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Uncovering Multilingual Strategies

Literary Periodicals and the Conceptualization of “Flemish” Literature (1815–1825)

Abstract: At the turn of the 19th century, the Southern Netherlands were under French rule: literature, press and society progressively frenchified. During the following “Dutch period” (1814–1830), the French policy of monolingualism was transformed into a political revival of Dutch language, accompanied by efforts to impose a Dutch written standard and to culturally unify the Southern and Northern Netherlands. Above all, Napoleon’s rigid system of censorship was turned into a free press, open to debate. Governmental efforts to defend Dutch were criticized by mostly francophone journalists and defended by some of their Flemish colleagues. At the same time, a growing sense of an autonomous Flemish literary field found its place in certain periodicals. After a decade of frenchification of the press and the literary field, one wonders what the discourse on Flemish literature was like, and how it related to journalistic practices of translation, adaptation and transfer. How did these periodicals reflect the multilingual reality of the Southern Netherlands and the superior place of French? By using a cultural transfer approach that highlights the role played by journalists, this article aims to show the paradoxical but rich variety of discursive stances and mono- or multilingual strategies taken in this debate on Flemish literature. It shows that a different method and a less traditional corpus can help overcome the age-old idea that Flemish literature at the start of the 19th century was non-existent.

Keywords: Flemish Literature, Literary Periodicals, Cultural Transfer, Translation, United Kingdom of the Netherlands, Belgian Literature, Cultural Mediators

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1 Introduction

In 1814, the Congress of Vienna decided to unite the Southern Netherlands (roughly present-day Belgium) and the Northern Netherlands (the present-day Netherlands).¹ Commonly referred to as the “Dutch period” of Belgian history (1814–1830), these years of government under the rule of William I, King of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, followed a “French period” (1794–1814) marked by a “frenchification” of cultural and political life. The Southern Netherlands had just emerged from an era of censorship and almost total monolingualism. King William I, on the other hand, actively promoted a cultural revival of the Dutch language², for instance by acknowledging Dutch as a “national language” for the first time in the Southern Netherlands, by subsidizing Dutch-language periodicals and by founding literary and linguistic societies. These initiatives served to find and promote a common language in which a (Northern and Southern) Dutch literature could be written in response to the frenchification which had reached its culmination during the French occupation. The linguistic and political components of this conflict have already been the subject of research (Vosters 2009; Vosters and Janssens 2014; Vosters and Weijermars 2012), but the question as to how Flemish-language literature was affected by this unification campaign remains a largely unexplored topic. The consensus was that political turbulence dominated the aesthetic component in the literary field of the early 19th century and that a Flemish literature did not exist before the creation of the Belgian state. This view fails to take two things into account: firstly, literature is not restricted to the production of novels and poetry but also appears on stage and in periodicals. Secondly, it overlooks the fact that often decades of struggle take place before the autonomy of a literary field is achieved. The 1820s marked a clear desire amongst literati to rediscover the sources of a Flemish literature – the famous *Verhandeling over de nederduytsche taal- en letterkunde* [Treatise on Dutch Language and Literature]³ (1819–1824) by

¹ This article has been prepared within the framework of the interdisciplinary project "Shaping 'Belgian' Literature Before 1830. Multilingual Patterns and Cultural Transfer in Flemish and French Periodicals in the Southern Low Countries" led by Prof. Dr. Tom Verschaffel and Prof. Dr. Beatrijs Vanacker and funded by the Flemish FWO, fund for scientific research (reference number G079620N)

² Beyond the varying linguistic and historical specificities, we use the term “Dutch” in a somewhat anachronistic but pragmatic sense to refer to the Dutch language with all its variants without geographical limitations and “Flemish” to refer to all the variants in the South.

³ All translations from French and Dutch are mine.

J.F. Willems⁴ is just one example – and thus to claim an autonomous Flemish literary field. This claim was particularly made in periodicals, which strove to defend as well as to showcase Flemish literature. As so-called “barometers” of culture (Johannes 1993), these periodicals provide insight into the key ideas on literary and cultural identity which circulated at that time. Through their open structure and periodicity, periodicals had the potential to become a “platform voor actuele discussie en hervormende actie [...] [en] maakt een continue wisselwerking tussen auteur en lezer mogelijk of zelfs noodzakelijk” [platform for current debates and for reformative action [...] [and] make interaction between author and reader possible and even necessary] (Johannes 1993: 11). This specificity of the press is crucial since it had been absent in the Southern Netherlands for fifteen years. Under the French regime, the press had been curtailed to the extent that, as from 1811,⁵ all periodicals had to appear either in French or in a bilingual version. No new Flemish periodicals were published after 1806. The press was completely frenchified, but also lacked literature. Periodicals were obliged to copy their articles from the official *Moniteur* so as not to run the risk of being banned. Flemish language and literature had no place there. Taking into account that the revolutionary period of 1780–1790 had given a new impulse to Flemish-language periodicals, one wonders how this freedom, which was regained in 1815, took shape in the periodicals of the Southern Netherlands and what the discourse on Flemish literature was like, finally freed from the “French burden”.⁶ The new geopolitical constellation⁷ would favor the language of the people and the fields of literature and the press were ultimately free: the press laws in place since the Directory and brought to a climax by Napoleon

⁴ Jan Frans Willems (Boechout, 11 March 1793 – Ghent, 24 June 1846) is perhaps the best-known Flemish writer of this period. He was already well known during his lifetime for his plays, historical and philological essays and poems. His bilingual poem “Aen de Belgen – Aux Belges” in 1818 marks his rise in the literary world of the Southern Netherlands (Stynen 2012).

⁵ Although the decree on imperative French translation for the press dates from 26 September 1811, in practice, the prefects of the departments – all of them Frenchmen – no longer accepted the creation of Flemish-language periodicals from the beginning of the Empire and forced existing periodicals to publish in French in order to better control them.

⁶ In 1815, J.F. Willems published a poem that connected freedom of language to the new government and characterized the French government as a “yoke”: “Triumph!-on'z Nederduytsche Tael/ Is van het Fransche juk onthéven/ En zal, hoe zeer de nyd ook smael'/ Haer'ouden luyster doen herleeven” (*Antwerpischen Almanach van Nut en Vermaek*, 19)

⁷ The first article of the Act of the Congress of Vienna of 21 July 1814 stipulated: “La réunion de la Belgique et de la Hollande devra être intime et complète, de façon à ce que les deux pays ne forment qu'un seul et même Etat” [The reunion of Belgium and Holland shall be intimate and complete, so that the two countries shall form a single state] (von Busekist 1998: 41).

were abolished by the decree of 23 September 1814.⁸ An interweaving of the press, literature and the Flemish language was in the offing. How could this emergent “Flemish literary field” find its place in these brand new self-proclaimed literary periodicals? How were these periodicals to reflect, in their text and form, the multilingual reality and the important place that French had taken in Flanders over the previous decades?

