Modernist Tendencies in the Literature of the Low Countries 1880-1920

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I Fin de Siècle

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth is a period of transition in the arts, often compared by historians and critics with earlier periods like the Baroque and Romanticism. The term "mannerism" has been proposed to describe such periods, in opposition to so-called "classicist" periods. Whereas the latter may produce art which, at its best, is exemplary and valid for all times, or, conversely, art which is conventional, derivative and facile, "mannerist" art periods tend to break down the formal balance achieved in classicism, not through incompetence, but through a wilful calling into question of the norms by which the previously stable period of art has come to define itself.

In the case of the late 19th century, there appear at first sight few reasons for this break-up of values and beliefs, be they specifically artistic or generally cultural. A relatively unified world view, which had etablished itself after the French Revolution had brought the bourgeoisie to power, suggested to those living in the more advanced and prosperous countries of Western Europe that the idea of a steady progress in the amelioration of the human condition was not simply a myth "invented" in the Age of Enlightenment, but was a practical and thoroughly valid idea. The enormous strides which the nations of Western Europe had made in accumulating wealth, through economic and territorial expansion, industrialization and the practical use of the achievements of the sciences; the relatively stable political constellations under which these nations flourished; and the improvements in the economic, social and intellectual conditions of most of the populations of these countries did not suggest to the majority of European citizens that a radical questioning of the very foundations and structures of Western society might be in order.

And yet such questioning and probing had already taken place in the initial phase of the bourgeoisie's rise to power. The conflict between the demands of society and those made by the individual is stated in philosophical terms by Jean Jacques Rousseau, in his contrast between natural and political man, in his basic rejection of the "blessings" of civilization and in his propagation of the myth of the "noble savage." In much more crude, but also more aggressive terms, the Marquis de Sade elaborates a view in which "natural" man is one, as Richard Gilman writes, who "refuses to be bound by established values, inherited and institutionalized pieties" (81). In Gilman's view, Sade was "the originator or, more accurately, the first compelling enunciator in modern times of the desire to be other than what society determined, to act otherwise than existing moral structures coerced one into doing." Sade's writings are after all not only, or even primarily, about sexuality, but about the impossible dream of absolute freedom to live out one's fantasies. Moreover, as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno have shown in their *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Sade saw clearly that it was productivity, the ever greater desire for efficiency, tied to the desire to dominate nature, which, as the guiding principle of the bourgeoisie (and the means as well as the end of progress), stood in the way of the affective life. Organization versus productive chaos, restrictive rules versus the desire for freedom, the pressing into the service of all elements of society in order to produce versus the private sphere in which leisure is a moral good because it is the realm of fantasy, sexual freedom and non-productivity — these are the dichotomies which Sade saw, and which Romanticism took up.

From these conflicts there arose the notion of decadence, which, as Gilman argues, is demon-

strated so well in Chateaubriand, and later in the century by Baudelaire and, in the domain of philosophy, by Friedrich Nietzsche. Utility as the sole criterion of the Good, as the yardstick of progress, is the demon against which art, as an independent value, revolts. For "if progress is tied to utilitarianism, moral advance no less than material, it is understandable that art, the pre-eminently impractical human activity, should become the banner under which the opponents of the age would group themselves" (Gilman, 82). It is to the arts that, at the end of the 19th century, we must look primarily for an alternative view of reality, for a redressing of the balance which utilitarianism had tipped so excessively in favour of restriction, organization and efficiency.

But art as an alternative to society as constituted does not always lead to the same results. In the work of some authors, the contrast between rationalism and emotionality is formulated almost as a contrast between good and evil. Art, in this view, is the realm par excellence in which the individual (as artist and as amateur of art) can re-assert himself against the strictures of social patterns and the ever greater demands of the collective. Social strictures imposed by an oppressive collectivity in fact force many an artist to withdraw completely from society in a kind of protest. This aspect is, according to Frans Coenen, typical for the movement of the Tachtigers in Holland:

> Die Tachtigers misten misschien — of waarschijnlijk — volstrekt niet alle maatschappelijke kanten... Maar zij wilden onmaatschappelijk zijn. Of anders gezegd: zouden zij zich en hun kunst handhaven, zouden zij zelf blijven gelooven in hun nieuwe wereld en een tegenwicht geven tegen de enorme maatschappelijke suggestie van het oude, dan moeten zij wel en het maatschappelijke en het verstandelijke volkomen uitschakelen uit hun kunst en leer. Dan behoorden zij zich ... vierkant te stellen tegenover alle strekkingen van practisch maatschappelijke nuttigheid in de kunst. Dan moesten zij alle maatschappelijke moraal verachten en vertreden, dan moesten zij zelfs al het logische, het verstandelijk opgebouwde versmaden, om het bandelooze, nergens beperkte gevoel te laten leven, herleven (Coenen, 27-28)

Both Decadence and Aestheticism are based on the kind of thinking that sees art as the realm in which fantasy can live its life, and in which pleasure and unbridled freedom reign supreme. In Decadent art, the outsider — often the artist himself — is the prototype of alternative man; in the realm of freedom which is art, the swindler may become a hero (Thomas Mann's Felix Krull) and even the criminal can serve as a potential model. In Aestheticism, on the other hand, the impractical preoccupation, as in Karl-Joris Huysman's *À rebours* or Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* becomes, by virtue of its role as protest against the practical bent of the bourgeoisie, exemplary and desirable (though it remains, as is understandable, problematic).

In other cases, however, the artist's withdrawal from everyday concerns indicates not primarily protest or contempt, but rather a feeling that isolation and loneliness are necessary preconditions for the creation of art. Lodewijk van Deyssel, in his short introduction to the translation of Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* (1905), stated this idea with reference to Wilde and the British literary world of 1880-1890. Wilde was to him the English representative of French thinking about art and life:

> Hij [Wilde] had zich gevormd in den geest van Baudelaire, Flaubert en, wat algemeene levensopvatting, niet wat poèsis aangaat, ook in dien van Verlaine ...
>
> Deze levensopvatting en deze letterkunde ... beschouwden den intellectueele en sensitieve, den kunstenaar, als een uitzondering op en een tegenstelling tot de algemeene menschen-samenleving. De artiest was uit op 'zeldzame' en 'nieuwe gewaarwordingen' en hij leefde door de glorie van het contrast, dat hij, in de eenzaamheid zijner geaardheid, tot de wereld om hem heen vormde. (Quoted in Polak, p. 23).

