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**SMALL NATIONS WRIT LARGE:
NOTIONS OF COSMOPOLITANISM IN FIN-DE-SIÈCLE
SCOTLAND AND FLANDERS**

Koenraad Claes

Though famously styled a “republic” by the influential comparatist Pascale Casanova, the global literary field is arguably also an empire, considering that its constituent cultures are ranked in complex hierarchies dependent on their respective cultural capital. As Casanova herself observes:

Though universalist literary belief agrees with Brancusi’s dictum that in art there are no foreigners, in reality national attachment is one of the most burdensome constraints felt by writers; indeed, the more dominated the country, the more constraining it is.¹

Casanova’s conception of a “World Republic of Letters” has profoundly shaped recent understandings of cosmopolitanism, its diverse meanings and divergent connotations. Whilst a world republic might suggest a transcendence of national borders, thus liberating participants from the perceived thematic, stylistic or institutional constraints of their respective nations, it is clear that not all world citizens have an equal say over the alleged *res publica* that is literature. This inequality of access is conspicuous in emergent literatures from former colonial territories, but it also holds true for the peripheral so-called “small nations” of Europe, which see their markets and institutions of consecration controlled by foreign centres of cultural capital. Accordingly, “cosmopolitics,” or the wielding of cosmopolitan strategies for cultural-political purposes, can never be disinterested.² Cosmopolitanism may be employed by authors identifying with a political status quo and thereby effectively serve an imperialist agenda by concentrating cultural capital in one place, or, conversely, it may be used as a means of improving equality by redistributing cultural capital across hitherto disregarded cultures.

¹ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. Malcolm DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 181.

² This term was popularized through the collection *Cosmopolitics*, edited by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

This article compares the tensions and affinities between cosmopolitanism and nationalism within two small nations of Western Europe at the fin de siècle: Scotland and Belgium, both culturally emergent during that period. It suggests that notions of cosmopolitanism are determined by the interests of the parties whom they are meant to serve, and it uses as a case study the inspiration that Scottish writer and cultural emancipation activist William Sharp drew from Belgian—and specifically Flemish—authors writing in French. His solidarity with such authors brought his cultural politics into opposition with those of Dutch-language Flemish authors who sought prestige for their own cultural emancipation campaign, raising questions about Sharp's outlook on Scotland, itself a multilingual nation with distinguishable literary traditions in several languages. However different the Scottish and the Belgian case studies seem, they demonstrate how the local and the global overlapped in the late-nineteenth-century avant-garde.

Belgian and Scottish Renaissance

Our first of several paradoxes to work through is the existence of a nationalist international. Cultural emancipation movements express solidarity with each other and often deem it opportune to publicize connections between them. It is for instance a commonplace in propaganda to argue that the achievements of a congenial cause imply potential for one's own. In internal debates, the successes of foreign movements may also inspire new cultural-political strategies at home. Both purposes are apparent in the marked interest in Belgian French-language literature attested by William Sharp.

Sharp expressed his admiration for "Belgic" literature on several occasions during the 1890s. In September 1893, he wrote a short appreciation of the little magazine *Jeune Belgique* (1880–1897) for the London-based monthly, the *Nineteenth Century*, that was important enough for it to be included among his major shorter criticism in his posthumous collection *Studies and Appreciations* (1912).³ In 1895 he published in *The Chap-Book*, a bimonthly published by Stone and Kimball of Chicago, a broader "Note on the Belgian Renaissance" that doubled as a puff piece for his associate Edith Wingate Rinder's anthology, *The Massacre of the Innocents and other Tales by Belgian Writers* (1895), just published in the same firm's Green Tree Library.⁴ Sharp's single-issue *Pagan Review* of

³ William Sharp, "La Jeune Belgique," *Nineteenth Century*, 34 (September 1893): 416–436..

⁴ William Sharp, "A Note on the Belgian Renaissance," *The Chap-Book*, 4.3 (December 15, 1895): 149–157..

