

The Great War in Belgium and the Netherlands

Felicity Rash • Christophe Declercq
Editors

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Beyond Flanders Fields

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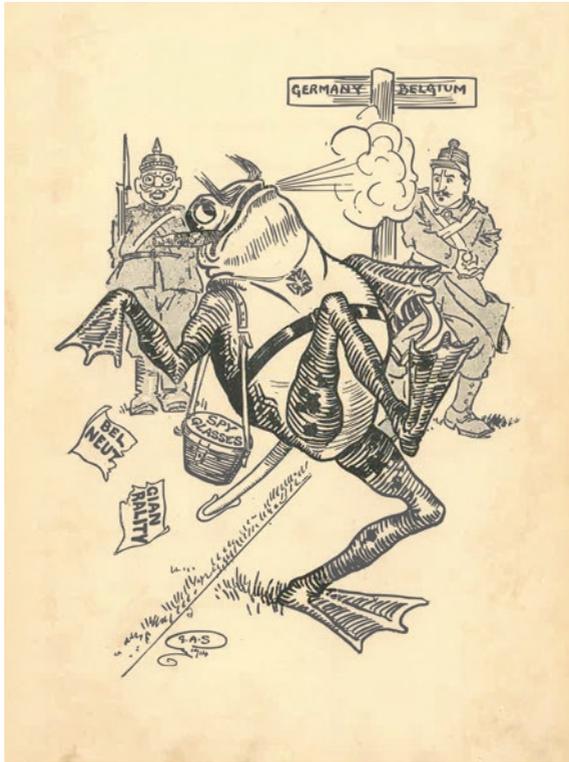


Fig. 1 A Frog he would to Belgium go

A frog he would to Belgium go,
Heigho, says Rowley!
Whether his treaty would let him or no,
With his Rowley, Powley, Gammon and Spying,
Hoch! says Attila Rowley.
On Paris he started to make an attack,
Heigho, says Rowley!
But some Tommies in Khaki soon bundled him back
With his Rowley, Powley, Gammon and Spying,
Hoch! says Attila Rowley.

Elphinstone Thorpe and G.A.Stevens (1915), *Nursery Rhymes for Fighting Times*. This poem is a pastiche of the traditional English rhyme *A Frog he would A-woeing go*.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This volume was inspired by a workshop, *Beyond Flanders Fields*, which took place at Queen Mary, University of London, on 4th–5th June, 2016. The aim of the workshop was to expand the field of First World War Studies about Belgium’s role beyond military matters and beyond the front line, and to offer a platform from which the interdisciplinary and international nature of First World War scholarship could be extended. The resulting volume documents intellectual and artistic responses to the German occupation of Belgium as well as the sociocultural context within which Allied nations offered assistance to beleaguered Belgium. The relationship between the Low Countries also plays a role, as do discussions of what should happen to Belgium after the war. The volume ends with a chapter on present-day memorialization.

In an introductory chapter, “When Neutrality Cannot Protect Against Belligerence”, Felicity Rash describes the neutralization of Belgium and Luxembourg prior to the First World War and the German occupation of those nations between August 2nd and 4th, 1914. Rash details British and American interpretations of the term “neutrality” within the context of Belgium’s position at the start of the war and examines the roles and attitudes adopted by British aid workers who travelled to Belgium during the first few weeks of the war.

In Chap. 2, Sophie de Schaepdrijver examines the concept of “war culture” as a set of beliefs that allowed the Belgians to countenance war as a necessary reality. One of this chapter’s major contributions is her account of *King Albert’s Book*, published by the *Daily Telegraph* for Christmas 1914, in which the “sacrifice” of Belgium was eulogized and Belgium’s

status as a martyred nation established. De Schaepdrijver assesses the widespread need to see the Belgian cause as a “sacrifice for the greater good” as a myth, and sees the reality of Belgium’s stance as lying in its need to comply with international law and thus secure its long-term security.

John Williams’s chapter, “The Flames of Louvain”, identifies the motives of German occupying forces for destroying the culturally rich university town of Leuven/Louvain during the first weeks of the war. He discusses reactions to the sacking from “Beyond Flanders Fields”, not only on the part of the Entente but on the part of German academics, politicians and the general public. In this sense it lays the foundation for Sebastian Bischoff’s chapter on German stereotypes of the Belgians. Bischoff’s chapter, “Furies, Spies and Fallen Women”, makes a connection between gender as represented in German public discourse and its role in framing war propaganda during the First World War. While Belgium was portrayed as a female trophy for Germany, sexualized and sadistic images of Belgian women were used to emphasize the role of the purportedly civilized and chivalrous German men who were fighting for the safety and honour of the female population of their homeland.