Yet another way of looking at art as an alternative, however, and a rather more important one, is to see art not merely as a form of protest against certain social strictures, but as the privileged domain in which ambivalence and suggestion — as opposed to destructive science and increasingly impotent logic — hold sway, and in which the invisible is made visible. In art the project is undertaken to come to an alternative vision of reality, a new and independent interpretation of the cosmos and of man's place in it; this project is above all the concern of the Symbolists.

II Decadence, Naturalism, Impressionism, Symbolism

Decadence is a particularly good example of the tradition which goes from early protests against modern civilization in the Enlightenment, via Romanticism to a revival of these attitudes in turn-of-the-century art. Much of what has been said in a general way about Decadence and its roots, however, also applies to other movements of the same period. In fact, these various movements are in many respects only variations of a common feeling about life and art. If, as Clive Scott reminds us, "the end of the nineteenth century was prolific in awarding names to its literary movements" primarily in order to stress differences between the various artistic canons, the point must also be made, as Scott himself does, that "today one sees more clearly the manifold affinities among them" (Scott, 206). Indeed, distinguishing between the various movements in the arts — especially around the turn of the century — by using definitions either proposed by the practitioners of the arts, or by contemporary or later critics — is a task fraught with difficulties. Each movement, it seems, ought therefore to be be seen rather as partially in tandem with, and partially at variance with other movements which have come to be associated with turn-of-the century art and literature.

A good example of the problem of classification of the various movements in the arts of this period is in fact provided by Scott himself. According to him three literary movements stand out at the turn of the century: Symbolism, Impressionism and Decadence. Scott distinguishes among them in the following way:

> Those who value in Modernism its pursuit of raw experience, its primitivism even, and who see Impressionism as the common denominator of the movements current round the turn of the century, may side with Hauser who, in *The Social History of Art*, calls Impressionism the 'last universally valid "European" style'. Those who esteem Modernist literature as a liberation of the text, of the word, will probably point to Symbolism as the source of the self-subsistent work that lives among the multiple privacies of its language, and side rather with Edmund Wilson who in *Axel's Castle* saw the foundations of modern literature in 'the development of Symbolism and its fusion or conflict with Naturalism.' (Modernism, p. 206).

Unfortunately, in his subsequent discussion of these movements, Scott does not seem to put Decadence on an equal footing with the other two movements; the discussion focusses primarily on the differences between Symbolism and Impressionism. Scott's somewhat vague definition of Decadence can be complemented, however, by citing John Reed, whose definition, in his book *Decadent Style* (1985) is one based on form. According to Reed, the artist using Decadent style "concentrates upon detail, the whole composition coming together as an assembly of these patiently developed elements. Decadent art elaborates an existing form to the point of apparent dissolution, but a new order arises out of the new method" (11). Decadence has in common with Aestheticism the idea that all of the fine arts are intimately related to one another — a notion Walter Pater was to modify into the statement that ultimately all art aspires to the condition of music. More specifically, however, Decadence can be distinguished from Symbolism in the following way:

> Decadence combines Aestheticism and Naturalism, Parnassian precision and innovative intent. In contrast, Symbolism emphasizes suggestiveness, vagueness, and free departure in form. Aestheticism, as a broad movement, recognizes the connection between beauty and evil, Symbolism, in reaching towards transcendence, seeks to shed ugliness ... Decadence stresses the interrelationship of virtue and vice, beauty and ugliness, whereas Symbolism separates them by converting offensive phenomenal facts into symbols for an immaterial reality (Reed, 14).

A further distinction made by Reed is also useful: beauty in Symbolism, he writes, is reached through contemplation; in Decadence, beauty is achieved through the will.

Such definitions, in which contrasts and overlaps with second or even third terms are used to describe, catalogue and classify what was an extremely productive, but at first sight a rather chaotic period in the arts in Europe, suggest, despite obvious difficulties, that, first of all, a certain number of characteristic movements for this period might be discerned, and secondly, that to these movements can be ascribed specific characteristics. Of course, any descriptions of such movements will include a large number of characteristics which also apply to other movements; and as far as the authors belonging to these movements are concerned, the "borderline cases" in fact may well outnumber the "inner core"

of the membership in the several movements. This is however the case every time we attempt to turn individuals into groups, and creative individuals into schools or movements. The theory of movements, styles and schools is no more precise than the theory of genres; in both cases we use constructs to help us cope with what otherwise would be — to our limited and basically positivistically inclined intellects — incomprehensible phenomena. Despite such reservations, however, we can make some fairly accurate statements about art and literature in general during this period, and about the aesthetic and philosophical principles involved in the various schools and movement in particular.

This can be done primarily by using two methods: tracing genealogies — the historical, partly geistesgeschichtliche approach — and the descriptive approach, i.e. showing what there is, once we have taken the leap of faith and catalogued who belongs and who doesn't. The latter method is, to be sure, an example of the circulus vitiosus: an author (or artist) belongs because he demonstrates certain categories which the critic has established, and he demonstrates those categories because the critic has determined that the artist belongs to the movement he is trying to define. There are two ways out of this latter dilemma, however: the one is to refer to the enunciation of a theory of art by the practitioners themselves or by those who accompany the rise of a movement; the other is to investigate which authors were felt by their contemporaries to belong to these various movements. For the latter method an investigation of the many personal contacts between artists (authors, painters, sculptors, architects etc.) and of the list of contributors to certain journals is particularly fruitful. These two latter methods will primarily be used in the following outline of the successive and several modernist movements in both Holland and Belgium.

III Literary Revival in Holland: From the so-called Tachtigers to Symbolism

When, on the 19th of November 1881 the poet Willem Kloos, in *De Nederlandse Spectator*, wrote his "In Memoriam" on the death of Jacques Perk, a friend and former schoolmate of his, the journal's editor Carel Vosmaer called the contribution a "manifesto." Indeed, the article was seminal enough to provide the basis for a much more extensive introduction to a posthumous collection of Jacques Perk's poems which appeared the following year — an introduction which has come to be considered the "poetic programme" of the movement of the eighties, and which, as J. C. Brandt Corstius has shown, can be used to outline the poetics and aesthetics of that movement. While on the surface intended to introduce Perk's poems to the Dutch reading public, the foreword is in fact much more a statement about Kloos' own ideals and ideas about poetry than about Perk's; moreover, Perk's poetry (and Kloos' own) is used to demonstrate what poetry in general is to be, and on what general principles literature is based.