1890 had already acknowledged intellectual kinship with “the most typical poets and romancists of the new movement in France and Belgium,” and in it he had adopted the term “les jeunes” several times to describe authors of whom he approved.⁵ In 1895, he translated Charles Van Lerberghe’s play *Les Fleureurs* (1889) as “The Night-Comers” for the second volume of the *Evergreen*, prefaced by another endorsement of the “contemporary Belgian Renaissance,” of which Van Lerberghe was one of his favourite exponents.⁶

As Michael Shaw has demonstrated, the interest of Sharp, as a prominent theorist of the Scottish Revival, in its purported Belgian counterpart, was nothing short of paradigmatic.⁷ According to Sharp, “the word Renaissance is bruited about too loosely,” but the “Belgian literary Renaissance ... is an actuality.”⁸ Furthermore, it is the only revivalist movement outside of Celtic Europe with which Sharp engages at all in his critical writings. He acknowledges that the young country, only founded in 1830, could hardly boast of a past period of glory to revive. What he means by the Belgian “renaissance” becomes clearer when we see that he essentially views Belgian literature as a joint venture of its two constituent peoples, francophone Walloons and (originally) Dutch-speaking Flemings, each having deeply rooted cultural histories that now needed to be combined for both of them to flourish together. The position taken by Sharp was in fact the standard view in Belgian historiography for much of the nineteenth century.⁹ Critics argued that a new “national literature” solely in French would result, able to stand its own against Parisian condescension towards a literary periphery that from the metropolis would seem worse than provincial, even downright “barbarian,” as it would be based beyond the pale of the French state.¹⁰ In that sense, the Belgian predicament in the francophone world would be similar to the Scottish within the Anglosphere: in Sharp’s words,

As the Londoner smiles when he hears the provincial (whether from Edinburgh or Dublin or the darkest of the lost shires) speak of

⁵ W. H. Brooks [William Sharp], “The Pagan Review,” *Pagan Review* (1892): 63–64 (64).

⁶ W.S. [William Sharp], “Note,” *The Evergreen*, 2 (1895): 60, introducing Sharp’s translation (“Englished by William Sharp”) of Charles Van Lerberghe, “The Night-Comers,” *ibid.*, 61–71.

⁷ Michael Shaw, *The Fin-de-Siècle Scottish Revival: Romance, Decadence and Celtic Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 102–11,

⁸ Sharp, “A Note on the Belgian Renaissance,” 149.

⁹ Jo Tollebeek, “Historical Representation and the Nation-State in Romantic Belgium (1830–1850),” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 59.2 (1998): 335.

¹⁰ Sharp, “*La Jeune Belgique*,” 418.

society, so the Parisian man of letters condescended towards any new Belgian poet or novelist.¹¹

Sharp did not consider Belgium a miniature United Kingdom—a conglomerate of several nations—but as a parallel to Scotland. He justifies this by only taking French-language Belgian literature into consideration; cultural life in Dutch to him seemed near extinction. Although he was aware that there had been an unbroken tradition of Dutch-language literature in these parts since the Middle Ages, for his purposes, he would only “consider Belgic literature ‘d’expression française’,” and specifically, produced “posterior to its inoculation with its most fortunate strain, that which the critics call *le flandricisme*.”¹² Sharp focuses on authors of a Flemish background, whose families only two generations before would have been predominantly Dutch-speaking, but who had opted to write exclusively in French: besides Van Lerberghe, these included the playwright Maurice Maeterlinck, the novelist Georges Eekhoud and the poet Émile Verhaeren. Critically consecrated even in bigoted Paris, these writers would have devised styles, tropes and regionally inflected expressions to perpetuate their defunct ancestral legacy through an adopted, viable language. Sharp saw in this a cultural-political strategy with potential for Scotland, which too would have to unite (among others) Gaelic, Scots and English literary traditions.¹³ The most effective way for this Scottish Renaissance to hold its own would be to write in English, as this would allow Scottish authors to compete with their English counterparts. Since English was an international language of culture, it would help Scottish literature gain a global readership, as was being achieved by the similarly peripheral Belgians through French. For Sharp, embracing the language of the centre was to reject a position of isolation and embrace cosmopolitics.