As such, this article aligns with a rich tradition of research on periodicals, which has been particularly fruitful for France in the 18th century.⁹ For the period after 1830, following the pioneering research done by M.-E. Thérenty, several researchers have studied the progressive mediatization of society in and through periodicals. But what happened in between these two milestones remains largely unknown – regardless of the cultural area being studied. In the Southern Netherlands, the 18th century would have remained uncharted territory if not for the pioneering research of J. Smeyers and J. Huyghebaert, among others, who regularly included the study of periodicals in their analyses. Researchers of Belgian literature after 1830 made the study of periodicals one of their research habits. Among nineteenth-century literature scholars, L. D'hulst, K. Vandemeulebroucke, A. de Clercq, A. Deprez, M. Hanot, R. Merecy and R.F. Lissens stand out for their focus on the study of the journalistic field in Belgium. Similarly, J. Weijermars focuses on periodicals in her research on the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. Nevertheless, for the first decades of the 19th century, the field remains rather unexplored, apart from a few synoptic studies, for example in the literary history of the 19th century by W. van den Berg & P. Couttenier (2016) and in *ENT1815*, the encyclopaedia of Dutch-language periodicals until 1815.¹⁰

Periodical studies are confronted with nationalist structures and methodological monolingualism in literary research. Both the Dutch and the preceding French period, i.e., the first three decades of the nineteenth century, often fall through the cracks of research because of this division along linguistic lines.

⁸ “Les lois et règlements émanés sous le gouvernement français, sur l'imprimerie et la librairie, en y comprenant tout ce qui concerne les journaux, sont abrogés dans le gouvernement de la Belgique” [The laws and regulations issued under the French government, on printing and bookshops, including all that concerns journals, are abrogated in the government of Belgium] (Pasinomie 1860, 275: Arrêté du Prince Souverain, concernant la liberté de la presse, et règlement pour l'imprimerie, la librairie et les journalistes du 23 Septembre 1814).

⁹ See, in particular, Sgard (1991).

¹⁰ van Vliet, R. (ed.) (s.d.). *Encyclopedie van Nederlandstalige Tijdschriften (ENT)*. Nederlandstalige periodieken tot de aanvang van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden (tot 1815). [Online]. <https://www.ent1815.nl/> (13.06.2023).

Thus, no proto-“Belgian” literary history that includes both linguistic groups has yet been produced. Several researchers, however, using the concept of the cultural mediator and proposing case studies from various periods, have in recent decades shown the need to consider the (proto-)Belgian lands as a whole and to study their intranational relations (Verschaffel et al. 2014). With few exceptions (D’hulst 2018), these studies have so far focused on the period after Belgium’s independence in 1830. However, this binary division is particularly untenable in a study of the “Dutch” period in Belgium, where French, standardized Dutch and so-called “Flemish” variants coexisted and conflicted with one another. The Southern Netherlands were at that time, as they had been in the past, a transitional zone, “où se croisent en s’articulant avec les productions indigènes les importations originales et traduites venues du Nord et de la France” [where original and translated imports from the North and France intersected and articulated with indigenous productions] (D’hulst 2018: 1315). Besides discursive analysis, which illuminates the positions taken by the different actors of an emerging literary field in this multilingual and multicultural context, the main working tool of such research is that of cultural transfer (Espagne and Werner 1985, Espagne 2013). The study of transfers allows us to consider the discourses, references and appropriations of these periodicals and their journalists without structuring them hierarchically. Rather than studying the discourse on endogenous literature on the one hand and the influences of other cultures – notably French – on the other, the analysis of cultural transfers directs our attention towards different modes of contact with these cultures and their adaptations within the endogenous literary field.

For this purpose and in order to analyze the complex or “diffuse” transfers in periodicals (Brolsma 2008), the analysis of cultural mediators is of paramount importance. Indeed, “mediators are not merely the support teams of the Literary Greats in the established canon, but agents with a very specific function in the diffusion of literature and culture” (Leerssen 2014: 1401) - who often polish their multilingual, translation and transfer practices (Verschaffel et al. 2014). Polyglots themselves, they can highlight but also strategically hide the multilingual reality of the Southern Netherlands. They can overtly translate but also adapt the transferred elements and articles to an (imagined) monolingual readership. To hide multilingualism¹¹ thus was one of many possible strategies

¹¹ Multilingualism, here, is understood as the sociolinguistic reality of the Southern Netherlands. “Hiding” or “showing” this multilingualism is thus regarded as a textual strategy. The individual component, the third of three levels of multilingualism recorded by R. Grutman, is

to conceptualize a fully autonomous Flemish literature, and one that was frequently used in these decades of French hegemony. More attention should therefore be paid to the choices of these mediators. They change not only the meaning of a cultural good but also its function. Periodical editors recorded these transfers between cultures by writing them down, staging or concealing them, and thus played an important role in the formation of public opinion. They can tell us more about the state of literature at a particular moment in history. Noting the existence of a discourse on “Flemish” language and its emerging literature during the first ten years of the Dutch period (1815–1825), we want to study the role of journalists in the development of this discourse, focusing on the intra- and international relations of the mediators and the linguistic strategies and transfers implemented in their periodicals.

2 The “literary” periodical in Flanders, in search of a language and a literary field

Between 1815 and 1825, the journalistic field in Flemish had to be rebuilt almost entirely. Journals that had appeared in bilingual versions could reappear in Dutch, and new Flemish periodicals emerged although they had difficulty surviving. The pre-eminence of French language in periodicals written in Flanders endured throughout the French period. These French-language periodicals clearly showed a literary inclination, while no Flemish periodicals existed exclusively dedicated to criticism or literary production. Nevertheless, in the French-language periodicals specializing in literature, the debate was almost exclusively on French literature; in the *Mercure Belge* and the *Annales Belges*, Flemish literature was discussed but was never the central topic. On the Dutch-speaking side, the beginning of the 19th century witnessed a first wave of philological and historical works on Flemish literature in search of the origins of literature in Dutch (van den Berg and Couttenier 2016: 37).¹² The Dutch period

addressed through the analysis of the strategies and opinions of the editors of the two journals (Grutman 2009: 182).

¹² This desire to write the history of Flemish literature corresponds to J.F. Willems’ emancipatory vision of Flemish literature, one of the three visions noted by Weijermars (2011). This vision asserted the existence of a fully-fledged Flemish literature (under whatever name), which should free itself by searching for its roots and seeking its specific character. At the same time, there was a vision of a Flemish literature “in development”, which should be modelled on

was thus a transitional period, a breeding ground for research and creation that resulted, as early as 1828, in the creation of the historical novels of Henri Moke in French and Hendrik Conscience in Dutch. For this, a common history had to be created, and this was the task Flemish “literary” periodicals in the years 1815–1830 took upon them.