The crucial term used by Kloos in his introduction to Perk is "verbeelding," or "fantasie:" "Fantasie is de oorzaak en het middel en het wezen van alle poëzie," he writes. "Verbeelding" is not only used to point to poetic language, to images and rhetorical devices, therefore, but made to be the creative and productive poetic principle itself. Moreover, it is a principle which allows the artist to create an autonomous world, independent of empirical reality. Consequently, art is seen as a realm by and for itself; art does not serve in the cause of religion, politics or society, but is there for its own sake (the principle of l'art pour l'art). Kloos' interpretation of art is based on two related givens: that poetry as practised in the Netherlands in the 19th century primarily by a large number of amateurs (the so-called domineesliteratuur) is not true art, because poetry is "Ene gave van weinigen voor weinigen..." (Corstius, 82); and that true art cannot be practised as a past-time, because it is like a religion itself: "Geen genegenheid is zij, maar een hartstocht, geen bemoediging maar een dronkenschap, niet een traan om 's levens ernst en een lach om zijn behaaglijkheid, maar een gloed en een verlangen, een gezicht, een verheffing, een wil en een daad, waarbuiten geen waarachtig heil voor den mensch te vinden is, en die alleen het leven levenswaard maakt" (84).

In Kloos' statements we recognize clearly the rhetoric of a revolutionary: the large claims made for art are, on the one hand a protest against the old, i.e. the debasement of art in the period preceding Perk and Kloos himself; on the other hand, there is the announcement of the new: art is all-encompassing, a counter-proposal to reality, to the world as hitherto constituted. Other factors too, are involved in Kloos' claims. The artist, as demiurge, recreates the world as God created his: in the words of Kloos himself: "Ik ben een God in't diepst van mijn gedachten." The artist can resolutely turn his back to the world, since his reality lies beyond the everyday concerns of common humanity. As Jacques Perk wrote in his poem "Hemelvaart:"

De hemel is mijn hart en met den voet
Druk ik loodzwaar den schemel mijner aard'
En nederblikkend, is mijn glimlach zoet.
Ik zie daar onverstand en zielevoosheid ...,
Genoegen lacht ... ik lach ... en met een vaart
Stoot ik de wereld weg in de eindeloosheid.

Such heady radical notions were unheard-of in late 19th century Ducth art, and, given the tone and rhetoric of Kloos' manifest, it is no wonder that it sounded like a trumpet to those who had at the end of the seventies been searching for change on several fronts: in society, in art, in literature. Their longing for something new, still felt in a rather vague way (as Rob Nieuwenhuys formulates it: "Wat ze precies wilden, wisten ze nog niet goed, maar er hing iets in de lucht van vernieuwing" [Quoted by Scholten, 69]), their desire for experimentation and a fresh approach to the intellectual and emotional life in a Holland which had for decades been ruled by the infamous spirit of "Jan Salie", suddenly seemed to acquire a focus in what Kloos proposed for literature: a veritable revolution. Consequently, on June 14, 1881 a number of these young people decided to form a debating group called Flanor, in which the problems associated with the creation of a new art were to be discussed. To it belonged Frank Van der Goes, Willem Paap, Willem Kloos and Frederik van Eeden, later also Jacobus van Looy, Lodewijk van Deyssel, Albert Verwey and Frans Erens. Flanor's meetings in the café-restaurant De Karseboom in the Kalverstraat in Amsterdam must have been heady and stormy at times, for, from the start, certain differences in opinion and especially of temperament were visible, though for the moment papered over by the common desire to attack the old.

Particularly the confused genealogy of the ideas bandied about by the members of the group would ultimately have had to create tension. Much of what Kloos was proposing was directly inspired by Romanticism, especially of the English variety. The emphasis on individualism, the idea of the artist as a genius, and the exclusive focus on the inner, intellectual but especially emotional life of the poet in fact gradually made Kloos gravitate towards, first, "een toenemende bedwelming aan primaire impressies en sensaties en naar verabsolutering van eigen dichterlijke grootheid," (Scholten, 71), later to a kind of psycho-symbolism. By contrast, a number of members of Flanor were rather more inclined towards the principles of Naturalism, with its debt to determinist philosophy, and towards a close contact with observable reality and a certain degree of social concern. It is especially the prose authors, quite understandably, who followed at first the aesthetics of Naturalism and Zola, though, as I have argued elsewhere, they soon evolved towards a more impressionistic art in the 1890's.[1] Although the common contempt for the older generation at first proved a strong bond, calls for a consensus along the lines of the slogan of "art for art's sake," even as a minimum, had to fail in the light of such genealogies, and ultimately, the differences between these groups, and between their interpretations of the function of art in society, became irreconcilable.

The split in opinion between the groups just discussed can best be traced through an examination — such as the ones undertaken by Garmt Stuyveling and G. H. 's-Gravesande — of the history of the "house journal" of the Tachtigers, *De Nieuwe Gids*. As in Belgium (as we shall see later) literary journals were really the focus of literary life in Holland, and any new school or movement became visible first and foremost in this forum. *De Nieuwe Gids*, as the sounding board for the ideas of the members of Flanor and other kindred spirits, is generally seen as one of the most important journal of the whole of the 19th century, despite its relatively short existence. In the early phase (from 1885 on), the bi-monthly periodical was directed by Willem Paap, Frank Van der Goes, Albert Verwey, Frederik van Eeden and Willem Kloos. *De Nieuwe Gids* was conceived as a journal for letters, art, politics and science, and by no means only as a literary journal; nevertheless, the influence it was able to exert on the course of Dutch letters, thanks to its editors and the high quality of its contributors, was enormous. To be sure, some important authors did not participate in the editing of the journal, notably Lodewijk van Deyssel; yet he and many others did at least contribute.

Unfortunately, as indicated above, the original (superficial) solidarity in matters of philosophy and aesthetics soon gave way to quarrels about the quality of works submitted (as for example van Eeden's rejection of van Deyssel's novel *Een Liefde*). A major conflict broke out between Kloos and Verwey in 1888/89, mainly because Kloos resented Verwey's independent stance. This conflict led to the resignation of Verwey from the editorial board in 1890. In addition to quarrels of a purely literary nature, it was also the question of socialism which caused a split among the editors, with Frank van der Goes and others confronting Kloos, and with van Eeden attacking both sides (Knuvelder, 138). The result of these quarrels was that the 1893 October issue appeared with only Kloos' name as editor. Harry

Scholten has described the consequent demise of the journal in rather colourful terms:

> Vanaf oktober 1893 heeft [Kloos] in *De Nieuwe Gids* het rijk alleen. Zijn creatief en kritisch vermogen neemt af ten gunste van zijn eigen grootheidswaan; voor zijn scheldkannonades aan het adres der vroegere vrienden verwerft hij slechts het applaus van talentloze aanhangers met wie hij zich in de redactie omringt. Zij waanden zich kleurrijke palfreniers rond de koets van Koning Kloos, maar in werkelijkheid begeleidden zij een karretje op de doodlopende zandweg van zelfvergroting. De jaren van *De Nieuwe Gids* als 'brandpunt' der beweging ... waren voorbij (73).