According to Daniel Laqua and Christophe Verbruggen, “French-speaking Belgian authors adopted a double strategy: their purpose was to enlarge and protect their market by playing both the national and the Parisian card.”¹⁴ They suggest that *La Jeune Belgique*’s approach to this double strategy, aiming to subvert Parisian dominance over francophone culture, can be understood through the concept of “micro-cosmopolitanism,” which was theorised by the translation scholar Michael Cronin as a contrast to what he proposes should be termed “macro-

¹¹ “A Note on the Belgian Renaissance,” 150.

¹² *Ibid.*, 419.

¹³ Shaw, *Scottish Revival*, 103

¹⁴ Daniel Laqua and Christophe Verbruggen, “Beyond the Metropolis: French and Belgian Symbolists Between the Region and the Republic of Letters,” *Comparative Critical Studies*, 10.2 (2013): 351-258 (253).

cosmopolitanism.”¹⁵ Macro-cosmopolitans, in Cronin’s terminology, uphold universally applicable norms for all literary production, inevitably favouring global cultural centres of cultural capital. In the late nineteenth century, this meant proverbially cosmopolitan London and Paris. Cronin warns that “small nations, ethnic groups concerned with the protection or preservation of cultural identity,” and “former colonies which still subscribe to an ideology of national liberation are dangerously suspect in this macroscopic conception of cosmopolitanism.”¹⁶ For macropolitical culture, such anomalies need to be assimilated, and at best “the existence of small countries is justified by their being a kind of pre-cosmopolitan nursery, a warehouse of the mind where cognitive raw materials await the necessary processing and polish of the present and former capitals of empires.”¹⁷ Macro-cosmopolitanism can quickly deteriorate into a whitewashed imperialism.

It therefore suits small nations, in Cronin’s account, to develop a counter-strategy of “micro-cosmopolitanism” that rejects the “opposition of smaller political units to larger political units (national, transnational).”¹⁸ Micro-cosmopolitans actively participate in international debates and global movements, while vindicating characteristic peripheral deviations from centrally imposed norms as an enrichment of the global field. Sometimes, as in the case of the Belgian and specifically of francophone Flemish authors, an assertive micro-cosmopolitanism could achieve acceptance even at the cultural centre.

Sharp was not the only British fin-de-siècle Francophile to notice this. In his recent monograph on Fin-de-Siècle cosmopolitanism, Stefano Evangelista quotes Oscar Wilde’s defence of his choice to write *Salomé* (1891) in French: “a great deal of the curious effect Maeterlinck produces comes from the fact that he, a *Flamand* by race, writes in an alien language.” Indeed, “Maeterlinck learnt to turn this discourse of marginalisation into a strength, strategically using his ambiguous position in order to criticise the stagnation of modern French as a literary language.”¹⁹ The Belgian playwright had been a *Jeune Belgique* contributor, and his would have been the strategy of the entire network behind the magazine, which in the year of Sharp’s accolades reasoned that

¹⁵ Michael Cronin, *Translation and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2006); see also *The Expanding World: Towards a Politics of Microspection* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2012).

¹⁶ Cronin, *Translation and Identity*, 12.

¹⁷ Cronin, *Translation and Identity*, 13.

¹⁸ Lagua and Verbruggen, “Beyond the Metropolis,” 253.

