>16</sup> de Man emphasizes that it is ‘un climat entièrement différent de celui que nous avons connu chez les écrivains de France’ [a completely different climate from that which we have come to know from French writers]. This difference is due to the (German) ‘esprit’ [spirit] ‘qui préfère la méditation poétique à la lucide clarté de l’analyse’ [which prefers poetic meditation to the lucid clarity of analysis] and reveals itself ‘dans l’expression, plus à la recherche des formes métaphoriques et symboliques que de précision dans l’exposé’ [in the expression, more in search of metaphoric and symbolic forms than of accurate presentation]. At the same time, de Man continues to emphasize the division between the so called French psychological novel (which he places under the aegis of Proust, Gide or Valéry) and the typical German work of Wiechert which ‘met avant tout en scène des mobiles éthiques’ [stages ethical motives above all else].

While for de Man the French novel ‘étudie et observe la manière dont se développent, dans ses personnages, des appétits ou des tendances, sans se préoccuper de porter un jugement sur la valeur morale de ces instincts’ [studies and observes the manner in which tastes or tendencies develop, through its characters, unconcerned with judging the moral values of these instincts], the German novel does not evoke ‘un drame psychologique’ [a psychological drama], but rather ‘un conflit entre le bien et le mal’ [a conflict between good and bad] all the while following ‘une vision symbolique des choses’ [a symbolic vision of things] surrounded by the ‘forces de la nature’ [forces of nature].<sup>17</sup> From this contrast de Man infers that while German writers lack precision vis-à-vis the surrounding reality, they regain essential ‘qualités de poésie: originalité de vision, profondeur d’émotion et vertus musicales de la langue’ [poetic qualities: original vision, profound emotions and the lyrical virtue of language]. Vaguely invoking Madame de Staël’s romanticized vision of Germany, he concludes by highlighting that in the German novel there is ‘[c]ette tendance à la profondeur, qui aime à rechercher, sous les apparences extérieures, un sens caché et le révèle en entourant les objets matériels d’un climat de brumeuse rêverie’ [this tendency towards depth, which likes to seek out, beneath outside appearances, a sense of the hidden, which it reveals by surrounding material objects with the haze of a misty daydream].<sup>18</sup>

Once again, the aesthetic-impressionistic aspects of de Man’s literary criticism should be balanced by other criteria, such as the importance of ‘sociological insights’ stressed by de Graef,<sup>19</sup> but also by the ‘cultural nationalism’ which, according to Dick Pels, pervades and shapes his articles, so that the idea of ‘the specific genius of a people’, is defined from a cultural rather than racial or even anthropological perspective’.<sup>20</sup>

Two key aspects in particular seem to concern the young literary critic. First, he believes it is important that the typology presented above be located in the historical time line of an artistic and literary heritage (the term ‘héritage littéraire’ is used in the article’s conclusion), embodying certain ‘constantes de la mentalité artistique germanique’ [constants of German artistic

<sup>16</sup> E. Wiechert, *La Servante du Passeur* [original title: *Die Magd of Jürgen Doskoci*]. Transl. by B. Briod (Paris: Plon, 1941).

<sup>17</sup> De Man, *Regards sur l’Allemagne*, in *Wartime Journalism*, pp. 126-7.

<sup>18</sup> De Man, *Regards sur l’Allemagne*, p. 127.

<sup>19</sup> From this point of view ‘literary sensitivity’ is conceived ‘as a legitimate agent in the production of knowledge’ (De Graef, *Serenity in Crisis*, p. 24).

<sup>20</sup> D. Pels, ‘Treason of the Intellectuals: Paul de Man and Hendrik de Man’, in *Theory, Culture & Society* 8:1 (1991), p. 38.

mentality]. Next, this source of inspiration must also contribute to regenerating the imaginary and the aesthetic of the French and Francophone novel. These claims are not typical for de Man; rather, they are recurring motifs in much of the criticism written under the occupation.

From among approximately twenty articles that he devotes to German literature, de Man focuses on one well-known author, Ernst Jünger, an emphasis already noticed and exhaustively studied by de Graef with respect to de Man's later critical work, especially concerning the category of 'the aesthetic ideology'.<sup>21</sup> In view of the wartime context, his choices can hardly be called accidental. Three articles and four texts, indeed, do relate to different works by Jünger, who was an officer of the occupation in France at the time, and whose works were distributed during this time via different French translations. The repercussions were immediate. On 31 March 1942, de Man reviews *Sur les Falaises de Marbre* [On the Marble Cliffs] in his literary column, a translation of Jünger's novel *Auf den Marmorklippen* by Henri Thomas, published by Gallimard. Less than three months later, on 23 June 1942, de Man reviews *Jardins et Routes* (orig. *Gärten und Straßen*) [Gardens and Roads], translated by Maurice Betz.<sup>22</sup> The review of *On the Marble Cliffs* follows the cultural model that de Man had established in his article on Wiechert. According to him the German text compensates, to a certain extent, for what was missing in contemporary French literature. De Man also stresses that Jünger exploits 'tout un domaine riche en possibilités infinies que l'entre-deux-guerres française a ignoré: c'est le domaine du mythe' [an entire field rich in infinite possibilities that the French had ignored in the interwar period: the field of myth]. Furthermore, de Man states that since Stendhal, 'le roman français est une œuvre explicative, une œuvre d'intelligence' [the French novel is an explanatory, a cerebral work], whereas with Jünger '[l]'intrigue, la fable n'a donc plus qu'une valeur d'illustration' [the intrigue, the fable, has no other value than that of illustration]. What is important is not the 'souci d'analyse' [the concern about analysis] but rather 'des symboles, portés par des forces et des aspirations irrésistibles' [symbols, carried by the forces of irresistible aspirations]:

Et ce sont des forces qui constituent le ressort romanesque proprement dit, indépendamment du fait qu'elles sont incarnées dans les personnages ou dans les paysages et scènes d'action. Nous voyons, dans un monde fabuleux, s'agiter des hommes étranges, se développer des luttes et des combats d'une brutalité inouïe, planer une atmosphère de paix et de sérénité sans pareille. On nous transporte en plein mythe, dans un conte qui n'a plus qu'une apparence terrestre et où tout est défini par des puissances aussi secrètes qu'inexpugnables.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> O. de Graef, 'A Stereotype of Aesthetic Ideology: Paul de Man, Ernst Jünger', in *Colloquium Helveticum* 11/12 (1991), pp. 39-70. De Graef aims at 'an attempt to trace the contours, in Jünger's work, of a particularly powerful version of what de Man in his later work explicitly and critically began to address as "the aesthetic ideology"' (p. 41). This is made on the basis of a comment on Jünger's following texts: *Gärten und Straßen* [Roads and Gardens], *Auf den Marmorklippen* [On the Marble Cliffs], *Das abenteuerliche Herz* [The Adventurous Heart] and *Der Arbeiter* [The Workman]. Cf. also Pels, 'Treason of the Intellectuals', p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> A third article titled 'Een groot schrijver: Ernst Jünger' [A great writer: Ernst Jünger] appears in the Dutch newspaper *Het Vlaamsche Land*; cf. De Man, *Wartime Journalism*, pp. 319-22 (original text and English translation).

<sup>23</sup> De Man, *Wartime Journalism*, pp. 216-7. From the time it was published, the translation of the *Marble Cliffs* contributed to the intellectual bearing of Ernst Jünger on French intellectual circles. Julien Gracq remembered his discovery of the work as a revelation when he acquired it from the bookshop of the Angers Station in December of 1942. As for Henri Michaux, he refers to it in an imminent way in his piece 'Lieux inexprimables' [Inexpressible Places] in 1947



[And these are the forces that constitute the actual drive of the novel, whether they are embodied in the characters or in the landscapes and action scenes. In a fantasy world we see strange men in action, the development of struggles and battles of an outrageous brutality, and a setting and an atmosphere of peace and serenity that has no equal. We find ourselves in the middle of a myth, a fairy tale that has no resemblance to the real world and where everything is defined by powers that are as secret as they are impregnable].

Two features that make up myth are distinguished in this perspective, both in negative contrast with the propositions of French literature: the fact that myth reveals a fundamental aesthetic experience on one hand, generating emotion, ‘ce frisson qui émane de l’art véritable, ce tressaillement d’épouvante ou de félicité qui s’élève de sa violence ou de sa douceur [...]’ [that shiver that is brought about by true art, that quiver of fear or happiness that rises from its violence or its tenderness]; and on the other hand the absence of value judgement in the midst of this ‘lieu de rencontre des éternelles forces antagonistes, du Bien et du Mal’ [meeting place of eternal antagonistic forces, of Good and Evil]: ‘L’ouvrage de Jünger est celui d’un poète et non d’un directeur de conscience’ [The work of Jünger is that of a poet, not that of a spiritual adviser].<sup>24</sup>

## De Man as Translator

The translation work of Paul de Man is eclectic. We will analyze its impact on the basis of two recent articles: one by Elke Brems on the translation of the historical Flemish novel by Filip De Pillecyn, *De soldaat Johan*,<sup>25</sup> the other by Michael Boyden on the Flemish translation of *Moby-Dick* by Herman Melville for which de Man is credited.<sup>26</sup> However we first need some comment on the editorial context in which the publication of French translations was determined. All three came out of the Toison d’Or publishing house, managed by the couple Edouard and Lucienne Didier. They were the organizers of a political-literary salon starting in 1932 in Ixelles, at the heart of the town of Brussels. The Didiers adhered to the philosophy of the *Jeune Europe* movement.<sup>27</sup> Before the war, they welcomed emissaries from the German cultural diplomacy, such as Otto Abetz, as well as Belgian intellectuals, who later succumbed to the collaboration. Among them was Henri (or Hendrik) de Man (1885-1953), Paul’s uncle, a major political figure in the Belgian Workers Party (the future Socialist Party) at the time, who had lived in Germany for a long time. He was active in Higher Education and produced several theoretical publications on socialism.

Henri’s influence on Paul de Man was decisive during the latter’s formative years.<sup>28</sup> Both were actively multilingual, living right in the middle of the high bourgeoisie in Antwerp, to which their families belonged. Beyond the characteristic diglossia of the de Man family, who spoke

(cf. E. Geisler, ‘Ein Text von Henri Michaux als Replik auf Ernst Jünger’, in *Text + Kritik. Ernst Jünger* 105/106 (1990), pp. 65-73).

<sup>24</sup> De Man, *Wartime Journalism*, p. 216.

<sup>25</sup> E. Brems, ‘A case of “cultural castration”? Paul de Man’s translation of *De soldaat Johan* by Filip de Pillecyn’, in *Target. International Journal of Translation Studies* 22:2 (2010), pp. 212-36.

<sup>26</sup> M. Boyden, ‘A Silent Spout: Paul de Man’s Moby-Dick’, in *The Translator* 19:1 (2013), pp. 25-49.

<sup>27</sup> See the remarkable chapter of Geneviève Duchenne’s monography, *Esquisses d’une Europe nouvelle. L’eupéisme dans la Belgique de l’entre-deux-guerres (1919-1939)* (Brussels et al.: P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 383ff.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Derrida, *Mémoires*, pp. 166-9.