In 1894 the journal ceased to be published. Meanwhile, a new journal had appeared, the *Tweemaandelijkse Tijdschrift*, led by van Deyssel and Verwey, a journal much more in the tradition of *De Nieuwe Gids* than Kloos' last issues.

The demise of *De Nieuwe Gids* is, in the words of Gerard Knuvelder, "een uitwendig teken van het ten einde lopen van de eerste fase der vernieuwing. Zij liep ten einde in verwarring, onzekerheid, tot op zekere hoogte zelfs verwildering ... Maar tegelijkertijd openbaarden zich in de jaren rond 1890 reeds de kernen van nieuw leven, het zoeken naar nieuwe zekerheid en vastheid" (IV, 140). This next phase would come to be known as Symbolism. To a greater degree even than in the case of the renewal by the Tachtigers, the move towards Symbolism in literature marks the re-integration of Dutch — and Belgian — letters into the larger European context. For a short period, it could indeed be argued, Belgian and Dutch literature are at least at a par with France, Germany and England.

The Dutch situation in literature does not allow us to give a definite time-period from which the Symbolist movement can be said to date, nor can we give a clear marker for its end: "in Nederland zijn symbolistische symptomen te traceren gedurende een lange periode van 1880 tot 1919 ... met incidentele nawerking ook in de volgende decennia," according to van Bork & Laan (153). Of course, they argue, we can expect important differences between the earlier and later styles of a movement that covers such a long period, yet there is a kind of poetics which, if not precisely valid throughout the four decades indicated, nevertheless was available in essence in the early years, and which became dominant in the 1890's. This poetics has, according to these two critics, the following central thesis: "aan de werkelijkheid ontleende beelden worden niet als doel op zich gebruikt en evenmin om de werkelijkheid weer te geven, maar als instrumenten ('symbolen') waarmee geheimzinnige relaties en samenhangen ('correspondenties') gesuggereerd kunnen worden tussen subject en buitenwereld of tussen de tijdelijkheid van het aardse leven en absolute, eeuwige waarden"(153).

As we shall see, this definition applies admirably to the literature produced by Belgian, and indeed French Symbolism. In Holland it is clear, however, that the first period of the revival of Dutch letters in the 1880's does not fully coincide with such a poetics, as van Bork & Laan themselves admit. The representatives of the movement of Tachtig, which is much closer to Impressionism than to Symbolism, are rather more interested in earthly phenomena and in beauty which is graspable, than in the ineffable which lies beyond such phenomena. Moreover, whereas the Symbolist sees the artist as mediator (albeit as an imperfect one), the Tachtiger stands in the tradition of the idea of the Romantic genius; his individual "I" is central to his poetics and to his output. Finally, as we saw in an earlier quote by Frans Coenen, a good number of the Tachtigers see themselves primarily, and necessarily, as outsiders and lonely persons; the Symbolists, on the other hand, and especially the Flemish Symbolists, were much more interested in a kind of communal art.

Nevertheless, behind the rather rhetorical phrases stressing the centrality of earthly beauty, behind the exuberant, even excessive praise of individualism, and behind a neo- or pseudo-romantic genius-worship there is, with a number of Tachtigers, a sense that aestheticism alone is insufficient, and that art must go beyond the here and now. Frederik van Eeden at least seems to have had an intuitive grasp of the problems associated with both Naturalism and Impressionism. He, like many of his contemporaries, was first drawn to the transcendental realm by his reading of Spinoza, whose influence became increasingly evident in the decades following the 1880's. Spinoza is almost the resident philosopher of literary journal *De Nieuwe Gids*, and his influence makes itself felt in the slow process by which these predominantly Naturalist and Impressionist authors begin to move towards various forms of Symbolism. Willem Kloos, as we mentioned, thereby introduces his own variant, in that for him nature symbols are primarily used to cast light on his inner life. Lodewijk van Deyssel initially seems to have had little interest for the kind of poetry produced at this time by Mallarmé; later in his career (as in the *Verzamelde Opstellen*), he would show a more

pronounced sympathy for the ideas of Symbolism. By contrast, Albert Verwey was an early follower of Symbolism. Like his Flemish counterparts, he became fascinated with primitive art as the means to open oneself to mystical and mysterious inspiration. For Verwey the word "Ver-beelding," for example, means not simply imagination (as it basically did for Kloos), but the power to see "correspondences" in the Baudelairian sense of the word.

Despite all this, however, van Bork & Laan are certainly correct in maintaining that "de periode van Tachtig met haar vaak al treffend verwoorde symbolistische uitgangspunten, nog niet meer dan de prefiguratie van een poètisch ideal [is] dat zich pas in de jaren negentig volledig zal ontplooien" (158). By the time Symbolism makes inroads in Holland, however, Belgian Symbolism, as a distinctive offshoot of French Symbolism, is already well established. It will therefore be most advantageous to discuss Symbolism first in general terms, then in Belgium, and only then in Holland.

IV The Theory of Literary Symbolism

What are some of the characteristics of Symbolism in literature, and who are its practitioners? More specifically, who belongs to the movement in the Low Countries, and what are the characteristics of their art? A brief "genealogic" paragraph might help situate the movement in time.

It is often very useful to see where and when a term itself first appears. Both in the history of art and of literature, the year 1886 appears to have been crucial for Symbolism, for it is then that Charles Moréas, in his manifesto published on the 18th of September in the literary supplement of the *Figaro* uses the term referring to a group of French contemporary writers. Though concerned primarily with enunciating a new literary tradition, Moréas already in the same year found a kind of disciple in the painter Puvis de Chavannes, who, in the catalogue of the Salon des Artistes Français, describes, in his own "Triptique," the rivers Rhône and Saône as "symbolizing" power and grace. Symbol, vision and dream are also used by him to characterize the decorative paintings concerning which he was negotiating with the city of Lyon.