¹⁹ Stefano Evangelista, *Literary Cosmopolitanism in the English Fin de Siècle: Citizens of Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 63.

if “[l]es écrivains de souche bretonne, normande ou provençale ont leur accent particulier, nous croyons que les écrivains de la Belgique ont aussi le leur” (“Writers of a Breton, Norman or Provençale strain have their own particular accent; we believe that Belgian writers have their own as well”).²⁰

Sharp’s admiration for the longstanding Belgian periodical may be relevant to his endeavours just two years later with the *Evergreen*, which also sought to frame Scottish art and literature in micro-cosmopolitan terms. That “*Northern Seasonal*” similarly aimed to demonstrate the relevance of Scottish culture first within the broader Celtic Revival, and thence to “the world,” which for late-Victorian Scots above all meant France. In his programmatic essay “The Scots Renaissance,” Patrick Geddes, the other founding editor, remarks:

The Literature of Locality, we are told by many reviewers, has had its little day, and is subsiding into mere clash o’ kirkside, mere havers o’ kailyard; so doubtless the renewal of locality may polarise into slum and respectability once more. Be it so; this season also will have its term. One day noble traditions long forgot will rouse a mightier literature, nobler localities still unvisited bring forth more enduring labours for their crown.²¹

The exact nature of this “Literature of Locality to which the kindly firesides of Thrums and Zummerzset, the wilder dreamlands of Galway and Cader-Idris, of Man and Arran and Galloway are ever adding their individual tinge and glow” is not explained.²² Nor does Geddes’s prophecy of cultural atavism reveal in which language (or languages) this Literature would be. The *Evergreen* of course has a prominent interest in Celtic themes, but it may be significant that the Scottish locales mentioned here had all been long anglicised. The fictional “Thrums” of J. M. Barrie stands in for the whole of the rural Lowlands, and the slightly more exotic Arran and Galloway (the latter like “Thrums” having a “kailyard” association due to the novels of S. R. Crockett), up until Early Modern times firmly in the *Gàidhealtachd*, had lost their Celtic-speaking majorities centuries before the more famously Gaelic Highlands. Contributions on Gaelic literature abound, such as by the philologist Alexander Carmichael in the first issue, but these are invariably antiquarian, or at most luxuriate in the nostalgia of lost causes, as in Sharp’s poetry under the guise of “Fiona Macleod.” Despite the efforts of language revivalists throughout the Celtic Revival, including in Scotland, Scottish-Gaelic literature is not treated as a viable

²⁰ [anon], “Questions du Jour,” *Jeune Belgique* 11 (1892): 363. All translations mine, unless otherwise noted.

²¹ Patrick Geddes, “The Scots Renaissance,” *Evergreen*, 1 (1895): 137.

²² *Ibid.*

literary culture, but as a referential repertoire for a Scottish cultural nationalism conducted entirely in the *Beurla* (English), peppered with as much of the *Beurla Ghallta* (Scots) as an English reader might have picked up from Scott or Stevenson.

Two Rivalling Belgian Cosmopolitanisms

The Belgian-style micro-cosmopolitanism favoured by Sharp required difficult choices of this kind, though they are never explicitly addressed in the *Evergreen*. They are also skimmed over in Sharp's appraisal of "Belgic" literature:

We all know the national motto of Belgium: "Union is strength". The ablest writers of the Franco-Flemish Netherlands recognised its aptness. There was no room for a national Flemish literature, nor yet could the Franco-Belgians hold their own against Gallic influences without alliance, and, indeed, practical identification with, the patriotic sons of Flanders.²³

"A national Flemish literature" here means in Dutch, and Sharp's grandiose verdict overlooks the fact that this was a controversial issue in Belgium, where the first language of around 60% of the population was Dutch. Of course, some authors wholeheartedly endorsed his view. Generally speaking, for francophone Flemish authors, their roots in Dutch-language culture were only a link to a superseded past. Where Flemish cultural references appear in their work, they furnish symbols for organicist origin myths, images of Gothic decrepitude, or the mystique of an only half-understood primeval language.