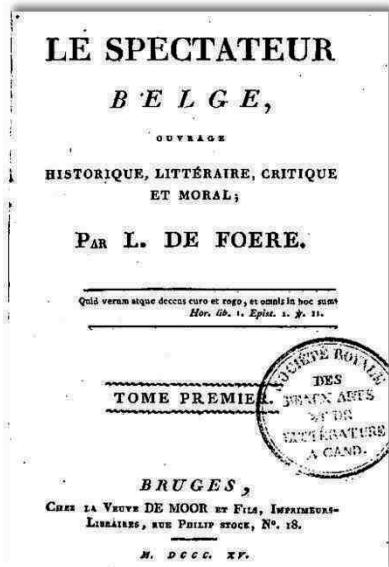


Fig. 1: Le Spectateur Belge, front page

Dutch literature, and an “integral” vision that integrated the two literatures of the North and the South as part of a whole.

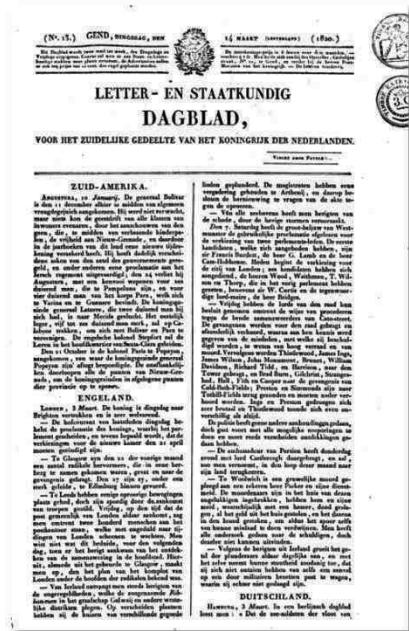


Fig. 2: Letter- en Staatkundig Dagblad

Two of these periodicals, which appeared between 1815 and 1825, stand out for the special attention they gave to literature in Flanders and for their unique stance in the linguistic debate. *Le Spectateur Belge, ouvrage historique, littéraire, critique et moral [The Belgian Spectator, Historical, Literary, Critical, and Moral Work]* by the Flemish abbot Leo De Foere¹³ was published in Bruges between 1815 and 1823. It was fiercely opposed to the French regime and relied on the new Dutch regime to reestablish the language and culture of the old “Belgians”. He pleaded for a *Belgian* national feeling under the protection of William I. However, he became increasingly critical of the king’s monocultural policy, leading to a Flemish cultural and linguistic particularism. The *Letter- en Staatkundig Dagblad [Literary and Political Daily]* (1 February 1820–29 August 1820)

¹³ Leo De Foere (Tielt, 8 February 1787–Bruges, 7 February 1851) was ordained to the priesthood in 1810. He was a teacher at the college in Roeselare until he started writing his *Spectateur Belge* at the end of 1814. After handing over his periodical to Felix De Pachtere in 1823 – who continued it for a year – he disappeared from the public scene, only to return after Belgian independence to play an important role in the constitution of the new state (Simon 1968).

was founded by a community of pro-government Flemings and was approved by the king. It was published in Ghent by the brothers Pierre¹⁴ and Johan Hendrik Leblocqy¹⁵ with the support of Leo D'hulster,¹⁶ J.M. Schrant¹⁷ and other members of the literary society *Regat Prudentia Vires*.¹⁸ This local anchoring was reflected in its articles, which dealt with Ghent's literary life and the activities of the Chamber of Rhetoric *De Fonteine*.¹⁹

Today, these journals would be classified under the common denominator of cultural magazines. With a well-defined program (e.g., in flyers, in a preface or discernible in the text itself), they tried to create a (national, local, international) identity to which the reader could relate (Aerts 2002). This was the period preceding the great mediatization of the press that established new genres and assigned specific functions to increasingly specialized periodicals. In 1815,

14 Pierre Leblocqy (Ghent, 1 February 1797–Nivelles, 4 February 1864) had studied law but eventually embarked on a career in journalism. He started out in the *Dagblad* and held various posts and positions in different periodicals in Ghent and Brussels, always with an Orangeist bias. He published poems in French and Dutch and became professor of linguistics at Ghent University (Voordeckers 1964)

15 Johan Hendrik Leblocqy (Ghent, 1790–Ghent, 2 May 1858) was a teacher at the Ghent and Menin colleges, before briefly becoming a journalist and then a judge at the court of first instance. He also translated Siegenbeek's *Précis de l'histoire littéraire des Pays-Bas* in 1827 and belonged to several literary societies (Van Duyse 1858).

16 Leo D'Hulster (Tielt, 15 January 1784–Ghent, May 1843) was a teacher at various colleges. He was a member of several literary societies and the Orangeist movement. He published collections of poems and essays. Because of his political convictions, he worked for a common Dutch language for the Netherlands and Belgium (Vanacker 1987).

17 The Dutch Catholic priest Johannes Matthias Schrant (Amsterdam, 24 March 1783–Leiden, 5 April 1866) was sent to Ghent in 1817 by William I to become the first professor of Dutch literature at the University. In 1830 he returned to the Netherlands, disillusioned: his courses were hardly attended, which he attributed to the hegemony of the French language and culture in Ghent (Weijermars 2009).

18 The *Maatschappij van Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, also known by its motto *Regat Prudentia Vires*, was a section of the rhetorical chamber *De Fonteine* in Ghent. Their aim was to promote Dutch language and literature. Founded in 1819, it became autonomous in 1821 and followed the example of northern literary societies in its activities. The society was disbanded with the independence of Belgium in 1830 (De Clercq and Deprez 1996: 59).

19 This chamber was founded in Ghent in the 15th century. It went through many ups and downs in the following centuries, but – unlike other chambers – survived the French period. Between 1800 and 1830 it performed Dutch or Flemish traditional plays and translated plays by Kotzebue, Shakespeare, Schiller and Voltaire (Verschaffel 2017: 71–74; Van den Berg and Couttenier 2016: 180).

the literary press was not exclusively “literary”:²⁰ it dealt with literary, cultural, and social issues. For example, the *Letter- en Staatkundig Dagblad* was advertised as a “literary and political daily”. The paper was divided into a political and a literary section with book reviews, poems, and information on cultural life. The title of the *Spectateur Belge* referred to a tradition of satirical literary journals – the English *Spectators*²¹ and the French *Spectateurs*: it adopted their polemical and moralistic character and the first- person narration, but not the other formal characteristics of this type of periodical, such as the setting (in an inn, in the streets) of the narrative instance. De Foere used literary forms to convey his message, such as the fictitious letter, the essay and the dialogue (Johannes 1995: 6). These literary journals served the improvement of the Dutch language in the Southern Netherlands. They assigned a dual function to their periodicals: to inform and to educate.