There are other early important indications of the tenor of the new art subsumed under the term "Symbolism." Gustave Moreau, contemporary of Puvis and of Moréas, used his copy of Eliphas Lévi's ***Fables et symboles avec leur explication*** as inspiration of his work (Lacambre, 21). A connection between art and literature is established by Ari Renan in his discussion of Moreau's work in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts* of May and July 1886 when he refers to Baudelaire's "correspondences" — the correspondences between the senses as well as those between the soul and inanimate nature. The painter Odilon Redon's fascination with dreams might be mentioned here, as evidenced by his first lithographic album, ***Dans le rève.*** And Mallarmé, Verlaine and Rimbaud may not have used the term symbolism, they were always aware of its content., this despite Verlaine's quip to Huret, "Ça doit être un mot allemand. ... hein?" (Van Bork & Laan, 144). Moréas himself, it is to be admitted, remained conveniently vague in his descriptions of what Symbolism was supposed to be, though for lyric poetry he had some specific characteristics in mind: " d'impollués vocables, la période qui s'arcboute alternant avec la période aux défaillances ondulées, les pléonasmes significatifs, les mystérieuses ellipses, l'anacoluthe en suspens, tout trop hardi et multiforme ..." (Scott, 208).

Closer examination of the many vague descriptions abounding in the early stages of "Symbolism" (neither as yet felt to refer to a coherent movement, nor quite precise enough to be called a theory) point, however, to a central notion which unites both painters and writers associated with Symbolism. It is the idea "dat in de dichterlijke [and by extension artistic] ervaring een ideële, transcendente wereld achter de materiële wereld kenbaar wordt: de wereld van de Idee. De symbolist is met andere woorden een idealist in de filosofische betekenis van het woord: de eigenlijke werkelijkheid is volgens hem van niet-materiële, geestelijke aard" (Van Bork & Laan, 145). This notion is, first and foremost, as we have seen, a "réaction naturelle contre le réalisme et le positivisme qui avait longtemps occupé des positions clefs" (Legrand, 9), and has therefore social as well as philosophical, even political overtones. It is a notion derived from certain idealist German philosophers like Novalis, but also from Swedenborg. To reach the idea behind the transitory phenomena, the artist uses symbols, "c'est-à-dire des objets, des images ayant une vertu évocatrice magique ou mystique, des marques ou des signes se référant à l'invisible monde des âmes" (Legrand, 9).

This idea is essentially already available in Romanticism, of course, and the crucial connection between Symbolism and Romanticism has been stressed repeatedly by critics, just as it has been for Decadence, and in fact the same "ancestors" are quoted in both cases. Charles Chassé, to cite but one such critic, considered Symbolism to be "un

romantisme occupé de la représentation du monde intérieur," whereas Ernest Raynaud, in a less charitable vein, wrote: "Le Symbolisme est le dernier coup de queu du romantisme expirant. Il en offre les caractères spécifiques: le trouble, l'orgueil, la sensualité mystique, le mépris de la science, le dégout de la vie commune. Il en a surtout la misanthropie, le pessimisme" (Legrand, 9). In particular Marcel Raymond has written about the connection between Romantics and Symbolists; he thereby comes to the conclusion, however, that between these two movements there is a shift from the heart to the soul as central concern of the poet; in the words of Guy Michaud, "L'âme, c'est le mot-clé de l'époque" (Brandt Corstius, 38). C. de Deugd, writing about the Romantics' attempts to capture the infinite in the finite, notes that such ideas are " van zodanige aard ... dat men zich zonder dit romantische ideeëngoed het later symbolisme moeilijk kan denken" (de Deugd, 332-3). Willem Kloos clearly borrowed from the Romantics this idea of a revelation of the infinite in the finite — in his case from the English Romantic poets Leigh Hunt, Shelly, and Wordsworth — though, as Brandt Corstius point out, with a slight difference: "Ook voor Kloos is de verbeelding het vermogen het vervluchtigende, onzichtbare, vast te maken, zichtbaar en onsterfelijk. Maar hij ervaart die goddelijke natuur, die reine bovenwereld van Plato-Shelley ... niet als iets boven of achter de werkelijkheid van het aardse bestaan, maar in zijn ziel" (53).

An extremely important difference between Romanticism and Symbolism must be emphasized at this point, however. Whereas the Romantic poet saw the poem as a possibility to give form to the essential unity of man and world, and made himself the instrument for such a fusion of inner and outer world, with the understanding that he was capable of achieving such a fusion, the Symbolist has come to realize that he is limited in his possibilities, and that the fusion is a goal which always lies ahead, is never completely attained. In the thinking of Baudelaire this is caused by the rational element in man. Baudelaire called himself a false chord in the harmony of the universe, but still retained his faith in the ability of poetry to re-create the world; later Symbolists were not quite so sure about their powers. Emile Verhaeren, for example, wrote that the new Symbolist art would do for the modern world what antique symbolism had done for the old, but "nous n'y mettons point notre foi et nos croyances, nous y mettons au contraire nos doutes, nos affres, nos ennuis, nos vices, nos désespoirs et probablement nos agonies" (Christophe, 39).

In France, the true initiator of the Symbolist movement, or at least Symbolist ideas, is Baudelaire, whose own poetry is an illustration of the power of the imagination to create analogies and metaphors, or, to use his word, "correspondences." According to Baudelaire, the whole world is governed by such correspondences: "Chaque couleur, chaque son, chaque odeur, chaque émotion ... chaque image visuelle, même complexe, est reliée à un équivalent dans chacun des autres domaines" (Legrand, 10); art can disengage such analogies, and ultimately relate them to a transcendental reality of which such analogies are the symbol. A consequence of this thinking is of course that the barriers between the various arts disappear, and that music, sculpture, painting and poetry are all related. As stated earlier, music is thereby given pride of place, not only by Walter Pater, but also by the French. For the new poetry the slogan is, in the words of Verlaine, "de la musique avant toute chose," and the painter Odilon Redon claimed: "La musique est le ferment d'une sensibilité spéciale très aigüe, autant et plus que ne le serait la passion elle-même. Elle est un danger, un bienfait pour qui la sait prendre" (Legrand, 11). In this connection we cannot avoid the name of Richard Wagner, of course. His role in the self-understanding of the Symbolist movement is perhaps even greater in France than in Germany itself. Especially Dujardin, as editor of the *Revue wagnérienne* has played a crucial role in carving out for Wagner the reputation of master of symbolism, though, as has been suggested, less because of his actual music (which initially met with some very important opposition and a fair amount of misunderstanding in Paris, as witness Wagner's own memoirs), but because of his libretti, with their emphasis on myth as a structural and thematic device.