Jeune Belgique contributor Verhaeren may often have written of "les flamandes," but these country wenches are invariably objectified into mute fertility figures. They are "notre Idéal charnel," as in his poem "Aux Flamandes d'Autrefois" (1883), notably "of the past":

Au grand soleil d'été qui fait les orges mûres,
Et qui bronze vos chairs pesantes de santé,
Flamandes, montrez-nous votre lourde beauté
Débordante de force et chargeant vos ceintures.

(By the light of the summer sun which ripens the barley,
And browns your flesh dripping with health,
Show us, Flemish women, your heavy beauty
Overflowing with power and pressing down on your girdles.)²⁴

²³ Sharp, "Jeune Belgique," 421.

²⁴ Émile Verhaeren, "Aux Flamandes d'Autrefois," *Poèmes* (Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1895), 175.

In 1910, Verhaeren spoke out against new legislation that allowed Dutch as a language of administration, with the warning that “[l]e flamand est la langue de certaines provinces; le français est la langue du pays. La patrie est en cause quand le français l’est” (“Flemish is the language of certain provinces; French is the language of the country. The Homeland is at stake when French is”).²⁵

In 1896, Maeterlinck celebrated “la substance presque divine” (“the almost divine substance”) of the medieval mystic and “humble prêtre flamand” (“humble Flemish priest”) Jan van Ruusbroec, who wrote in Middle Dutch.²⁶ However, the later Nobel Prize winner could also write witheringly of activists for the expansion of Dutch language rights. In an opinion piece for *Le Figaro* in 1902, he called them “une poignée d’agitateurs que leur naissance obscure au fond des fermes et une éducation tardive ont rendus incapables d’apprendre le français” (“a bunch of agitators whose obscure birth in some farmyard and tardy education has rendered them incapable of learning French”).²⁷ This sounds much like the Parisian denigrations of provincial culture which these young Belgians, according to Sharp, would be countering.

The Belgian situation was of course highly peculiar and not well-known abroad. Neither Sharp nor any of his Scottish collaborators ever expressed themselves as dismissively about literatures outside of the supposed *Leitkultur*, either in Belgium or for that matter in their own country. However, such tensions reveal an uncomfortable truth: in multilingual countries, notions of cosmopolitanism are not only a defence against foreign centres of cultural capital, they also serve in internal conflicts between linguistic communities. Francophone Belgian nationalism had a significant advantage because the elites of the country had presented themselves ever since its secession from the short-lived United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815–1830) as part of international *francité*. This benefited the southern French-speaking region of Wallonia, but also the French-speaking bourgeoisie of Flanders, for whom fluent French (as Maeterlinck’s sneering shows) was a marker of class distinction. The majority of the population, based in Flanders, spoke Dutch, but in a myriad of dialects that could not be properly standardized due to an absence of secondary and higher education in the language. Literature in Dutch from the Kingdom of the Netherlands was read widely in Flanders, and Dutch-Flemish literature in turn was noticed (if somewhat

²⁵ Quoted in Rainier Grutman, “Maeterlinck et les langues de Flandre: attitudes et représentations,” *FrancoFonie*, 5 (2015): 105.

²⁶ Maurice Maeterlinck, “Ruysbroeck l’Admirable,” *Le Trésor des Humbles* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2008), p. 81.

²⁷ Quoted in Grutman, “Maeterlinck et les langues de Flandre,” 108.

condescendingly) by the more confident neighbours to the north. Yet full integration into the flourishing literary field of the Netherlands was made impossible by a linguistic “particularism” through which influential authors resisted the long-established standard language of the Netherlands, arguably to a greater extent than that to which their French-speaking counterparts deviated from the standard in France. Maeterlinck alluded to this in his aforementioned *Figaro* article when he lamented of “le parti flamingant” that “[c]’est dans cet informe et vaseux jargon qu’ils prétendent retremper l’âme de la Flandre” (“it is in this shapeless muddy jargon that they seek to soak the soul of Flanders”).²⁸ Small wonder then that it would not occur to Sharp that, in the bookshops of Amsterdam of The Hague, Dutch-Flemish literature, pronounced moribund by internationally famous Belgians, actually shared shelves with authors from the Netherlands such as Multatuli or Louis Couperus, who were translated into English and received enthusiastically in late-Victorian Britain.