The *Dagblad* wanted to “verspreiden en opbouwen onzer taal” [spread and build up our language], and “derzelver keurigheid, deftigen aard en welluidendheid [aantoonen]” [prove the delicacy, distinction and harmony] of the Dutch language and make it easy to use for the Flemish so as to “de oefening der Nederlandsche Letterkunde bij ons algemeener te doen worden” [generalize our literary practice in Dutch]. They claimed that they had found nothing more suitable to achieve the “[inleiding van] alle taallievende Vaderlanders [...] in het heiligdom der Nederlandsche Spraak en Letteren” [introduction of all patriots who love their language into the temple of Dutch language and literature] than a literary journal (L&SD, 1 February). The *Spectateur* also wanted to achieve this goal by means of discourse and example: “il faut [...] que non-seulement je relève la beauté de la langue flamande par des discussions, mais que par le fait même, je la revête de toute sa dignité et de toute sa grandeur” [I must not only enhance the beauty of the Flemish language by means of discussion, but also by putting it into practice so as to dignify it with all its greatness] (SB 1815: t.1, 91). For example, the *Spectateur* intended to include historical Flemish literary pieces. He hoped that the periodical form would be more suitable for such a task than a book:

20 As early as 1825, literary criticism as we know it today began to emerge in periodicals but really established itself after 1830 (van den Berg and Couttenier 2016: 36).

21 The first of which, *The Spectator*, was a daily periodical founded in 1711 by J. Addison and R. Steele. This kind of moralising periodical, with a central character who guides the text, was in vogue in the 18th century and was imitated throughout Europe. In the southern Netherlands, the first „spectator”, *De Rapsodisten*, was founded in 1784 by a Dutchman. The Ghent press favoured this formula in the early French period (Verschaffel 2017: 114).

Móoglyks zullen die onbekende waernemingen op onze oudheyd onze landgenooten noyt kunnen toevloeyen, 't en zy door deader van eenige nu en dan utgegeve bladjes, zynden den eenigsten middel, dien ik tans ook verkiest, om de zeldzaeme nasporen, op ons vaderland gedaen, tegen eene zekere en betreurlyke vernietiging te verdedigen

[It is possible that these unknown proofs of our antiquity may never reach our compatriots, if only through the vein of a few pages published from time to time, being the only means, which I now also prefer, of defending the rare traces left on our homeland against certain and regrettable destruction] (SB 1815: t.1, 38)

Thus, the periodical could become a monument for the literature of the Southern Netherlands, since the endogenous literary history had demonstrated an unparalleled richness and should become the source for contemporary authors, rather than foreign literature. Indeed: “waarom onze aandacht uitsluitend aan het vreemde gegeven, en de vruchten van onzen eigen bodem verzuimd?” [why should we pay attention only to foreign things and neglect the fruits of our own soil] (L&SD, 1 February), asked the *Dagblad* rhetorically. The same image is used by the *Spectateur*:

Que vous vous suffisez à vous-même, pour ne pas ramper servilement aux pieds de vos voisins, qui ne cessent de colporter leurs vaines et frivoles prétentions d'esprit pour la réalité même ! N'allez pas chercher sur le sol de l'étranger, plus ou moins stérile, des productions insipides, tandis que sur votre sol natal, vous pouvez recueillir tant de richesses indigènes

[May you be self-sufficient, and not grovel slavishly at the feet of your neighbours, who never cease to peddle their vain and frivolous pretensions of spirit for reality itself! Do not go looking for insipid productions on foreign soil, which is more or less barren, while on your native soil you can gather so much indigenous wealth] (SB, 1815, t.1, 29)

Underneath the rejection of this “foreign soil” and these “frivolous pretensions of spirit”, an attack on French culture and language can be identified. The *topos* of the French burden was often used during this decade. Commonplaces about the frivolity of the French and the rigorous fixity of French language were contrasted with the flexibility of the Dutch language, which also conveyed moral concepts that the French language supposedly no longer knew. The *Spectateur* even indicated France as the instigator of the decline of Dutch:

de oudste, de schoonste, de rykste, de uytgedrukkste, de natuerlykste der levende taelen in Europa, het nederduytsch, was [...] uytgeroeyd uyt staetkunde, [...] uytgeroeyd van een rykbestier, 't welk zig, schaemtloos en tot walgens toe, den voorstaener der letterkunde voor geheel Europa uytriep.

[The oldest, most beautiful, richest, most expressive, most natural of the living languages of Europe, *Dutch*, has been [...] exterminated by politics [...], exterminated by a state which had shamelessly and to the point of disgust elected itself the advocate of literature of the whole of Europe] (SB, 1815, t.1, 43–44)

But the tide had been turning since William I came to power. The *Spectateur* was in favour of the new language law of 15 September 1819: “een lichtje van hóop schemert tusschen véel nevelen” [a light of hope shines in the midst of many fogs] (SB 1815 t.1: 44). The Dutch language was finally being valued and literature could eventually reach the same level as in the Northern Netherlands.

Sedert dat ons schoon en rijk Belgie aan vreemde heerschappij is ontrukt, ziet men bij ons overal onze schoone en rijke moedertaal geliefkoosd; en wij ook zullen misschien wel haast onze Van der Palms, onze Bilderdyks, onze Feiths, enz. kunnen opnoemen
[Since our beautiful and rich Belgium has been wrested from foreign domination, our beautiful and rich mother tongue is loved everywhere; and we too may soon be able to name our Van der Palms, our Bilderdyks, our Feiths, etc.] (L&SD, 4 February)

Also, the insistence on language as proof of the existence of a Flemish literary field reveals a sociolinguistic and political issue that played an important role in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

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révolution qui vient de déchristianiser et de dissoudre la monarchie trône-chrétienne, et d'être aujourd'hui le plus grand obstacle à la contre-révolution en faveur de cette monarchie ;
par M. Poitiers, chanoine de Rheims. Cette nouvelle édition est augmentée de quelques notes trouvées dans les manuscrits de M. H. J. A. Petit, S. T. L. chanoine, exam. synod. et trésorier de l'église cathédrale de St. Bavon, à Gand. Nous consacrerons un article à l'examen critique de cet ouvrage.

M. Bossuyt heeft een latynsche vertaling gegeven van de franse *Stenographie* van Conen de Propéan, met een byvoegsel van verkoorregels toegepast aan de neder- en hoogduytse, engelsche, italiensche en spaansche taelu. Zie over dit werk onse N° II, bl. 71, en N° V, bl. 189.

M. J. J. Raespaet, ancien membre des états de Flandre et des académies de Hollande, Zélande, et autres provinces des Républiques belges, a écrit la *thèse* de l'inauguration des princes souverains des XVII^e et XVIII^e provinces des Pays-Bas. C'est une dissertation très-intéressante sur l'origine, la nature, les droits et les devoirs qui résultent des inaugurations de nos provinces Belges. L'auteur y a joint des *Recherches sur l'origine, la nature et le mode d'exécution de la faculté de causer le service et l'obéissance*, reconnue par l'article 59 de la JOUVEUSE ENTRÉE du Brabant, non pas comme PRIVILÉGE, mais comme DROIT, et l'application de ces principes à l'organisation de la législation de moyen âge et à nos chartes. De plus, M. Raespaet réussit à des connaissances très-variees et très-étendues sur l'histoire de la Belgique, de bons et de loyaux principes. Tout le monde a applaudis à sa nomination pour la rédaction d'un projet de loi fondamental; puissions nous applaudir aussi au travail qui doit ressortir de sa commission honorable! cependant on s'assure que, pour la part d'influence qu'il exercera sur notre législation, profondément instruit dans notre histoire, il saura combiner celle-ci avec les besoins actuels de la patrie à laquelle on sait qu'il est très-dévoué.