For literature proper, Stéphane Mallarmé's ideas about poetry became at once the most influential and the most problematic. To his elaboration of a "theory" of Symbolism it is largely due that Symbolism to most critics even now means primarily French Symbolism (a good example is Clive Scott's discussion in *Modernism*, which practically ignores any other Symbolist literature). French poetry as a whole, as represented by Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Verlaine had a greater influence on Europe at this time than any other national literature, and an understanding of Dutch or Belgian Symbolism, or even German, Austrian or English Symbolism is impossible without reference to the French — whereby it is interesting to note that in England and in Holland the sensitivity and sensibility of a Verlaine were more in demand than Mallarmé's rather more intel-

lectual poetry, though the latter's theoretical influence was enormous.

In his article "Définition de la Poésie" (1886), Mallarmé defines poetry as the highest science. Poetry can lead to the highest forms of metaphysical truths, but only of course if poetry is practised as a kind of science. Poetry is an instrument designed less to express emotions, therefore, than to arrive at truths; poetry is "l'expression, par le langage humain ramené à son rhythme essentiel, du sens mystérieux des aspects de l'existence." In the fusion between intuition and ratio , by using language in a most idiosyncratic and personal way, as language game, as pursuit of the "precious" image, the unusual line, the half-forgotten word, and by using the symbol as his main tool, the poet reaches the ineffable.

Clearly, Mallarmé's definition is intended as a protest against the claim of the sciences in the late 19th century of being the exclusive tool to reveal truth. Mallarmé's definition is anti-positivistic, and contains at the same time a rejection of the natural sciences as normative for art: in other words, the definition also dismisses Naturalism and all manner of naturalist (mimetic) art. Mallarmé's definition of poetry is in fact one more step in the direction of an eventual definition of art as basically not concerned with reality at all. Paradoxically, however, and consistent with the theoretical position initiated by Baudelaire, the exclusive concern of the poet with his own inner life does not prevent him from making valid statements about the world, since he is, after all, in harmony with the world, thanks to the system of "correspondences" discussed earlier. The Symbolist poet can therefore rely on the description of his inner world, since, even without stating so explicitly, it will point back to the transcendental realm lying behind all appearances: "... omdat de mens en wereld in geestelijke essentie identiek zijn ... kan de symbolistische dichter door zich te verdiepen in zijn eigen wezen de ware aard van de werkelijkheid doorgronden en uitdrukken in zijn poëzie" (van Bork & Laan, 146) — an idea we noted also in the case of Willem Kloos.

It may be assumed that those poets who gravitated around Mallarmé (particularly those who assisted at the famous Tuesday sessions) would in essence have been in agreement with the definitions and theses posed by him. Stuart Merrill, Adolphe Retté, Henri de Régnier and Francis Vielé-Griffin are some of the poets mentioned by Clive Scott as having come under the spell of the master. Georges Rodenbach, too, is mentioned in this connection (226, note 8), but with the latter there opens up the question of the specific nature of Belgian literary Symbolism, both in its French and Flemish variants, and even that of the nature of the subsequent Dutch Symbolist movement. To be sure, the ideas presented so far would, because of the pre-eminence of French art, to a certain extent have provided the basis of Belgian and Dutch modernist art and literature. And yet, already in discussing Rodenbach, Scott draws a distinction between the French and Belgian variant of Symbolism. His distinction is in fact an essential one, since it is concerned with the term "symbol" itself. While speaking about Rodenbach and of his fellow countrymen, namely, Scott claims that, while their "strengths have yet to be properly represented", "their weaknesses lie chiefly in the ways they made Symbolism easy." According to Scott, the authors mentioned above "tended to prefer an allegorical mode, where objects merely represent abstractions for narrative purposes, to a symbolic one, where abstractions are contained by an object; they consolidated a diction with a prefabricated suggestiveness and by failing to stiffen it with real intellectual motive, they let their work become a collection of seasonal mood-poems, bland and wistful" (226, note 8).

Scott's charge of allegory instead of symbolism is particularly grave in the light of the theoretical writings of the Belgians Albert Mockel and Maurice Maeterlinck, for they, on the contrary, distinguish very sharply between the two modes. Mockel, for example, writes:

> L'allégorie, comme le symbole, exprime l'abstrait par le concret. Symbole et allégorie sont également fondés sur l'analogie, et tous deux contiennent une image développée.
>
> Mais je voudrais appeler allégorie l'oeuvre de l'esprit humain où l'analogie est artificielle et extrinsèque, et j'appellerai symbole celle où l'analogie apparait naturelle et intrinsèque.
>
> L'allégorie serait la représentation explicite ou analytique, par une image, une idée abstraite PRECONÇUE; elle serait aussi la représentation *convenue* — et par cela même explicite — de cette idée ...
>
> Au contraire le symbole suppose la RECHERCHE INTUITIVE des divers éléments idéaux épars dans les Formes (quoted, Gorceix, 141)

According to Mockel, therefore, both allegory and symbol have a common point of departure in the idea of the analogies or "correspondences" to which

Baudelaire refers; but the allegory is an intellectual, discursive game of preconceived equations tacitly or explicitly agreed upon by writer and reader, whereas the symbol is a subtle game of hiding and revealing, of suggesting rather than stating, based on intuition. Allegory is artificial and intellectual in that it chooses consciously to represent a fixed meaning; symbolism uses intuition to suggest an ineffable meaning.

As Paul Gorceix rightly points out, writing poetry in this vein is a profoundly 'non-classical' enterprise: "Le poète ne cherche plus l'équilibre, le compromis dans un concours harmonieux du contenant et du contenu, du fond et de la forme, pour toucher le lecteur" (145). At the same time, the traditional romantic notion of the role of poetry — that of speaking to the heart — is abandoned, in favour of a notion which brings poetry in the proximity of philosophy or — as in the case of Mallarmé, as we have seen — science: "Désormais, la poésie cesse d'être affective pour se charger d'une mission 'cognitive' — et ce par la voie du symbole qui, note Mockel, 'suppose la recherche intuitive des divers éléments idéaux épars dans le Formes.' L'image symbolique devient l'instrument capable de révéler l'incommunicable au-delà du monde sensible. ..." (145)

In the case of Mockel's compatriot Charles Van Lerberghe the distinction between allegory and symbol seems initially not to be so sharp, to be sure. In a letter to a friend of his, he declares: "Je vois en images, en symboles ... je ne parle jamais des choses qu'indirectement, par allégories, par suggestion" (Legrand, 13); the mixture of image, symbol and allegory seems to indicate less concern with theory than with a general starting point for the production of poetry. Yet the main "feeling" about a poem, and about poetry itself, remains basically the same as was the case with Mallarmé (and I would argue, Mockel): "Un poème ne me plait tout à fait que lorsqu'il est à la fois d'une beauté pure, intense et mystérieuse. Je crois que toute profonde beauté est mystère et que le côté mystérieux est un signe qu'on l'a entrevue."