Fin-de-Siècle cosmopolitanism, however, eventually arrived in Dutch-language Flemish literature as well, in direct response to the aspirations of its francophone opponents.²⁹ Yet again we must look to little magazines for guidance. *Van Nu en Straks* (1893–1901) had for its main editors the essayist and Dutch literature scholar August Vermeylen, the Parnassian-style poet Prosper Van Langendonck, and the critic Emmanuel de Bom. Henry van de Velde, soon to be renowned as an Art Nouveau and later Art Deco architect, undertook page design and ornamentation, securing illustrations from local talent such as Théo van Rysselberghe, James Ensor and Georges Lemmen (less-known but contributing twice in 1896 to the British little magazine the *Savoy*), and foreign artists such as Jan Toorop, Charles Ricketts and Lucien Pissarro. The magazine’s third issue (1893) was a special issue filled with previously unpublished letters and rare prints by the late Vincent van Gogh.

The title *Van Nu en Straks* translates as “Of Now & Soon” and was inspired by French Symbolist critic Charles Morice’s *La littérature de tout à l’heure* (1889) (“of the near future”), a study of the visionary aspect of avant-garde literature in anticipating cultural trends.³⁰ The front matter helpfully explained the magazine’s “twofold purpose”:

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Francis Mus and Hans Vandevoorde, “‘Streetscapes of New Districts Permeated by the Fresh Scent of Cement’: Brussels, the Avant-Garde, and Internationalism,” in Peter Brooker, Sacha Bru, Andrew Thacker and Christian Weikop, eds, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. III: *Europe 1880-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 339.

³⁰ Anne Marie Musschoot, ed., *Van Nu en Straks: 1893-1901* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), xiv.

Het is vooral: het tijdschrift der jongeren uit Zuid-Nederland, eene uiting van het willen & denken der laatstgekommenen,—zonder aesthetische dogmata, zonder school-strekking—een vrij voorhoede-orgaan gewijd aan de kunst van Nu, nieuwsgierig naar de kunst-nog-in-wording—die van Straks—hier en in 't buitenland. Deze uitgave vormt ook een werk van boek-kunst, door kunstenaars stoffelijk verzorgd, en waarin zo weinig mogelijk aan 't werktuigelijk industriële zal worden overgelaten.

(It is above all the journal of the youth of the Southern Netherlands, an expression of the will and thought of the new generation,—without aesthetic dogmas, without schools—a free avant-garde organ devoted to the arts of Now, curious about art still nascent—that of Soon—here and abroad. This publication is also a work of book art, materially processed by artists, in which as little as possible will be left to industrial production.)³¹

The term “Zuid-Nederland” was current in Flemish nationalism, and provocatively implied a disregard for the Belgian state. However, as an alternative to the more obvious “Flanders,” it also signals that the journal rejected the linguistic and cultural “particularism” that had isolated Flemish literature within Belgium, not allowing it to benefit from a wider cultural association with its northern neighbours. Several terms formerly associated with French-dominant culture are also applied here for the first time to Dutch-Flemish literature. Momentously, “avant-garde” is rendered with the purism “voorhoede,” and “de jongeren” are literally *les jeunes*, no longer forced to translate themselves.

This mission statement bears comparison with contemporaneous British little magazines, familiar to the “Van Nu en Straksers,” who admired the Arts & Crafts Movement. It is no coincidence that editor De Bom would later publish a short study on William Morris as a book designer, and the initial plan had been to design a new font especially for the magazine, following a then-common British interest.³² Inspirations may also have included the internationally acclaimed *Century Guild Hobby Horse* (1884/1886–1892), the typesetting of which resembles that in *Van Nu en Straks*, and the *Dial* (1889–1897), designed and edited by their British contributor Ricketts. The stated secondary purpose of the magazine, to serve as “a work of book art,” must be inspired by such British publications, because the French journals emulated by *La Jeune Belgique* and other French-language Belgian little magazines were generally not illustrated and less invested in typography. This stylistic orientation

³¹ Front matter, *Van Nu en Straks*, 1 (1893), n. p.