In her chapter on the German “*Flamenpolitik*”, Tessa Lobbes examines the role of the neutral Netherlands in the Belgian language conflict, mainly during the period 1915–1916, when the Dutch had become aware of German and Dutch support for Flemish nationalist activism, causing Germany in particular to look upon race and language as elements of cohesion. Interaction between Dutch, Belgian and belligerent intellectuals and officials as a response to the *Flamenpolitik* led to three types of alliance: one pro-German, one pro-French and a third that was simultaneously pro-Belgian and pro-Flemish.

Geneviève Warland’s chapter on the “Belgian question” looks at Germany’s post-war plans for Belgium, in particular from the point of view of German academics. Intellectuals were concerned with the legitimacy of Belgian statehood and nationhood, and made plans for Belgium’s role in a new post-war Europe dominated by the German Empire.

In a chapter on “The Belgian Exile Press” Christophe Declercq examines core elements of the history of Belgian refugees in Britain during the First World War through their representation in Belgian exile newspapers published in Britain. The Belgian journals allowed for an increased sense of Belgian identity in exile but also extended existing language relations within the Belgian community.

Maria Inés Tato's chapter on the diaries of Roberto J. Payró, written during the early months of the German occupation of Brussels (August–November 1914), documents the Argentinian journalist's dismay at the restrictions imposed upon both the people and communication systems within Belgium. As foreign correspondent to the Argentinian newspaper *La Nación*, Payró worried about the reliability of news that reached the outside world. He was also concerned about the spread of rumours among the civilian population of Brussels. The extensive quotations included in this chapter, which have been translated into English by the author, have been provided in their original Spanish due to the nature of their rhetoric and the significance for this particular chapter, not only of *what* is said but *how* it is said.

Hugh Dunthorne's chapter on Frank Brangwyn illustrates the versatility which set this artist apart from many of his contemporaries. His realism made his work especially effective for posters and publications encouraging recruitment and promoting war charities. Brangwyn's refusal to idealize the fighting forces and to ignore the horrors of war underpinned his activism during the First World War, one of his chief achievements being the practical and financial support of Belgian refugee artists.

Hubert van Tuyll's chapter, "The Low Countries as Enemies, 1918–1920", uses primary source material from the Belgian and Dutch Foreign Ministry and State Archives to examine the post-war relationship of Belgium and the Netherlands and the reasons for a lack of strategic cooperation between the countries directly after the Versailles Treaty.

The final chapter to this volume highlights the importance of memorialization. In this chapter, Karen Shelby recounts the history of the *Wacht aan de IJzer* (The Guard on the IJzer), which determined the boundaries of the Belgian Front during the First World War, and looks at the role of the Westfront Nieuwpoort Visitors' Centre, with its famous facsimile of a section of the *Panorama of the IJzer 1914* by Alfred Bastien, illustrating the devastation in Flanders.

The editors would like to acknowledge their gratitude toward the following institutions and individuals. The initial workshop was enabled in both financial and practical terms by Queen Mary University of London. We are particularly indebted to Professor Simon Gaskell, Professor Adrian Armstrong, Nicola Lee and Beth Prescott for their support.

The editors would like to extend their gratitude to the Belgian Embassy—to Mr. and Mrs. Trouveroy, and Tine Jacobs in particular—for hosting a wonderful drink on the eve of the conference. We are equally

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Finally, the editors would like to thank the contributors to the volume but also the delegates of the workshop for making *Beyond Flanders Fields* such an interesting event and volume.