Maurice Maeterlinck's definition of the symbol, in any case, is very similar to the one found in the theoretical writings of Mockel. In the *Réponse à l'Enquète de J. Huret*, Maeterlinck wrote:

> ... je crois qu'il y a deux sortes de symboles: l'un qu'on pourrait appeler le symbole *a priori*: le symbole de *propos délibéré*; il part d'abstraction et tâche de revètir d'humanité ces abstractions. Le prototype de cette symbolique, qui touche de bien près à l'allégorie, se trouverait dans le *Second Faust* et dans certain contes de Goethe. ... L'autre espèce de symbole serait plutôt inconscient, aurait lieu à l'insu du poète, souvent malgré lui, et irait, presque toujours, bien au delà de sa pensée: c'est le symbole qui naît de toute création géniale d'humanité; le prototype de cette symbolique se trouverait dans Eschyle, Shakespeare, etc. (Gorceix, 154).

As was the case with Mockel, Maeterlinck stresses particularly the unconscious part of symbolic creation ("à l'insu du poète, souvent malgré lui"); the power of the pointing function of the symbol is in fact seemingly located outside the actual thought of the writer ("au delà de sa pensée"). Yet, as in the case of Mallarmé, poetry is still seen as an instrument of cognition, even as a kind of science, one assumes, though not of the same nature as the natural sciences. Abandoning this intellectual component of poetry on which Mallarmé so insisted, clearly implies — despite Scott — even for Maeterlinck, Mockel and their compatriots a certain danger of vagueness and muddled thinking if pushed too far. On the other hand, of course, precisely the (at least partially) anti-intellectual stance adopted by many turn-of-the-century writers (not necessarily Symbolists) which is implied in giving free reign to fantasy and dreams might be seen as a positive factor, considering that art must not obey laws which are seen to operate with such disastrous results elsewhere in the modern world.

That there nevertheless seem to exist some differences between the French and the Belgians Symbolists (the quasi-scientific versus the "intuitive" approach), is used by Paul Gorceix to prove that the sources of the Belgian Symbolist thinking lie in German idealist philosophy rather than in the definitions advanced by Mallarmé. No doubt there is a kind of Belgian nationalist fervour involved in Gorceix's attitude towards French Symbolism — an attitude which is merely the echo of contemporary statements produced by the adherents of Symbolism in Belgium. For if we once again compare Mallarmé's description of poetic activity with that of the so-called "intuitive" Belgian Symbolists, we see something not so very different from Mockel's idea of the nature of Symbolist art. Mallarmé, too, sees the role of the Symbolist poet as that of "Évoquer, dans une ombre exprès, l'objet tu, par des mots allusifs, jamais directs, se réduisant à du silence égal, comporte tentative proche de créer. ..." ('Magie').

So much is this procedure for Mallarmé also an intuitive one that Clive Scott can say that "the symbol usually coincides with the poem's discovery of its subject," and that the symbol is the "precipitate of all the 'tiers aspects' that have grown out of the metaphors of the poem" (210).

Still, Gorceix is quite correct in pointing to significant differences in the Belgian variant of Symbolism, both in art and in literature, just as critics have been at pains to emphasize differences between French and Dutch Symbolism. There are a number of reasons for these differences, partly historical and partly socio-political. In the case of literature this is particularly relevant, not only because of certain differences in language usage between the French and the Walloons, but also of course for the Flemish-language component of Belgian Symbolism, to be discussed later. Finally, in Dutch Symbolism certain particularities associated with the prominence of the movement of the Tachtigers — and their association with English rather than French authors — as well as the usual division in subjective Symbolism (Leopold) and transcendent or objective Symbolism (de Beweging) are responsible for significant deviations from Symbolism as practiced in France. These various "schools" of Symbolism will now be discussed in the order indicated.

V Belgian Symbolism in the French language

There are several explanations for the sudden resurgence of artistic and literary productivity in the Belgium of the 1880's and 1890's. Intellectually, it is an age of paradoxes. On the one hand, there is, as in other Western European countries, the problem of rapid industrialization and languishing agriculture, with all its attendant woes of peasant misery, child labour, a growing proletariat, and anarchistic trends; at the same time, Belgium is prosperous and the liberal bourgeoisie well established, with sufficient leisure time to indulge itself in the fine arts and literature. If one wants to be cynical, one could perhaps argue (with Legrand) that the arts are "d'autant plus nobles qu'elles permettent de donner libre cours à une secrète insatisfaction, à une inquiétude que les menées anarchistes et l'essor de la libre pensée tiennent en éeveil" (12). Be that as it may, it remains in any case true that everyone belonging to the middle classes reads; music is readily available, and the salon, that venerable French institution, is alive and well in the larger cities such as Brussels, Ghent and Antwerp. It is indeed fascinating to note that a number of the authors writing in French who are associated with Symbolism come from the upper middle class: Georges Rodenbach was born in Tournai of a rich bourgeois family, Max Elskamp's father was a prosperous arms merchant in Antwerp, Maurice Maeterlinck the son of a rich proprietor in Ghent. The most striking exception here is undoubtedly Emile Verhaeren, who was born of parents living in extremely modest circumstances in the village of Saint-Amand.

The curious mixture of cultural and economic preoccupations characteristic of Belgian bourgeois society results on the one hand in a certain austere attitude, which does not allow the culture of the café to play quite the same role as in Paris; on the other hand, the cultivation of friendships and the salon are given free reign (Legrand, 11-12). Indeed, in the arts the progressive tendencies are given even greater scope: a sense of freedom from bourgeois restrictions is experienced with a certain light-headedness, and to be anarchistic is completely de rigeur. A number of important journals clearly show this revolutionary tendency in the arts of the time. Thus, Max Waller's *La jeune Belgique* (founded in 1880) assembles a group of rather audacious poets — among whom Albert Giraut and Iwan Gilkin — who preach extreme forms of individualism, whereas *L'Art moderne* (1881), under the leadership of Edmond Picard, devotes itself with similar progressive energies not only to literature and the plastic arts, but to theatre, music, costumes and interior decoration. Its editorial secretary, Octave Maus, shortly afterwards was to become the pivotal figure for the group of painters calling themselves Les XX, later La libre Esthétique. We already had occasion to mention the still quite young Albert Mockel, who, in 1886 founded the continuation of a little French periodical (*Écrits pour l'Art*), namely *La Wallonie*, to which a number of important French and Belgian authors contribute. In the same year Rodenbach makes his poetic debut, while in 1889 Maurice Maeterlinck publishes the seminal cycle of poems *Serres chaudes*, with a frontispiece by George Minne — a clear demonstration of the interrelationships between the arts so typical for this period. (A similar example of cooperation between the arts is provided by Grégoire Le Roy's *Mon coeur pleure d'autrefois*, this time the text being illustrated by both Minne and Fernand Khnopff). Finally, and perhaps the most crucial, from 1890 on Maurice Maeterlinck begins to write his Symbolist plays which will carry his reputation far beyond the borders of Belgium itself.