³² Emmanuel de Bom, *William Morris en Zijn Invloed op het Boek* (Amsterdam : Ipenbuur & Van Seldam, 1910); Musschoot, ed. *Van Nu en Straks*, xiv.

towards Britain, rather than France, may have been a cosmopolitical strategy.

Contributions to *Van Nu en Straks* were diverse in style and theme, and it was mainly Vermeylen's that identified the magazine's aims and subsequently generated the most controversy. One contributor reminisced later that "the social theories of Elisée Reclus" were a significant influence on Vermeylen, who attempted to work out a socially progressive reinvention of Flemish emancipation politics.³³ He often attended the salons of the French Brussels-based anarchist Reclus, whose brother Elie contributed to the fourth volume of the *Evergreen* (1896). Vermeylen's essay "Critique of the Flemish Movement" opened the more overtly politicized "New Series" of the magazine in 1896 and dismissed previous linguistic politics in favour of an outward-looking communitarianism, explaining that the prevalence throughout Flemish society of the one historically rooted language could improve social cohesion and collective progress. Vermeylen parried Franco-Belgian disdain for the relative isolation of Dutch-Flemish culture with the argument that

Indien de hedendaagsche gedachtestroomingen Vlaanderen niet bevruchten komen, dan heeft 't gebruik van 't Fransch als voertaal het meest daaraan schuld. Begint men dan nog niet te beseffen dat de grondslag aller beschaving de ontwikkeling is van het geheele volk volgens de noodwendigheid van zijn eigen wezen, volgens zijn eigen aard, waarvan de taal het volkomenst beeld is?

(If contemporary currents of thought do not come to fertilize Flanders, then the use of French as dominant language is most to blame. Have we then still not begun to understand that the foundation of all civilization is the education of the whole people according to the necessity of its own essence, according to its own nature, of which language is the perfect image?)³⁴

Linguistic emancipation is therefore a means, and not an end. It is also not meant to close Flanders off from the outside world, but rather may facilitate a cosmopolitan openness to other cultures:

Door stoflijke en verstandlijke belangen voelen wij ons in samenhang met de landen die ons omringen. Wij zoeken aanrakingspunten in den vreemde, ruilen geestelijke voortbrengsels met hem; niemand is er, die nog spreekt van "vaderlandsche" wetenschap; de gedachte is internationaal[.]

³³ F V. Toussaint van Boelaere, "Inleiding tot *Van Nu en Straks*", *Van Nu en Straks* (Antwerp: Uitgeverij Standaard Boekhandel, 1944), 29.

³⁴ August Vermeylen, "Kritiek der Vlaamse Beweging," *Van Nu en Straks*, n.r. 1 (1896): 12.

(Our material and intellectual interests make us feel connected to surrounding countries. We seek points of contact with the foreigner, exchange intellectual productions with him; nobody now speaks of “national” science; thought is international.)³⁵

Similarly, Vermeylen’s later contribution “Flemish and European Movement” (1900) is all about micro-cosmopolitanism, propagating national identity as a starting point for equal interaction with other European nations. This piece was written in response to the Flemish naturalist author Cyriel Buysse, who had recently switched to French after having started his career writing in Dutch. A polemical article by Buysse had appeared in the newsletter of the Association Flamande pour la Vulgarisation de la Langue Française (1899–1914) (“Flemish society for the dissemination of the French language”), a lobby group opposed to secondary and higher education in Dutch, and it featured the same arguments against this as proffered by Verhaeren and Maeterlinck above. In his reply, Vermeylen pleaded for the Flemish Movement to make itself impervious to such allegations of provincialism. The goal of Flemish cultural emancipation would not be to idealise a medieval past; it would transcend even the desired civil right to speak one’s own language in schools and universities, and courts of law. Vermeylen saw it as a means of confidently entering international debates that would allow for the elevation of the whole of Flemish society.