Dutch as their daily language and French as their *Bildungssprache* (erudite language), Paul also had a deep knowledge of English and German, as did his uncle. This is how Paul would eventually become initiated into the mystical poetry of Meister Eckhart and to the terms of a national identity consciousness, that is, belonging to both Belgians and Flemish within the framework of a cultural 'German identity'.<sup>29</sup>

Paul de Man entered the Université Libre de Bruxelles in 1937, with the help of his uncle who then probably provided him with the contacts necessary to become a journalist for *Le Soir* under Raymond De Becker at the end of December 1940. Some six months later, around the middle of 1941, Paul made his debut as a collaborator for the Toison d'Or publishing house, as can be seen from a document found by Elke Brems which describes de Man's defense in a Belgian court after the War, on 30 July 1946. Friends 'who were published or worked there as translators' had recommended him for Dutch and German translations and editing tasks.<sup>30</sup> Over the next two years his work as a critic and translator within these various networks grew. At the end of November 1942, Evelyn Barish has shown, de Man was eventually laid off by Raymond De Becker after a complaint made by Edouard Didier for his 'irresponsability as a translator' and for losing manuscripts.<sup>31</sup>

This editorial environment undoubtedly shaped the transfers and translations made by de Man. As Michel Fincoeur has demonstrated, the publications of La Toison d'Or were conceived as part of a 'Euro-pacifist' network in the vein of Didier's work from the early 1930s onwards.<sup>32</sup> There is no doubt though that concessions were made so as to comply with the editorial constraints of the occupation, but it is difficult to confer a specific identity on Toison d'Or's ideology. As far as de Man is concerned, we are surprised by the partial inadequacy between the choice of the authors in question and the representation by propaganda literature that we would expect at the time.

### ***The Two Faces by Paul Alverdes***

The selection of the novel *The Two Faces* (*Das Zwiegesicht*, 1937) by German author Paul Alverdes (1897-1979), editor of the journal *Das Innere Reich*, which appeared from 1934 to 1944, is representative of the problems with which Belgian Germanophile circles were confronted. While they attempted to present quality German authors, they had to exclude all the exiles, who were considered undesirable by the regime. The choice of Alverdes as a representative of contemporary German literature was certainly dictated by the fact that he was a part of the Belgo-German social network which, in keeping with the Franco-German youth encounters of the 1930s, was a tool for political infiltration of the cultural encounters between Belgian and German artists and intellectuals just before the war. Alverdes had indeed been a member of the German delegation during such encounters in Brussels and Knokke Le Zoute, on the Belgian coast, from

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<sup>29</sup> Barish, *The Two Lives*, p. 37.

<sup>30</sup> Official court statement, quoted from Brems, *A case of 'cultural castration'*, pp. 217-8.

<sup>31</sup> Barish, *The Two Lives*, pp. 163-4.

<sup>32</sup> M. Fincoeur, 'Le monde de l'édition en Belgique durant la Seconde guerre mondiale: l'exemple des éditions de la Toison d'Or', in *Textyles. Revue des Lettres belges de langue française*, Special issue 2, *Leurs occupations. L'impact de la Seconde Guerre mondiale sur la littérature en Belgique*, 1997, pp. 21-60.



23 to 27 June 1939, the full report of which can be found in an anonymous contribution to Nazi propaganda newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* on 1 July 1939.<sup>33</sup>

Alverdes' popular novel *Das Zwiegesicht* mixes the tones of amorous intrigue with elements of trivial literature and pseudo-philosophical considerations concerning the memories of the dead and the military experience during this 'terrible war followed by a terrible defeat' (p. 7).<sup>34</sup> Five years after the war, thirty-six-year-old Juliane moves to a small town in southern Germany where she becomes bored of her relationship with her husband Doctor Bring, with whom she has two children. There she meets the 'Chevalier von Erewein', a former aviator on the Eastern front who has been knighted for acts of bravery. He has miraculously escaped death in Siberia thanks to the actions of ex-NCO Plötz. After Erewein, who was believed dead, has been buried, leaving only a hand exposed in the frozen earth, Plötz has touched the hand and discovered that Erewein was indeed still alive. The two men moved into a dilapidated castle not far from Juliane's home where Erewein raises fish in the property's ponds.

While Juliane feels attracted to Erewein's aura, he befriends her husband Bring, who was a doctor during the war. The two men share a secret bond through their wartime experiences, whereas Juliane does not like her husband to speak to her of the war, as 'elle se sentait étrangère à des circonstances dont la description lui semblait profondément ennuyeuse' (pp. 37-38) [she felt completely removed from the circumstances, whose descriptions seemed profoundly tedious to her]. However, Juliane aspires to penetrate the secret that unites these men when discussing their common war experience.

After Juliane discreetly visits Erewein and Plötz in their 'little [seventeenth century] castle', Erewein visits the house on several occasions at Bring's invitation. Erewein and Juliane secretly grow attached to each other, taking walks together before sunset whenever Bring is retained by visits to his patients. One evening at the beginning of Advent, Juliane goes to a tiny church overlooking the snow-covered valley. As the church choir is singing, she sees Erewein leaning against a wall near the tombs. The intimate moment that brings them together occurs when Erewein reveals that he is the organizer of a strange cult for those who have died in combat:

Il lui tournait le dos et avait posé la main sur le bras d'une des croix en fer forgé, comme s'il avait touché une créature vivante. Bientôt il lâcha la croix et se dirigea vers une autre tombe, proche de la première. Juliane vit qu'il s'inclinait sur la pierre et que, à l'aide de sa main gantée, il essayait la neige qui recouvrait l'inscription. Un instant, il demeura recueilli, remettant la main sur l'épaule de fer, comme s'il voulait la regarder de près ou lui adresser la parole. [...] Juliane marcha vers lui et il enleva son gant pour prendre sa main dans la sienne. Sans la lâcher, il la ramena vers les tombes comme s'il devait lui montrer une chose qu'eux deux étaient seuls capables de comprendre. Il désigna l'inscription et dit: 'Regardez cela'. [...] Le nom était inscrit sous cette image et on pouvait y lire en outre que cet honorable jeune homme et fils de paysan était mort pour la patrie, loin de son pays. [...] 'Honorabile

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<sup>33</sup> 'Deutsch-belgische Begegnung. Fruchtbare Gedanken-austausch über kulturelle Gegenwartsfragen', in *Völkischer Beobachter*, 1 July 1939. Raymond De Becker attended these meetings and alluded to them in the newspaper *L'Indépendance Belge*. Cf. H. Roland, 'Les relations belgo-allemandes "autour de Raymond De Becker"', in *Raymond De Becker (1912-1969). Itinéraire et facettes d'un intellectuel réprouvé*, ed. by O. Dard, G. Duchenne and E. Deschamps (Brussels et al.: P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 119-44.