Ensen schryver zonder naem, gal in 1814 een *Getrouw verhael van de vernietiging en herstelling van het bisschoppyk seminarie van Gent*. Mogelyks sal ik ter verificating en voltrekking onzer landseken, in de negentiende eeuw, dit verhael eens in nouwere paelen begrypen.

Fig. 3: Spectateur Belge, 1815, vol. 2, 85

3 Which national language?

The national language, Dutch, which had been promoted by law, was not able to play a big role in reality. King William I himself, who had supported the creation of a pro-government French-language periodical, the *Journal de Bruxelles* (1820–1827), had realised that in the Southern Netherlands the debate was conducted in French. The *Letter- en Staatkundig Dagblad* had also been supported by the government,²² but not enough to survive. De Foere initially tried to create a fully bilingual *Spectateur Belge*. A Dutch work was criticized in Dutch; a work in French or another language was reviewed in French (see example opposite). But the latter language became more and more predominant. Already in the second volume, still in 1814, a reader complained that in number 9 he encountered not one Dutch word. In 1816 the first French review of a Dutch work appeared. This review no longer emphasized the usefulness of this type of work in spreading the mother tongue, but rather its formal characteristics and the classic criteria of criticism: “It is a real combination of the useful and the pleasant” (SB 1816 t.4: 186–187). French language and standards prevailed when discussing the political and cultural affairs of the state, both by the king himself and by a large part of the periodicals.

The negative influence of French on Dutch was noted and denounced by several periodicals, which often mocked the hybrid language spoken by the Frenchified bourgeoisie. In a presumably fictitious letter to the editors of the *Dagblad*, the writer prefers the editors to write in a language that is known to everyone, as he himself does. This language turns out to be full of Gallicisms. In the following (Dutch) citation, these Gallicisms for which a Dutch equivalent existed are in italics:

Ik bermerk dat gij zoodanig hoog reikt om onbekende woorden te *attraperen*, dat men alle momenten in de lectuur *gearresteerd* is [...] Waarom *prefereert* gij zulke woorden niet waar aan ons oor door dagelijksch gebruik *gehabitueerd* is? [...] 'T Zijn *singuliere* geesten die *pretenderen* altijd zulke *pedantische expressien*, die zij zuiver vlaamsch noemen, te *em-ploijeren*

[I notice that you reach so high to *catch* unknown words that one is *arrested* at every moment of reading [...] Why do you not *prefer* such words to which our ear is *accustomed* by daily use? [...] It is singular minds that *pretend* always to *employ* such *pedantic expressions*, which they call pure Flemish] (L&SD, 25 February, my emphasis)

²² Pierre Lebroucq stated in his memoirs that his brother's “Dutch periodical” was “favoured” by the government, but he did not specify in what form (Lebroucq 1842: 2).

In the same issue, another letter took the opposite stance and found, on the contrary, that the *Dagblad* used too many “bastard words”. The author of this letter undermined his own argument, however, since even Vondel’s language seemed impure to him: “mij [is] laatst Vondel uit de handen [...] gevallen, om dat hij sprak van *trompetten en regementen*” [Lately Vondel fell out of my hands, because he spoke of *trumpets and regiments*] (L&SD 25 February, my emphasis). In the *Spectateur*, this figure of the French-speaking Flemish parvenu appeared in a dialogue. Here the Gallicisms were pointed out by De Foere himself:

Monsieur l’advocat ik heb d’eer u te *salueeren*, ik heb lang *gedesireerd* u eens over *interessante* zaeken te spréeken, en altyd g’echouéerd in die *entreprise* [Monsieur l’advocat I have the honour to *salute* you, I have long *desired* to talk to you about *interesting* things, and I have always *failed* in that *enterprise*] (SB t.1: 162).

The *Dagblad* deplores that “in de latere vlaamsche schriften [...] voegt zich de taal naar de woordvoeging *in het fransch*” [in later Flemish writings, language adapts to the *French* word order] (L&SD 18 February). But this French influence on Flemish had not always been the case. Better still, Flemish was already codified long before the French language, said De Foere:

Van in dat tydvak, wanneer de fransche tael nog ruw en regelloos was, [...] was onze vaderlandsche tael reeds tot zulke beschaefdheyd gevoorderd, dat negentien onzer vlaemsche genootschappen, rederyk-kamers genaemd, in hunne letterkundige betrekkingen een eenstemmige spelling hadden.

[at that time, when the French language was still crude and without rules, [...] the language of our fathers had already evolved to such a degree of civilization that nineteen of our Flemish societies, called chambers of rhetoric, already had a unified orthography in their literary relations] (SB 1815 t.2: 72)

In the discourse on Flemish language and endogenous literature, the use of the French language was inevitable, even if it was intended to highlight the advantages of the Dutch or Flemish language. In order to build up a barrier against French influence, Dutch language and literature had to be strengthened.

The written form of the newly created “national language” was indeed problematic. There were three competing ways of writing Dutch in the Southern Netherlands: the system developed in the north by Matthijs Siegenbeek and officially recognized in 1804, the Des Roches system dating from 1761, which took into account the spelling habits in the Southern Netherlands, and finally the Behaegel system, published in 1817, which tried to create a synthesis of the Flemish and Dutch ways of writing. This question was on everyone’s mind, and

the debate took shape in periodicals in particular. The *Spectateur* stuck to the Des Roches spelling in its Flemish articles, while the *Dagblad* adopted the Siegenbeek spelling. In defense of their choice, the Lebrocquy brothers included historical texts to show that the Siegenbeek spelling was already in use in Flanders long before it was officially codified by the Dutch. “Daar zal de lezer zien dat in de XVIe eeuw, gansch Belgie door, eene spelling werd gevuld, welke [...] even de zelfde is als de hedendaagsche Hollandsche spelling.” [There the reader will see that in the sixteenth century, everywhere in Belgium, people followed a spelling which [...] was exactly the same as the contemporary Dutch spelling] (L&SD 21 July).

Adopting the already perfected Northern Dutch language would mean a renaissance of literature in the Southern Netherlands. The editors of the *Dagblad* were convinced that J.F. Willems and N. Cornelissen “zullen eerlang de spelling der gezonde reden [...] als de hunne aannemen” [would one day accept the spelling of right reason] (L&SD 23 May). The spelling of “bad reason” would, then, be that of P. Behaegel (L&SD 28 March). For the *Spectateur*, on the other hand, Behaegel's system was quite natural: “les principes grammaticaux de Mr Behaegel [ne sont] non-seulement pas nouveaux, mais [ils sont] aussi anciens que la nature elle-même” [Mr Behaegel's grammatical principles [are] not only not new, but [they are] as old as nature itself] (SB 1816 t.4: 255).