Felicity Rash
Christophe Declercq

CONTENTS

- 1 When Neutrality Cannot Protect Against Belligerence:
The Position of the Low Countries Seen from Beyond
Flanders Fields** 1
Felicity Rash
- 2 “A Less-Than-Total Total War”: Neutrality, Invasion,
and the Stakes of War, 1914–1918** 13
Sophie De Schaepdrijver
- 3 The Flames of Louvain: Total War and the Destruction
of European High Culture in Belgium by German
Occupying Forces in August 1914** 35
John P. Williams
- 4 Furies, Spies and Fallen Women: Gender in German Public
Discourse About Belgium, 1914–1918** 49
Sebastian Bischoff
- 5 The Cultural Mobilization of Language and Race During
the First World War: The Interaction Between Dutch
and Belgian Intellectuals in Response to the German
*Flamenpolitik*** 65
Tessa Lobbes

6	Which Belgium After the War? German Academics Dealing with the First World War and Its Aftermath	95
	Geneviève Warland	
7	Belgian Exile Press in Britain	121
	Christophe Declercq	
8	Trapped in Occupied Brussels: Roberto J. Payró's War Experience, 1914–1915	143
	María Inés Tato	
9	A Cambro-Belgian in the Great War: Frank Brangwyn as Artist and Activist	163
	Hugh Dunthorne	
10	The Low Countries as Enemies, 1918–1920	179
	Hubert P. van Tuyll	
11	Westfront Nieuwpoort: The (Collected) Memory of the Belgian Front	199
	Karen Shelby	
	Index	221

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LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1.1	The Promise	7
Fig. 3.1	The sacking of Louvain (Bruno Waterfield. <i>The Sacking of Louvain</i> , accessed September 13, 2016. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/belgium/11053962/The-city-that-turned-Germans-into-Huns-marks-100-years-since-it-was-set-ablaze.html)	44
Fig. 4.1	Front cover of Spingard’s <i>Clarissa from Belgium’s Dark Houses</i>	58
Fig. 5.1	<i>De Kroniek. Maandblad voor Noord en Zuidnederland</i> . [<i>The Chronicle</i> . Monthly Journal for Northern and Southern Netherlands], Kerstmis 1915	66
Fig. 5.2	Van der Hem, <i>Nederland en Blauwbaard</i> . [<i>The Netherlands and Bluebeard</i>], cover of <i>De Nieuwe Amsterdammer</i> , 9.10.1915	76
Fig. 5.3	Advertisement for <i>La Revue de Hollande (De Telegraaf)</i> , 1.07.1915, p. 4)	78
Fig. 5.4	Braakensiek, “As Long as I can Sow Discord”, <i>De Amsterdammer</i> , 21.10.1916	86
Fig. 5.5	Column ‘Van Vlaanderen’, [From Flanders] in <i>De Amsterdammer</i> , 1915	86
Fig. 8.1	Payró’s portrait	145
Fig. 8.2	Payró’s journeys (Map by Paulo Gonzalo Pires)	151
Fig. 9.1	Frank Brangwyn (1867–1956), <i>Britain’s Call to Arms</i> (Lithograph, 96.5 × 147.5 cm, 1914. © TfL from the London Transport Museum collection. Recruiting poster commissioned by Frank Pick of the London Underground Electric Railway Company)	166

- Fig. 9.2 Brangwyn, *Antwerp: the Last Boat* (Lithograph, 100 × 60.8 cm, 1915. © David Brangwyn. Photo courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Charity poster commissioned by the Belgian Red Cross Fund, 1915) 168
- Fig. 9.3 Brangwyn, *Dixmude* (Lithograph, 43.2 × 76 cm, 1918. © David Brangwyn. Amgueddfa Cymru—National Museum Wales, Cardiff. From *The Ruins of War* series, commissioned by the Canadian War Memorials Fund) 170
- Fig. 9.4 Pierre Paulus (1881–1959), *La Fuite* (Chalk and watercolour, 25.1 × 35.2 cm, 1914. © DACS 2017. Amgueddfa Cymru—National Museum Wales, Cardiff) 172
- Fig. 9.5 Woodcut accompanying the poem ‘Les usines’. In Emile Verhaeren, *Les villes tentaculaires*. Paris: Helleu & Sergent, 1919. 4to. 179 + 4 pp., with a lithograph and 49 woodcut illustrations by Brangwyn. (© David Brangwyn. Museum Emile Verhaeren, Sint-Amands, Belgium) 175
- Fig. 11.1 Westfront Nieuwpoort (Photograph courtesy of airmaniacs.be) 208

LIST OF TABLES

Table 7.1	Overview of Belgian newspapers during the First World War, excluding those appearing in occupied Belgium, at the front or in Britain	124
Table 7.2	Overview of Belgian newspapers printed in exile in Britain, ranked chronologically according to their first appearance in Britain, and with their dates of appearance. (Declercq 2015: 184)	126