<sup>34</sup> The following quotes are taken from: P. Alverdes, *Le Double Visage. Traduit par Paul de Man. Dessins de Tjienke Dagnelie* (Brussels and Paris: Les Éditions de la Toison d'Or, 1942). English translations by Ariane Leverett.

jeune homme et fils de paysan' dit Erewein après une pause, et il répéta encore une fois ces mots ; 'c'étaient là de belles paroles' ajouta-t-il 'de bien belles paroles'. Et il lui demanda si elle n'aimait pas cette dénomination (pp. 102-5).

[He had turned his back and put his hand on the arm of one of the wrought iron crosses, as if he were touching a living creature. He then let go off the cross and walked towards another tomb, close to the first. Juliane noticed that he was leaning against the stone and that he swept the snow covering the inscription with his gloved hand. He collected himself for a moment, putting his hand back on the iron shoulder of the cross as if he wanted to inspect it more closely or speak to it. [...] Juliane walked towards him and he removed his glove to take her hand in his. Without releasing it, he brought her to the tombs as if wanting to show her something that only the two of them could understand. He pointed at the inscription and said: 'Look at this'. [...] The name is inscribed under the image, so we can read no more than that this honourable young man and son of a peasant died for his country, far from his home. [...] 'Honourable young man and son of a peasant', Erewein said after a long pause, repeating these words again; 'these are beautiful words' he added, 'very beautiful words.' And he asked her if she liked this wording].

Seated on the pine tree-log, Juliane and Erewein embrace, in a shared joy that they feel for the memory of those who died in combat, 'the good, the brave, the pure [...]' (p. 108). This is the culminating moment in their relationship that, with sharp bitterness, will not be prolonged as their situation leads to Erewein's departure. He leaves the city in order to avoid facing his feelings of affection for Juliane any longer.

If the goal was to disseminate an edifying nationalist view of the war through propaganda literature, the management of the Toison d'Or publishing house certainly could have chosen pieces less melancholy and resigned. The only 'mobilizing' factor would be the secret friendship and intimacy that unite those who have lived through the war, particularly on the front line. This dimension was actually pinpointed by de Man in his omnibus review written on the works of Alverdes, among those of others in his column in *Le Soir*.<sup>35</sup> Beyond its moderate commercial success in Germany,<sup>36</sup> Alverdes' novel was not a convincing object for a potential cultural transfer, as it lacked literary quality.

### ***Johan the Soldier* by Filip De Pillecyn**

The historical novel *Johan the Soldier* by Flemish nationalist author Filip De Pillecyn (1891-1962) exerted a greater influence as a transfer, beyond the fact that the political dimension of this editorial choice in relation to the Flemish literary field is also worth considering. Coming from a movement of frontline soldiers called the *Frontbeweging* during World War I, De Pillecyn had been eager to create a sense of revolt in the Flemish soldiers who opposed the war itself but also connected pacifist motives with an engagement in Flemish nationalism.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. De Man, *Wartime Journalism*, pp. 222-3. De Man addresses the fact that Erewein renounces the love of Juliane in order to preserve his friendship with Bring, saying that it speaks to a 'fraternity in arms creating a sacred duty' between the two men.

<sup>36</sup> The original edition, published at Langen-Müller in Munich, reached 40,000 copies published in 1944 and 49,000 in 1954.

In the 1914-1918 period the German occupation's efforts to gain sympathy from the Flemish movement in the context of the political promotion of Flemish culture (*Flamenpolitik*) had eventually failed, as most Flemish intellectuals by and large remained loyal to the Belgian State. But when the occupying power reiterated its call for active collaboration after 1940, they recruited more allies. One of them was Filip De Pillecyn, who worked in an official capacity within the 'Flemish Cultural Council' and the 'Writers' Chamber' under German control, of which he became president in 1942. At the same time, he directed a Flemish delegation that attended the *Europäische Schriftstellervereinigung* conference at Weimar. This 'Organization of European Writers' had been founded by Joseph Goebbels, this to establish the foundations of a European political and intellectual literature compatible with the Nazi political order.<sup>37</sup>

De Pillecyn's novel *De soldaat Johan* was published in 1939 and its purpose and theme must then first be considered outside of the specific context of the occupation. *De soldaat Johan* is set in the fifteenth century and directly refers to the myth of the rebirth of a Kingdom of Lotharingia under the aegis of the dukes of Burgundy and their last representative, Charles the Bold. Shortly before Charles' defeat at the battle of Nancy on 5 January 1477, Johan, a soldier in the Burgundian army, was wounded in a battle. He survives and travels back through devastated lands to his home in Flanders. Just outside Ghent, he stops in this land of heather and decides to devote himself to its cultivation. According to the book summary on the inside cover of de Man's translation, '[l]a puissante attraction de la terre s'exerce bientôt sur son âme. Il se rend compte de la vanité de la guerre qu'il a faite, et qu'il ne se battait que pour servir les intérêts dynastiques et impérialistes du seigneur ? Sa plus grande ambition devient d'être un paysan libre, maître de la terre qu'il a rendue féconde par son labeur' [The powerful attraction of the earth soon begins to pull at his heart. He realizes the vanity of the war he fought, and that he was fighting only to serve the dynastic and imperialist interests of his lord? His greatest ambition is to become a free peasant, master of the soil that he made fruitful through his labour].<sup>38</sup> Facing the threat of the King of France 'dont les armées ont systématiquement ravagé les moissons mûrissantes des paysans flamands' [whose armies systematically ravaged the ripening harvests of Flemish peasants], Johan takes part in the local peasant revolts against their oppressors. Returning to his home in the heather, he concludes by conveying the following message to his young son: 'Tu seras un paysan, et, par Dieu, un soldat également, un soldat qui libérera les paysans dans toutes les régions où l'on dit "Mon Seigneur et mon Dieu", dans notre langue à nous' (p. 260) [You will be a peasant, and, by God, a soldier as well. A soldier who will free the peasants in all the lands where the words 'My Lord and my God' are spoken in our own tongue].

