

hopefulness as part of the human definition: "And yet life in its unfathomable depths is so wonderfully good, Maria—I have to come back to that time and again. And if we just care enough, Maria, God is in safe hands with us despite everything, Maria" (144). Especially those of us "who never lived under a sky of blood" (Wiesel, 203), can read such statements only in awe, anger, and humility, marvelling at the poets who, through the tragedy of world history, contributed a "little piece of stone to the great mosaic" of Jewish history and the human spirit.

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Writing in Holland and Flanders

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Writing in Holland and Flanders was the irregularly appearing publication of the "Foundation for the Promotion of the Translation of Dutch Literary Works," also known more simply as the "Foundation for Translations." Established in 1954 by the Dutch Ministry of Welfare, Public Health, and Culture, and also supported since 1960 by the Belgian Ministry of Dutch Culture, the Foundation's primary task, according to its constitution, "is to promote the knowledge of Dutch literature outside the Dutch language area." It fulfills this mandate by seeking out international publishers for translated works, promoting publications at book fairs, facilitating international contacts for Dutch authors and providing them with information pertinent to the translation process, working with the translators themselves, and generally representing the interests of Dutch literature abroad through whatever channel seems appropriate.

Writing in Holland and Flanders played a role in a number of these functions. Provided free of charge, with a circulation of about 3,000, it presented authors, most often from the twentieth century, by a brief biographical sketch and translated excerpts from their works. Sometimes an entire issue was devoted to one author (eg. Vol. 35 [Spring 1978] on Remco Campaert), with a slightly more extensive discussion of his or her writing and translations from several works; sometimes an issue focussed on authors by dealing with a particular theme (eg. Vol. 40 [Autumn 1982]; *The Child is Father of the Man. Flemish Writers about their Parents*, or Vol. 36 [Spring 1979]; *Exploring the World of Women. A survey by Diny Schouten*); most often, however, an issue presented a very large number of different authors with no apparent commonality except for the Dutch language of their writing. Some of the translated excerpts were taken from completed translations for which a manuscript was available for publication; at other times the excerpt was intended to pique the interest of a potential publisher so that the translation could be commissioned. From 1956 to 1982 forty volumes appeared; since 1982 publication has been suspended.

The promotion of Dutch and Flemish authors in this fashion has both its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, *Writing in Holland and Flanders* did introduce authors to the English-speaking world, both by facilitating a first acquaintance and by functioning as a handy reference source for further exploration, a type of mini-bibliography/biography for primary literature. On the other hand, the brevity of both the biographical introduction and the translated excerpts necessarily gave short shrift to the one ingredient that was and is vital to the promotion of Dutch literature in translation, namely cultural context. Of course, a more detailed discussion of this fell outside of the parameters of this publication; nevertheless, one must ask how accessible the peculiar Dutch or Flemish formulation of universal themes can be to the non-Dutch reader without further explanation. Two examples of such culturally typical formulations would be the theme of religion and society in many of Maarten 't Hart's works, and that of the family and society in Hannes Meinkema's *And then there'll be coffee*. The former requires some understanding of the peculiar manifestations of Calvinism in the Netherlands, the latter a definite appreciation for the role that food in general and coffee in particular play in warding off or masking the evil spirit of existential despair in Dutch society.

Such discussions are, of course, more appropriate to academic journals than promotional literature, and it could be maintained that *Writing in Holland and Flanders* fulfilled its function as a promotion tool for Netherlandic literature in both academic and publishing circles quite adequately. One could quarrel with some details of the actual translations, or point out that citing all titles in English, whether or not the work had actually been translated, was potentially confusing to the reader. These, however, are minor criticisms not intended to detract from the enterprise as a whole. Particularly useful for those wishing to recommend titles to non-Dutch readers were the bibliographies of works in translation periodically published in some of the issues (eg. Vol. 23 [October 1967]). It is a pity that this publication has been suspended, particularly as nothing has appeared to take its place to keep the world informed about recent developments; it is to be hoped that this is not indicative of a lack of English-speaker interest in Dutch literature generally.

Hugo Claus: *Le Chagrin des Belges*. Traduit par Alain van Crugten, Paris, Julliard, 1985.

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Les habitants de pays unilingues tels que les Hollandais, les Français et les Américains ne cessent d'être surpris et fascinés par les difficultés et la complexité de pays bilingues ou multilingues tels que le Canada ou la Belgique. Les querelles, les conflits et le manque de compréhension qui caractérisent la vie publique de ces pays choquent ces observateurs pour qui ces problèmes semblent désespérés, ridicules et faciles à résoudre.

Le roman de Hugo Claus *Le Chagrin des Belges* est un excellent exemple du fait qu'il faut avoir intimement vécu tous ces problèmes avant qu'on puisse en parler avec autorité. Ce roman est à la fois une chronique des années trente et quarante en Flandre, un Bildungsroman des plus classiques, et un document précieux pour mieux saisir la mentalité flamande.

A l'instar de *L'Etranger* de Camus, ce roman est divisé en deux parties. La première partie, qui traite de la période de l'avant-guerre, est intitulée "Le Chagrin"; chaque section a un titre. Par contre, la deuxième partie, qui traite de la guerre et de l'après-guerre et qui est intitulée "Des Belges", ressemble plutôt à un roman-fleuve, car elle n'est pas divisée en sections ayant des titres. En fait, tout le roman est composé d'épisodes d'une ou de plusieurs pages et, surtout dans la deuxième partie, ceux-ci sont parsemés de passages lyriques.

Le Chagrin des Belges possède plusieurs thèmes mais ceux-ci ne sont pas simplement éparpillés dans le texte. A travers les épisodes et les passages lyriques, et grâce au point de vue personnel ainsi qu'au ton neutre mais tolérant du narrateur, une vision cohérente de son époque et de son pays se forme. En d'autres mots, ce texte illustre parfaitement l'assertion sartrienne qu'"une technique romanesque renvoie toujours à la métaphysique du romancier".¹

Hugo Claus a une conception organique et intégrée de la nature de l'homme et de la société. Bien que le roman traite officiellement de l'époque 1939-1947, le temps chronologique n'y joue pas vraiment de rôle: le véritable lieu de l'action est la conscience du narrateur qui, comme une éponge gigantesque, absorbe tout. Son imaginaire est tel que tout y est associé et relié. Son écriture est l'expression verbale de tout ce qu'il a vu, entendu, et imaginé; elle est l'image confuse de sa vie. Comme Vlieghe, l'ami du personnage principal Louis Seynaeve, le lui explique au sujet du cinéma:

N'avait-il donc pas remarqué que, comme chaque