When the *Dagblad* disappeared, the *Spectateur* mocked its linguistic and literary stances in allegorical and satirical letters between the cities of Bruges and Ghent:

Et votre pauvre *Letterkundig Dagblad* qu'est-il devenu? N'avoit-il pas fait, par ses doctes déclamations, assez de prosélytes à la langue hollandaise, la langue nationale [...]? Voyez comme on parle et comme on écrit maintenant le hollandais, et tout cela la patrie le doit à ce grand nombre d'articles dans lesquels il crie si fortement qu'on étoit en conscience littéraire obligé de parler et d'écrire le hollandais, même à l'exclusion du flamand, et sous peine d'être arriéré de trois siècles! Tous ces mémorables exploits, nous les devons à ces littérateurs qui, par des preuves si éclatantes et par des raisonnemens si clairs, démontrent évidemment la supériorité de l'orthographe hollandaise sur l'orthographe flamande. [...] Et ce chef-d'œuvre philologique est aussi trépassé!

[And what has become of your poor *Letterkundig Dagblad*? Had he not, by his learned declamations, made enough proselytes of the Dutch language, the national language [...]? See how Dutch is now spoken and written, and all this the fatherland owes to this great number of articles in which he shouted so strongly that one was in literary conscience obliged to speak and write Dutch, even to the exclusion of Flemish, and on pain of being three centuries behind! We owe all these memorable feats to those writers who, with such striking evidence and clear reasoning, clearly demonstrated the superiority of Dutch spelling over Flemish spelling. [...] And this philological masterpiece has also passed away!] (SB 1820 t.11: 348–349)

The *Spectateur* seemed to claim victory: the language of the Flemish people would be Flemish. All other conceptions, and in particular an adherence to Dutch literature and orthography, did not emanate from the nature of the Flemish people but from a small elitist group of men. Interestingly, the *Spectateur* provided this criticism in French. Indeed, the *Spectateur Belge* appeared only in French after a few months and the *Letter- en Staatkundig Dagblad* disappeared completely – according to P. Lebroucq because of a general disdain for the Dutch language (Lebroucq 1842). Several attempts by ambitious journalists to create periodicals in Flemish never came to fruition or were abandoned in favor of a periodical in French. Could we say that this meant the failure of Dutch language in Flanders and the omnipresence of French language and culture?

4 Hiding or playing with the French element: transfer and translation practices

Several studies have demonstrated the existence in the “Belgian” journalistic corps of many liberal French emigrants since the Restoration in France, overlapping with the “Dutch” period for the Southern Netherlands.²³ They joined or founded political periodicals in Brussels, Ghent and Antwerp. In his *Spectateur*, De Foere provided articles on the “good” new periodicals that appeared in the kingdom, explicitly with the aim of serving as a counterweight to these foreign periodicals. He recommended the *Letter- en Staatkundig Dagblad*, whose first issue had not yet been published, but he already praised it: “Tels sont les nobles efforts que d'estimables compatriotes (sic) se proposent d'opposer aux scandaleux desseins de quelques étrangers qui semblent vouloir établir dans notre patrie [...] des foyers d'impiété et de corruption” [Those are the noble efforts some esteemed compatriots intend to oppose to the scandalous designs of some foreigners who seem to want to establish in our homeland [...] hotbeds of impiety and corruption] (SB 1820 t.9: 130–131).

²³ See Lemmens (2011). Saint-Jean (2010) has calculated that more or less half of the editors of periodicals in the Belgian regions were French. However, one should not deny the share of Northern Dutch writers, professors and journalists in the Southern Netherlands, especially in the second half of the 1820s. *De Argus* and the *Belgische Muzen-Almanak* were founded by Dutchmen, based on a Dutch model, and their pages were filled with articles communicated from the Northern Netherlands, with the aim of providing an example for southern literati (Weijermars 2011).

The presence of these French emigrants was favored by William I's liberalism and by the governors of the Flemish provinces, who were generally French-speaking. *Den Merkuur van Antwerpen* could not count on the governor's support as long as it did not appear in French; the *Letter- en Staatkundig Dagblad*, supported by the government, was in the paradoxical position that as a semi-official periodical promoting the national language and William I's language policy, it was nevertheless forced to insert official announcements by the governor in French (L&SD 21 March). It turned out that some of these foreign journalists were paid to spread the liberalism dear to William I, indirectly contributing to the hegemony of the French-language press in the Southern Netherlands.²⁴ These foreign journalists were also involved in the cultural affairs of their host country (Merecy 1945), often taking up peculiar standpoints. In the *Annales belgiques*, a Ghent periodical written by Frenchmen, "Flemish" literature did not seem to be a problem: it was simply part of Dutch literature. The perspective of this periodical was "Belgian", in the broad sense that William I tried to give to this term, encompassing all the inhabitants of the Kingdom.

De Foere and the Lebroucq brothers wanted to provide a counterweight to this French hegemony and this reading of the literary field by creating periodicals by and for Flemings. This may obscure the fact that they themselves occupied an important position as mediators in the literary field of the Southern Netherlands. In addition to his work as a journalist, De Foere was probably part of a literary circle around Baron d'Eckstein (Charlier 1948) that worked to introduce European Romantic authors in the Southern Netherlands. P. Lebroucq published and translated several collections of poems into French; J.H. Lebroucq translated a Dutch literary history for a French-speaking audience. They were therefore immersed in French culture and language and inevitably took a stand towards that culture in their periodicals. France remained in all respects the privileged referent, as it was for most European nations (Thérenty and Vaillant 2010). On the one hand, it was the big sister with whom the Southern Netherlands shared a language. On the other hand, it was the aggressor who had restricted cultural life, press, and the language of the people for twenty years. The two periodicals both claimed they had to position themselves against the influence of this French culture. While the discourse on endogenous literature was therefore full of praise, the reality of the journalistic and literary field –

²⁴ Vermeersch (1992) has shown that this attitude of William I turned against him after 1825: partly due to the liberal teachings of the French emigrants who returned in the 1820s, the new generation of periodicals, even those with a Catholic bias, were more vocal, more political and demanded more self-government for the Southern Netherlands.

which was much more hostile to literature in Dutch – indicates the need to study the relationship that these periodicals had with this French element, which was characterized as foreign but hardly concealable in the cultural life of the Southern Netherlands.