Independently of possible readings within the occupation context, the novel *Johan the Soldier* finds itself placed in the continuity of the Flemish nationalist engagement, while also being tinted with pacifism, much like De Pillecyn had promoted at the end of World War I. Flemish scholars disagree on whether the world view expressed in *De soldaat Johan* can be put on a level with the Nazis' *Blut und Boden* aesthetic.<sup>39</sup> However the novel's glorification of the northern lands and the fight against French oppression struck a chord with the Germans, as is

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<sup>37</sup> F.-R. Hausmann, 'Dichte, Dichter, tage nicht!' *Die Europäische Schriftsteller-Vereinigung in Weimar 1941-1948* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2004), p. 252.

<sup>38</sup> F. De Pillecyn, *Le Soldat Johan*. Transl. by P. de Man (Bruxelles: Éditions de la Toison d'Or, [1942]), 260 p.; summary printed on the inside cover. The following quotations are taken from this publication.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. various points of view from specialist critiques, reported by Brems, *A case of 'cultural castration'*, pp. 214-5.

evidenced by Bruno Loets' simultaneous German translation.<sup>40</sup> Through the Flemish press during the occupation, De Pillecyn himself warned against both a historical and an ideological reading of his novel, preferring to emphasize its symbolism.<sup>41</sup> Another important feature of *Johan the Soldier* is the 'Burgundian (or Lotharingian) myth', which was very *en vogue* in Belgian literature after Belgium had gained its independence in 1830. It supported the construction of the Belgian national identity of a country 'in between', a crossing of Latin and Germanic cultural influences that had had to struggle and revolt against foreign occupation throughout history.<sup>42</sup>

In view of the latter element, the claim that de Man's translation was intended to be a form of propaganda should be envisaged. Admittedly the glorification of the Flemish-Germanic *Heimat*, the peasants' working the earth as well as the determination to take up arms against a (French) invader, appears to be in line with the sort of 'edification' promoted by the Nazi regime as a key criterion for literature. By contrast, the subject of 'racial' homogeneity seems to be missing if we consider the internationalist scope of the idea of the 'in-between'.

On another note, the naked realism of the text and of its translation comes close to discouraging the idea of combat more than supporting its virtues. The initial scene of the first chapter, for example describes how Johan the Soldier renounces the battle just before his commander, the Duke Charles the Bold, escapes death in the plains near Nancy:

Il avait vu fuir, à sa gauche, les troupes qui s'étaient élancées avec lui, les chevaux se cabrant à travers l'infanterie, dans la buée de leur sueur. Il se battait sans colère et sans peur quand il fut précipité à terre ; il sentit ses mains glisser sur la terre dégelée par le piétinement de la bataille. Il était couché, la face au sol, et tout s'assourdit au-dessus de lui.

Lorsqu'il ouvrit les yeux, il faisait noir. Autour de lui, il vit les formes rigides d'hommes qui étaient morts. Il se redressa, avec une sensation de vide dans la tête et au ventre. Il entendait des râles dans le lointain et, d'un autre côté, la lourde chevauchée de la cavalerie. Il se mit péniblement debout et sut qu'il vivrait.

Son épaule était raidie ; du sang s'était coagulé en caillots sur sa manche. Et aux premiers pas, il chancela. Alors, il regarda les étoiles et marcha vers le nord, d'où il était venu (pp. 7-8).

[On his left he had seen his brothers in arms fleeing, the horses bucking through the infantry, in the mud and sweat. He fought without anger or fear when he was thrown to the ground; he felt his hands slip into the thawed-out ground through the trampling of the battle. He was on the ground, face down, deaf to what was happening above him.

When he opened his eyes, the sun had already gone down. He saw the rigid forms of dead men surrounding him. With an empty feeling in his head and stomach, he got up. In the

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<sup>40</sup> F. de Pillecyn, *Der Soldat Johan. Roman*. Transl. by B. Loets (Leipzig: Altenburg, 1941). Bruno Loets was to become known for his translations of Harry Mulisch after the war.

<sup>41</sup> Brems, *A case of 'cultural castration'*, p. 215.

<sup>42</sup> The 'Lotharingien myth', applied by De Pillecyn to the idea of a Flemish nation, had previously been linked to the idea of a Belgian nation, as is demonstrated extensively by Hans-Joachim Lope in his work on the literary figure Charles the Bold: *Karl der Kühne als literarische Gestalt: ein themengeschichtlicher Versuch mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der französischsprachigen Literatur Belgiens im europäischen Kontext* (Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 1995).

distance, he heard screaming from one side and the heavy thud of the galloping cavalry from the other. He painstakingly stood up and knew that he would live.

Blood was coagulating in large clots on his sleeve and his shoulder was stiff. He staggered out his first steps. Then, looking to the stars, he began to walk north from whence he came].