Zoals het particularisme nooit een hinderpaal mag worden voor de hogere eenheid eener algemeen Nederlandsche beschaving, zoo zal die beschaving slechts een stuk leven zijn, op eigen grond, van de wereldcultuur der Europeesche rassen.

(As particularism should never become a barrier to the higher unity of a common Netherlandish civilisation, so that civilisation too shall only be one living part, on its own soil, of the global culture of the European races.)³⁶

Instead of turning themselves into a quaint version of the French, Vermeylen urged, Flemings should fully embrace their own identity, because this would give them a grounded perspective whence to approach issues of concern to the entire Continent. Flemings would be ideally placed for this task, as “[m]et de kennis van Nederlandsch en Fransch houden wij den sleutel tot Germaansche en Romaansche talen, onze geest wordt gedrield door de nabijheid van Romaansche en Germaansche gedachtenwereld” (with the knowledge of both Dutch and French, we hold the key to Germanic and Romance languages, [and] our mind was trained

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁶ August Vermeylen, “Vlaamsche en Europeesche Beweging,” *Van Nu en Straks*, n.r. 1 (1900): 306.

by the proximity of both Romance and Germanic civilisations”).³⁷ The essay ends with one of the most-cited creeds in Flemish political history: “om iets te zijn moeten wij Vlamingen zijn.—Wij willen Vlamingen zijn, om Europeërs te worden” (“To be something, we must be Flemings—We wish to be Flemings, in order to become Europeans”).

Schotse en Vlaamse Wedergeboorte?

William Sharp, of course, should not be blamed for never having heard of *Van Nu en Straks*. Considering its language, and the continued disdain of cosmopolitically privileged French-language Belgian authors, it can barely have been known in Britain. Eventually, one of his admired “Franco-Flemish” authors, Georges Eekhoud, who had always been understanding of the Flemish Movement, did give the journal an honourable mention in a letter, years after it was discontinued. Defending his choice to have written in French rather than Dutch, Eekhoud explained that when he started out as a young author from little old Flanders, “le généreux mouvement de *Van Nu en Straks* devait tarder longtemps encore à réagir contre cet obscurantisme intolérant” (“it was yet a long time until the generous movement of *Van Nu en Straks* would react against this intolerant obscurantism”) that had characterised earlier Dutch-Flemish literary culture.³⁸ Later pro-Dutch little magazines would use the term “kosmopolitisch” to refer to *Van Nu en Straks*, in praise as well as disparagement.³⁹

It may be an interesting exercise to ponder whether Sharp, if he were to have had access to information on both sides of this debate, would have been more nuanced in his praise for the Belgian Renaissance. Perhaps this would have inspired him to reconsider the role of the different linguistic communities of Scotland in its own cultural emancipation politics. The rivalling cosmopolitanisms of fin-de-siècle Belgium show that in the context of multilingual nations, even a micro-cosmopolitan strategy can ironically be mobilized in conflicts with some rival Other implied to be less open to the world.

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³⁷ *Ibid.*, 310.

³⁸ Quoted in Joris van Parys, “‘Toute la Flandre est en lui’: Cyriel Buysse en de Franstalige Vlaamse literatuur,” *Mededelingen van het Cyriel Buysse Genootschap*, 14 (1998): 12.

³⁹ See Marnix Beyen, “‘Epater l’Avant-Garde’: De Strijd van de VN&S-erfgenamen tegen het etnocentrisme,” in Raf de Bont, Geraldine Rymenants, Hans Vandevoorde, eds, *Niet Onder Een Vlag: Van Nu en Straks en de Paradoxen van het Fin de Siècle* (Ghent: KANTL, 2005), 265-82.