One of the options, taken by some periodicals, was to try to eliminate all French references and turn to the North. The mediation of the Lebrocqy brothers took place from the Northern Netherlands to the Southern Netherlands, all while assimilating this Northern literature. The poems of Flemish and Dutch authors stood side by side and were part of the same literature. Foreign authors and works were mentioned in the “theater” section, since the Ghent theaters mainly put on foreign plays and often hosted French troupes. As far as language was concerned, the *Dagblad* expressed the desire from the outset for a unilingual Dutch text, the only argumentative language used in the journal. However, transfer and translation practices were very present even if they were well hidden under the unilingual text. Many articles were taken in their entirety from French language periodicals, such as the French *Journal des Débats*, the *Mercure Belge* from Brussels, the Parisian *Moniteur*, the *Journal de Paris* and the *Gazette de France*.²⁵ The Dutch translation was generally faithful to the original but above all very targeted, without making the original language appear. The sources themselves were translated (“Den Belgischen Mercurius” for “Mercure Belge” for example) and the mottos that accompanied certain articles were also translated – the common practice being to leave them in the original language. However, we have found that when the translator was unsure of his translation, he included the original word.²⁶ This is often the only indication of a multilingual reality and makes us assume that the editors knew their audience to be bilingual. In general, Lebrocqy’s journalistic practice tried to hide this actual multilingualism and numerous transfers from French to Dutch, in order to create a monocultural and monolingual illusion. If the other language was present, it was well framed by the *Dagblad* and served as a rhetorical device. For exam-

²⁵ These are the sources for one issue, from 18 February 1820. We also note the presence of an English periodical quoted from time to time (*The Courier*). Dutch sources are quantitatively rather limited. There is the *Algemeen Nederlandsch Nieuws- en Advertentieblad* from 's Gravenhage and the *Letterbode* from Amsterdam.

²⁶ In the issue of 29 February, when describing a possible Waterloo monument, taken from an article in the *Mercure belge*, the translator spoke of a “verminkte steenen-kegel (un cône tronqué en terre)”: this is a way of translating “tronqué”, but perhaps not the appropriate meaning in this context. Is this why the translator has left the original term – implying that the necessarily bilingual readership can decide for itself what image this “truncated cone in the ground” provides?

ple, in order to highlight the “national language”, it was compared with the French language by placing texts in Dutch and French side by side. The *Dagblad* thus published the poem “De Echtscheiding” by H. Tollens with a translation by a young “Belgian” to show that Dutch productions were on a par with French ones. “echter verhopen wij dat [de Franse vertaling] nog [...] zal kunnen [aantoonen], aan zulke personen, wie de taal min bekend is, [...] dat er ook bij ons bewonderingswaardige voortbrengselen gevonden worden” [We hope [...] that [the French translation] will convince those who are less familiar with the [Dutch] language that there are also admirable productions here] (L&SD 4 February)

French translations seemed useful to the editors of the *Dagblad*, “om hen, die nog door vooroordeelen verblind, van onze moedertaal eenen afkeer gevoelen, tot hare kennis en beoefening zachtelijk, en als 't ware ongevoelig, over te brengen” [in order to gently, and as it were imperceptibly, induce those who, blinded by prejudice, still feel an aversion to our mother tongue, to learn and practice it] (L&SD 9 May).

The other option was to include this French reference in a set of other national literatures that could serve “Flemish” literature. The program of the *Spectateur Belge* was to look outwards to “naturaliser dans sa patrie quelques productions des génies [...] de l'Europe” [naturalize in his homeland some productions of the geniuses [...] of Europe] (1823 t.18: 381). Nevertheless, the editor did not go beyond France. His first review was of *De l'Allemagne* by Mme De Staël and he sprinkled his journal with references to Chateaubriand. Still, “Flemish” literature could not be French, since he “déteste dans ses principes la Littérature française qui a dominé sur le dix-huitième siècle” [detested in its principles French Literature which had dominated the eighteenth century] (SB 1815 t.1: 220). One reader pointed to the overly exaggerated criticism of French literature in the *Spectateur*, and the corresponding lack of Flemish works:

Vous voulez exalter nos compatriotes en abaissant nos voisins, mais quand l'exagération est aussi palpable, l'effet est manqué [...] Savez-vous, Monsieur, quelle est la meilleure manière de discréder les Chef-d'œuvres français ? c'est en leur opposant de meilleurs ouvrages nationaux.

[You want to exalt our compatriots by demeaning our neighbours, but when the exaggeration is so palpable, the effect is missed [...] Do you know, Sir, what is the best way of discrediting French masterpieces? It is by opposing them with better national works] (1815 t.1: 221–224).

This reader suggests that Flemish writers stop criticizing French literature and concentrate on national literary production. But according to De Foere, Flemish writers had not yet reached a respectable level. Under the guise of cultural and

linguistic emancipation, he recommended (good) French works and wrote mainly in French himself: “J’attends avec la plus vive impatience le moment désiré que mes compatriots soient mûrs pour recevoir le *Spectateur Belge* en flamand” [I am looking forward with the greatest impatience to the desired moment when my compatriots are ready to receive the *Spectateur Belge* in Flemish] (1815 t.2: 65). Its purpose was quite unique: although it was written in French, the *Spectateur* is not to be situated in the vein of other French-language periodicals that wrote for the Republic of Letters. The *Spectateur* was initially very “Flemish” in its cultural orientation, with a didactic attitude and explicitly aimed at a local audience. To this end, it produced an assumed multilingualism: according to its program, articles in Dutch and French alternated according to the content. If he reprinted articles from other European periodicals, he reproduced them in their original language without translation. He considered his audience to be (passively) polyglot. However, as the issues progressed, this policy of multilingualism was replaced by a new program since it was the French-speaking public that had to be convinced of the beauty of the Dutch language. The text of the *Spectateur* became more and more unilingual French. The practice of translation became more important than the inclusion of articles in the original language. The *Spectateur* translated articles that were originally in Dutch to enter the debate on national language with the real enemies of Dutch.

[l’on entend souvent la critique] que c’est *en français même* que sont écrits les ouvrages où l’on représente l’usage de cette langue comme une sorte d’hérésie politique et religieuse , ce qui [...] ne prouve rien contre l’existence positive de la langue nationale des Flamands , attendu que ces ouvrages sont aussi composés pour les Wallons qui ne savent pas le flamand et que d’ailleurs ces ouvrages sont de telle nature qu’ils sont hors du goût ou au-dessus de l’intelligence de ceux qui ne parlent que le flamand
 [we often hear the criticism] that it is *in French* that those works are written, in which the use of French is depicted as being some sort of heresy [...], which proves nothing against the positive existence of the national language of the Flemish, given that these works are also composed for the Walloons who don’t know Flemish and that these works are of such a nature that they are beyond the taste or intelligence of those who speak only Flemish] (SB 1819 t.7: 174).