It is questionable if this reading could stimulate the ardor of the soldiers in combat and would therefore be promoted as propaganda literature. Life itself is eventually revealed as superseding combat, following the values described through the encounter of Johan with a wise, old peasant who grants the soldier refuge from death:

Si le soldat Johan ne s'était pas arrêté à la chaumière paysanne, entre un champ et un fossé, il serait resté dans ce lointain pays de Nancy, avec les centaines de cadavres que dévoreraient les loups. Mais, par la lucarne, il vit les dernières lueurs de l'âtre et le vieux paysan qui dormait. Il tenait son poignard à la main lorsqu'il entra, mais le vieillard le regarda et lui indiqua le banc près du feu (pp. 8-9).

[If Johan the soldier had not stayed at the peasant's cottage, between a field and a ditch, he would have stayed in the distant country of Nancy with the hundreds of corpses being devoured by wolves. But then he saw the last embers from the hearth of the sleeping peasant through a dormer window. He held his dagger at the ready as he entered, but the old man looked at him and gestured toward the bench near the fire].

After the two men fall asleep, they share a gourd of brandy and come to a silent agreement that they will not fight, even though they are on different sides ('– Tu es un de ces hommes de Bourgogne; j'aurais dû te tuer. – Je suis soldat, dit Johan. – C'est vrai, dit le paysan', p. 9) [– You are one of these men from Burgundy; I should have killed you. – I am a soldier, says Johan. – True, says the peasant]. A cow bellows nearby, preparing to give birth to 'a beautiful calf':

Et tous deux contemplaient, dans la pénombre suffocante, la bête dont la masse féconde reposait sur la paille. Il y avait longtemps que le soldat Johan n'avait plus ressenti ce respect du terrien devant la vie grandissante du bétail. Mais, dans sa mémoire, il retrouvait des expressions de cette sagesse paysanne qui lui venait de son père. Et le vieux paysan approuvait de la tête.

Ils ne parlèrent plus de la guerre. (p. 10)

[Both of them contemplated, in the suffocating half-light, the fertile mass laid out on the straw. It had been a long time since Johan the soldier had felt this type of earthy respect before the new life of such an animal. However, he was able to recall the wise peasant expressions coming from his father. The old peasant approved with a nod of his head.

They didn't speak another word of the war].

The interior transformation of Johan the Soldier and the encounters he will have while returning to his country of birth, however, do lead to a re-mobilisation for the defence of '[...] ces plaines où croissait une nouvelle moisson d'un beau vert, une abondance qui s'étendait à l'infini de colline en colline' [those plains where a new green harvest grows, where an abundance spreads

from hill to hill to infinity] against 'the French King's hordes' (pp. 174-75). Thus a new army marches made of 'des Bourguignons et des miliciens venus des villes allemandes, ainsi que des hommes de Bruges, d'Ypres et de Gand [...]' (p. 176) [Burgundinians and militiamen coming from German cities, as well as men from Bruges, Ypres and Ghent].<sup>43</sup> However, the text still retains a fundamental ideological ambivalence, potentially lending itself to multiple processes of political instrumentalization.

The detailed translational analysis provided by Elke Brems reveals the good quality of de Man's translation, on account of both its philological precision and its preservation of the original rhythm, recreated by a wide array of narrative devices and even made perceptible through the text's layout.<sup>44</sup> As Brems shows, de Man sometimes resorted to rewriting by modifying stylistic characteristics of the original. Thus, he rendered certain abstract passages more explicit through 're-personalizing' (e.g. 'the thought of a woman came to him' becomes 'he longed for the company of a woman at times'). He also likes to add exclamation points to further highlight the emotional dimension and at times makes attempts at clarification. Where the Dutch original does not mark the difference between direct and indirect discourse, de Man adds quotation marks. In addition, he also tends to reinforce the concision of the text to achieve stronger expression. Where the author systematically uses 'Johan the soldier', de Man finds 'Johan' or 'he' to be sufficient.<sup>45</sup>

### ***The Spirit of the Nations* by Albert Erich Brinckmann**

The second translation from German for which Paul de Man is credited was the product of a collaboration with Jean-Jacques Étienne. The two men ventured into the field of art history following the imposing work of Professor Albert Erich Brinckmann (1881-1958), *Geist der Nationen. Italiener-Franzosen-Deutsche*, published in Hamburg at the publishing house of Hoffmann und Campe in 1938. Brinckmann, a devoted student of the ideas of Heinrich Wölfflin, had lost his professorship at the University of Berlin in 1935, following the political appointment of Wilhelm Pinder by national-socialist initiative. Yet he was able to continue his work at the University of Frankfurt/Main, where he published this widely popular work *Geist der Nationen*. The sort of comparative approach involving 'The Spirit of Nations' was quite fashionable at the time; it had been the subject of the International Art History Convention in 1933 which both Brinckmann and Pinder had attended as German representatives.<sup>46</sup>

In a searing preface to his work *Geist im Wandel. Rebellion und Ordnung*, published just after the war in 1946, Brinckmann refers to his forced ejection from Berlin University. His work, which he places within the internationalist school of thought, would have disrupted, so he says, the convictions and world vision of national-socialism. He therefore places in retrospect his *Geist der Nationen* 'gegen einen übersteigerten Germanismus; es vertrat die Anschauung, dass nicht Rassenreinheit und Autarkie, sondern Rassenmischung und Austausch den fruchtbaren Kulturboden schaffen' [against an exacerbated German nationalism. It represented the point of view that it was not the purity of the race and the autarky, but rather the mix of races and their

<sup>43</sup> The original Dutch text refers to the 'Duitsche streken' which should be translated as 'German regions' rather than 'German cities' (F. de Pillecyn, *De soldaat Johan*, Amsterdam: P.N. Van Kampen & Zoon, [1939], p. 161).

<sup>44</sup> Brems, *A case of 'cultural castration'*, pp. 222-9.

<sup>45</sup> Brems, *A case of 'cultural castration'*, pp. 228-9.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. the biographical notes dedicated to the two men in the *Metzler Kunstshistoriker Lexikon* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 1999), pp. 38-41 and 309-12.



exchange that fertilized the cultural terrain].<sup>47</sup> To underpin this proposition, Brinckmann also reminds that he was the publisher of a collection entitled *Geistiges Europa (Bücher über geistige Beziehungen europäischer Nationen)* [Intellectual Europe (Books about Intellectual Relations between European Nations)], which appeared during wartime and included monographs dedicated (among others) to Erasmus and Giotto.

*Geist der Nationen* is a scholarly work that was to acquire authority among historical writings on the art of European nations since the classical period, all while maintaining an accessible style targeted at a general audience. Sixty-five illustrations adorn the publication and are reproduced in the translation.

Obviously, the intention of the translators is to preserve and even reinforce the didactic appeal of the work. In fact, they boost clarity by purposely reconstructing paragraphs that were not present in the original, as well as adding subheadings that are sometimes borrowed from non-paginated headings in Brinckmann's final table of contents. Even more significantly, the translation has suppressed the five-page preface of the original monograph. In this preface, Brinckmann resorts to methodological considerations relative to art history writings based on the theses of Wilhelm Dilthey or Ernst Troeltsch while still staying true to the concept of creative nations implied in *Weltbild* theories.<sup>48</sup> Referring to the source of the public's judgement and mutual stereotypes – the image of French people as represented through the character of Riccaut de la Marlinière in the play *Minna von Barnhelm* by Lessing *vis-à-vis* the image of the German people as seen by the 'Protestant Genevese woman from Staël' or Heine exiled to Paris – Brinckmann calls upon the reader to go beyond these clichés in order to acquire a better understanding of different peoples while remaining fundamentally attached to the idea of 'national identity'. The conclusion of the foreword, surprisingly quoting from Alfred Lord Tennyson's British patriotic poem 'Hands all Round', reads like a desire to reconcile the patriotic approach and the European credo in a view of an opening up to the world, even if he does claim to adhere to the German regime.

Ich habe als Deutscher geschrieben, aber auch als Europäer. Ich liebe mein Volk mehr als andere Völker; das aber ist kein Grund, die anderen tapferen Gefährten einer europäischen Schicksalsgemeinschaft zu unterschätzen: That man's the true cosmopolite/ Who loves his native country best.

[I wrote as a German, but also as a European. I love my people more than any others. However, this is no reason to underestimate the valorous companions of a community with a European community of destiny: That man's the true cosmopolite/ Who loves his native country best].<sup>49</sup>

What reasons led the Toison d'Or Publishing house to delete Brinckmann's preface, whose informative content is clearly related to the author's intent and his publication's objectives? Is it because of the specific exposition of the internationalist character of his convictions which, during wartime, would have made it a target for German censorship? Or should it be understood

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<sup>47</sup> A.E. Brinckmann, *Geist im Wandel. Rebellion und Ordnung* (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1946), preface.

<sup>48</sup> A.E. Brinckmann, *Geist der Nationen. Italiener-Franzosen-Deutsche* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1938), pp. 7-8.

<sup>49</sup> Brinckmann, *Geist der Nationen*, p. 12.

within the context of the occupation, as this final declaration of allegiance by Brinckmann (besides providing recourse to the explicit national-socialist statement of so-called *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* [community of destiny]) would have risked irritating the cultivated Belgian or French reader?

Whatever the reason, the choice to publish a German art historian who steadfastly believes in European exchange cannot be random. It shows that Paul de Man and the Toison d'Or Publishing house subscribed to a movement whose goal was to articulate an intellectual project for Europe under the aegis of Nazi Germany, which would not allow this field to become monopolized by its opposition, specifically German emigrants.

Does Brinckmann's thesis really show the kind of frank opposition to nationalism exacerbated by the Nazis, as he claimed in 1946? Or were his theses, set in the context of the debate of ideas within the German regime, concerned about its cultural influence abroad? Neither the German original, nor its French translation provides a clear answer to this question. Certain 'concepts' can be found in the work which point to the limitations of the art of non-Germanic cultures, like the idea of 'narrow reasoning', which is applied to French thought:

Comme le Français voyage moins à l'étranger que les autres Européens qui vivent au Nord des Alpes, sa compréhension ne dépasse guère le[s] limites de l'art français. Il le considère comme une valeur absolue et oppose volontiers l'art français, que son jugement subjectif lui représente comme indépendant, à l'art allemand, qu'il prétend soumis à toutes les influences, à toutes les dépendances. L'étroitesse de l'esprit français est indéniable.<sup>50</sup>

[As the French do not travel abroad as often as other Europeans north of the Alps do, their understanding never goes beyond the limit(s) of French art. They consider French art, which in their subjective opinion is wholly independent, an absolute value and readily contrast it with German art, which they claim is subject to all kinds of influences and dependencies. It is undeniable that French *esprit* is narrow-minded].

Are such types of considerations (only) typical of Nazi thinking? Perhaps Brinckmann's approach could generally be compared to modes of thought inherited from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which studied the connections between cultural nations as 'people' and resorted to all kinds of stereotypes and images. Brinckmann, however, does conclude his final chapter on the 'teleology of the three nations' with a glorification of the 'German soul':

Lorsque l'âme allemande se met à bouillonner et à déborder, elle entraîne aussi avec elle des éléments arrachés à d'autres nations. Comme le soleil, avec ses protubérances, elle est toujours tendue et agissante, mais elle n'est pas centrée sur un système de fins limitées : elle n'est pas égocentrique et n'attache pas une importance exagérée à l'harmonie. Elle est inspiration et expiration, systole et diastole.<sup>51</sup>

[While the German soul begins to boil and overflow it also carries elements ripped from other nations with it. Like the sun, with its eruptions, it is still vast and active, but not centered

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<sup>50</sup> A.E. Brinckmann, *Esprit des Nations. France-Italie-Allemagne*. Transl. by P. de Man and J.-J. Étienne (Brussels and Paris: Éditions de la Toison d'Or, 1943), p. 197.