After the implementation of the national language laws of William I in 1819, which led to the official valorization of the Dutch language, the defense of the Flemish linguistic and literary identity became more and more linked to political and religious issues. Although De Foere was initially in favor of a national language shared by the Flemish and the Dutch, he became particularistic over the years. As a Catholic priest, he was suspicious of attempts to spread the “national language” through literary societies such as the *Maatschappij tot Nut van*

't *Algemeen*, which in the north had taken shape in Protestant communities. These societies and their works were, in De Foere's view, intended to spread Protestantism. In the *Letter- en Staatkundig Dagblad*, on the other hand, religion was conspicuously absent, and literature was only linked to its linguistic component. For De Foere, the real battle had become one for the religion of all Belgians, rather than for the Flemish language.²⁷ The *Spectateur* wanted to engage with the many opinion papers that were being created in Brussels by foreigners; French was thus essential. But beyond that, he wanted his periodical to participate in the international Republic of Letters. In contrast to journalists who intentionally wrote in Dutch in order to reach a local audience and to spread the use of the language – his own initial goal – De Foere was reinserting himself in the old tradition of French-language periodicals produced in the Southern Netherlands but aimed at a European audience (Verschaffel 2017: 109). He could thus state in 1820: “Le *Spectateur* n'est pas un ouvrage de province. Les matières qu'il examine sont d'un intérêt général. Il écrit aussi pour les provinces wallonnes de la Belgique et pour les pays étrangers, où le *Spectateur* est lu, et où la langue flamande n'est pas connue.” [The *Spectateur* is not a provincial work. The subjects it examines are of general interest. He also writes for the Walloon provinces of Belgium and for foreign countries, where the *Spectateur* is read, and where the Flemish language is not known] (SB 1820 t.9: 254).

How far we have come from the first issue, where he claimed to be emerging from his “literary solitude” because “Il ne manque à [la] patrie que des mains qui lui rouvrent les sources de son ancienne félicité” [the only thing [the] fatherland lacks is hands that will reopen the springs of its ancient felicity] (SB 1815 t.1: 11). He intended at that time to “réveiller l'esprit national [et] rappeler les moeurs et la religion des Belges” [reawaken the national spirit [and] recall the morals and religion of the Belgians] (SB 1815 t.1: 21) and apologized to his Belgian readership for the few digressions he would make in the Republic of Letters: “que ma chère patrie me permette cette excursion timide dans le monde intellectuel” [may my dear fatherland allow me this timid excursion into the intellectual world] (SB 1815 t.1: 9). Now that the Dutch language no longer had to defend itself against French in order to gain the status of national language,

²⁷ In a reply to a reader who could no longer find the elements of a “literary journal” in the *Spectateur*, he stated that protecting the religion of the Belgian people had become more urgent than promoting the country's language: “Depuis deux ans, les attaques dirigées contre la religion sont beaucoup plus multipliées. C'est ce qui m'a engagé à donner au *Spectateur* un caractère de religion plus prononcé et plus exclusif” [For the past two years, attacks on religion have been much more numerous. This is what prompted me to give the *Spectateur* a more pronounced and exclusive religious character] (SB 1820 t.9: 79).

French could once again serve as a language of international culture and De Foere's journal became almost unilingual. While De Foere did not include any articles from Dutch periodicals during the first four years of his periodical, as soon as his editorial line changed, he began to include articles from the northern Catholic periodicals *Minerva* (1818–1821) and *De Godsdienstvriend* (1818–1869) – proving that by this time the defense of religion had become more important than the defense of a particular Flemish language and culture.

5 Conclusion

Between 1815 and 1825, the *Mercure belge* was considered by contemporaries to be the best literary journal in the Southern Netherlands. The *Dagblad* quoted an article from the *Mercure* about “het vreemd gelaat van het meeste deel onzer dagbladeren” [the foreign face of most of our periodicals] and the “belagchelijk en zelfs jammerlijk gebruik van het eigene voor het uitheemsche te verwaarlozen” [ridiculous habit of neglecting the endogenous for the foreign] (L&SD 1 February). This habit, “malgré les talents et les efforts redoublés de ses rédacteurs [avait mené vers l'échec du] seul journal littéraire qui existât dans le midi du Royaume” [in spite of the talents and redoubled efforts of its editors [had led to the failure of] the only literary journal that existed in the south of the Kingdom], said De Foere (SB 1821 t.13: 160). However, this *Mercure* was itself a French-language journal, written mostly by French émigrés and including works by foreign authors, such as Byron, Mme de Staël, and Chateaubriand, with only a (small) part of its pages devoted to Dutch literature. Moreover, its aim was to bring people together in the Republic of Letters: Dutch-language literature was taken for granted, and it had no desire to create a Flemish literature and a separate identity. It is revealing for the linguistic and cultural situation in the Southern Netherlands that this European journal, which focused on the French literary field, was revered as the best endogenous literary journal by the *Spectateur Belge*, the *Letter-en Staatkundig Dagblad* and by great figures of Flemish literature such as J.F. Willems. However, this is not an exception in Belgian literary history. Rather, these periodicals continued a “tradition” that already existed in the early days of the first literary periodicals in the Southern Netherlands: a continuous search for an identity of their own in a context of transfers and multilingualism. Discursively, the *Dagblad* and the *Spectateur* were (at least initially) in favor of the new government and the conciliation with the Northern Netherlands, which would push the Dutch language and literature in the Belgian provinces to new heights. Nevertheless, the Northern referent in

these periodicals was only historical – contemporary Dutch authors were hardly read at all. The Dutch period, although it enabled new ideas on language and literature and offered the possibility of creating a new discourse on Flemish literature, perpetuated the eternal question of taking a stand for or against French language and culture. Even if the language was abhorred, as in the *Dagblad*, French was still very much present, and the cultural horizon remained French. The Dutch language was hardly ever present, unless, in the case of the *Dagblad*, it was explicitly included in the program and in the text of the periodical. If not through the presence of French journalists in French-language periodicals, French hegemony manifested itself through the content and references of the French-language Belgian periodicals, which were part of a Paris-centered Republic of Letters, and which did not develop any reasoning about Dutch literature in the Southern Netherlands. In the Flemish periodicals, didacticism continued to reign, and here again, it was through comparison with French productions that the reflection on “Flemish” literature was carried out. Openness to other literatures continued to be largely filtered through the French literary field. The *Spectateur Belge* explicitly engaged in this dialogue by commenting in French on works by French authors and by defending Flemish literature in French. But the translation and concealment practices of the *Dagblad* show that even in the context of a periodical with a Dutch cultural and political agenda, the French reference prevailed.

By focusing on the mediators and their mediation and translation strategies, we can better understand how a geopolitical context influenced the positions of journalists and the forms of periodicals. Reading a 19th century periodical dedicated to literature in Flemish gives us an insight into what was happening in this emerging literary field, but more importantly, how this field was constructed through journalistic writing. This construction of a Flemish literature was based on transfers from a wide variety of origins, including French. Whether it was the form of the periodical that praised Flemish literature, the sources used to write the articles, or even the language in which it was praised, this literature, which on the surface looked for its own roots in a medieval past, was undeniably being constructed in a multilingual and increasingly mediatized society. Comparing one editorial program to another and thereby taking into account the numerous ways in which journals attest to the multilingual reality of the Southern Netherlands help us to reveal (un)consciously hidden traditions and trends in journalistic writing in the Southern Netherlands. Periodicals also appear to be a privileged object to grasp not only the similarities, but moreover the nuances different mediators apply to the inevitable inter-

twinement of language and literature in this beginning of the nationalistic 19th century.

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