<sup>51</sup> Brinckmann, *Esprit des Nations*, p. 265.

round a system of limited goals: it is not egocentric and does not attach an exaggerated importance to harmony. It is both inhalation and exhalation, systolic and diastolic].

Brinckmann's comparative art history, which de Man meant to study as a discipline with (pure) scientific character ('art history as art critical science'<sup>52</sup>) is therefore not free of nationalist emphasis, eventually making it largely compatible with the regime's propaganda and with the point of view that the discipline of German architecture believes that art has a 'transcendent mission':

Les autres peuples sont peut-être dans l'impossibilité de saisir ce que nous entendons par 'l'infini'. Nous ne bâtissons pas pour abandonner le travail, dès que l'œuvre ne cadre plus avec l'esprit du temps ; mais nous ne nous contentons pas de continuer à construire dans le même style. Nous bâtissons *pour bâtir*, souvent en modifiant les thèmes et en variant les styles ; nous bâtissons d'après des projets idéaux qui, souvent, paraissent des phantasmes, mais nous bâtissons avec cette fidélité germanique qui éclate si bien dans les *Nibelungen*.<sup>53</sup>

[Other people cannot possibly understand what is meant by 'the infinite'. We have not built something just to give up on the work as soon as it no longer fits within the framework of the times; but we will not be satisfied with continuing to build in the same style. We build *to build*, often through the adaptation of themes and varying of styles; we build following project ideals that often seem like ghosts, but we build with German faith that properly erupts so convincingly in the *Nibelungen*].

## Rupture and New Beginning

After 1943, Paul de Man left the collaborationist environment in which he had been involved. He moved his family to Antwerp near his father's place, a move that coincided with the condemnation of a group of *Le Soir* journalists by the resistance newspaper *L'Insoumis* [The Insubordinate].<sup>54</sup> This marked the beginning of a period during which he started the translation of *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville. This translation would be published by the Antwerp publishing house Helicon, which had no ties to the occupying forces. De Man's critics consider this step a shift in his intellectual trajectory, particularly because it is connected to the English language and the American novel.<sup>55</sup> Michael Boyden has provided an extensive analysis of this translation which rethinks the continuity of the cultural mediation work of *Wartime Journalism*. Indeed, Boyden suggests for instance that the French translation by Jean Giono, published by Gallimard in 1941, served as a source of inspiration for de Man.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> So de Man's meaning in the reviews he devoted to *Geist der Nationen* in *Le Soir* and *Het Vlaamsche Land* (cf. De Graef, *Serenity in Crisis*, p. 18).

<sup>53</sup> Brinckmann, *Esprit des Nations*, p. 265.

<sup>54</sup> M. Mc Quillan, *Paul de Man* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 107.

<sup>55</sup> Boyden (*A Silent Spout*, p. 30) reminds that his name does not appear in the work and that we attribute it to him on the basis of several testimonies by de Man's friends, corroborated by special critiques.

<sup>56</sup> Boyden, *A Silent Spout*, pp. 33-46. Boyden also makes an important clarification on the fundamental role of the translation of this critical work by de Man (pp. 26-8). This subject is too vast to be tackled in the context of this article.

Contrary to many other agents in the intellectual collaboration, de Man skillfully defended himself before the war tribunal in 1946, arguing that his articles came out of the Germanophile culture in Belgium and were not political, or that he had not been aware of the context of the publication of his article 'Jews in Current Literature'.<sup>57</sup> Surprisingly, he was not prosecuted by the Belgian courts. This constituted the occasion for him to turn a new page and prepare for the opening of new horizons which would eventually earn him international fame.

An overview of his mediation and translation work during this dark period leads to a couple of conclusions. Firstly, the idea of a European unity under German hegemony underlies these different efforts. This interest had come about before the occupation period in the intellectual and editorial environment within which the young de Man found himself working in 1940. However, there is no doubt that this engagement has become frankly compatible with the politico-cultural projects that the Nazis used to support a Europe conceived under their aegis. Secondly, this commitment to a European project under German supervision cannot be underestimated in any discussion of the motivation of Belgian (and other) collaborators in World War II, as demonstrated in the comprehensive studies by Duchenne and Hausmann.<sup>58</sup> De Man's motivation is most probably inherited from his uncle Henri de Man, who had been ready to cooperate with the Reich 'within the framework of a unified Europe and a universal socialist revolution', even if nephew Paul definitely transformed the internationalism of his uncle into cultural nationalism.<sup>59</sup>

Thirdly, the predilection of de Man and his publisher for authors who can be qualified as 'non-aligned' is quite clear. Alverdes, De Pillecyn and Brinckmann, in a specific way and to different degrees, all wrote within the national-socialist environment and may be considered as agents of the cultural propaganda. However they all struggled to also preserve own convictions, independent of the official ideology, so that they preferred to resort to the 'instability in the representational project of fascist discourse' and its equally instable institutional performance singled out by specialized research on the topics.<sup>60</sup> In this respect the case of de Man and others should certainly be interpreted from the perspective of Ine Van linthout's study on the principle of *totalitäre Differenzierung* (totalitarian differentiation)<sup>61</sup> reflecting the necessity of propaganda to adapt to specific and increasingly dynamic social contexts.

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. the summary of official court documents found by Barish, *The Two Lives*, pp. 193-202.

<sup>58</sup> Duchenne, *Esquisse d'une Europe nouvelle*; Hausmann, 'Dichte, Dichter, tage nicht!'

<sup>59</sup> Pels, *Treason of the Intellectuals*, p. 32.

<sup>60</sup> O. de Graef, D. De Geest and E. Vanfraussen, 'Fascist politics and literary criticism', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. by C. Knellwolf and C. Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), vol. 9, p. 81.

<sup>61</sup> I. Van linthout, *Das Buch in der nationalsozialistischen Propagandapolitik* (Berlin und Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), pp. 9-10.

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