For the rapid development of the Symbolist movement into the most significant art movement of its

day the role played by the literary and artistic journals is indeed crucial. Besides the ones already mentioned, there are especially also *Floréal* (founded in 1882 by Paul Géraldy) and *Le Coq rouge*, the former an important forum for the exchange of ideas with the German Symbolist movement whose significance will be discussed further on. So prominent are these journals in fact, that they threaten to outpace their Parisian counterparts. The borders between France and Belgium seem to almost have disappeared, and the list of contributors to these journals reads like a Who's Who of French-language Modernism.

Nevertheless, from the start, the issue of significant variance between the French language Belgian poets and French poets proper is central to Symbolist discourse. This difference is situated first, though not necessarily foremost, in the language itself. Most of the Belgian Symbolist writers in the French language are Flemish, as their names indicate. They write French in an environment in which Flemish is the dominant language (this parallels somewhat the situation in which German literature of roughly the same period is written on the fringe of German culture, in Prague). Enthusiasm about the new art can therefore not completely hide a certain difficulty in linguistic expression which to the purist makes the Belgian poet into a poor cousin of the French. For the Symbolist writers it seems indeed always more important to find the rhythms and cadences necessary for the expression of their ideas, than to obey any rules of grammar and diction transmitted through tradition. *La jeune Belgique* (in spirit close to the Parnassians), can therefore call the new style "un style macaque flamboyant," and find fault especially with Rodenbach's disdain for logic and his confused comparisons. Emile Verhaeren, too, is the target of criticism; in the words of the critic Giraud, "on dirait des mots qui courent dans des sacs" (Legrand, 13).

Clearly, there are two issues at stake here which are, in the minds of the contemporary critic, easily confused. There is, first, the particularity of the Belgian linguistic variant of the French language; obviously, however, there is also an initial unwillingness to enter into aesthetic and thematic innovations which deviate significantly from the purity and rather classicist tendencies of the Parnassians, still the dominant force in French poetry in the 1880's. The critics' confusion *vis-àa-vis* these young authors is not entirely unfounded, however, since the latter's initial motivations are themselves not completely clear. To be sure, the revolt against the Parnassians is in the first instance not a revolt in order to create a specifically Belgian literature, but rather to explore a personal and individualistic style. Nevertheless, these young authors must have seen language and style linked with the idea of a Belgian type of Symbolism. Both Maeterlinck and Verhaeren ultimately rebelled against the predominance of the French tradition, and in this respect they found allies in the Flemish-speaking authors involved with the Flemish journal *Van Nu en straks*. Exile in Paris for a number of poets (Rodenbach, Maeterlinck, Van Lerberghe) all the more emphasized the difference between the two cultures, as their correspondence shows.

Important in this connection is the role which, according to Paul Gerceix, must be attributed to two extra -literary thematic and stylistic source of Belgian Symbolism: Flemish pictorial tradition and Belgium's geographic location and its typical landscapes. Already in 1880, Iwan Gilkin had pressed for a national literature based on the Flemish pictorial tradition, which he considered both sensualist et mystical: "Il faut fonder dans la poésie une école flamande, digne de sa soeur ainée, la fille des peintres: nos Teniers, nos Ruysdael, nos Brouwer, nos Van Ostaede, d'abord — puis nous aurons Rembrandt et Rubens" (Gorceix, 10). In a similar vein, Emile Verhaeren, writing about his early collections of poetry in a letter to his mentor Van Arenberg stated: "Je voudrais pouvoir mettre dans ces différentes poésies que m'inspirent les Flandres, la santé plantureuse, la vie grasse que Jordaens a si admirablement mise en relief dans son oeuvre tout entièere" (Christophe, 31). Another important motif is a feeling on the part of the Belgians that French culture is in decline, and that Belgium, because of its geographic location, at the crossroads of Romance and Germanic cultures, can forge a new synthesis which is uniquely Belgian. Belgium as a kind of microcosm of European culture, this is the form much of this speculation takes.

In order to achieve this, however, and certainly also because of a greater degree of sympathy with the aims of Germanic art and literature, German and English painters and authors are now consciously brought to the fore. As far as the English authors are concerned, what Johan Polak writes with reference to Dutch writers of the 1880's is equally valid for Belgian literature. English literature had not been very influential in the 1870's, but a veritable re-discovery of the English Romantics, especially Shelley and Byron, took place in the 1880's. Willem Kloos' defense of his contemporary Swinburne, whom he puts right beside Goethe, is typical of this new attitude. Beside Zola, Gautier, Baudelaire and Verlaine, the English poets are now also suddenly revered; the aesthetic writings espe-

cially of Walter Pater make inroads into the Naturalist canon, and the Pre-Raphaelites, who themselves introduce Walt Whitman and Edgar Allen Poe as well as Fitzgerald to the English reading public, in turn prepare the terrain for the crucial role Oscar Wilde was to play for Dutch letters in the beginning of the next century, and — through the intercession especially of Olivier-Georges Destrée — Swinburne, Rosetti and Keats for Belgian letters. In as far as the German influence becomes discernible, it takes overwhelmingly the form of an enthusiastic reception — so late in the century! — of the Romantic movement, of the philosophy of Idealism, and above all of the mystic tradition. Particularly the latter exerts a dominant influence on a certain number of authors, notably Charles van Lerberghe and Maurice Maeterlinck and Karel van de Woestijne. That at the same time these authors embrace English aesthetic ideas demonstrates the kind of cosmopolitanism which is a proof of the special character of Belgian Symbolism *vis-à-vis* its French counterpart.

Clearly then, Belgian Symbolism is a unique product of a nationalist attitude — rooted in geography, landscape and pictorial traditions — combined with a striking openness to European influences. The cosmopolitan attitude which allows Belgian authors to find their inspiration not only in German Idealism, Romanticism and Mysticism, but also in English Romanticism as well as contemporary French Symbolism is evident in almost all the careers of the most important exponents of Belgian Symbolism.[2] Thus, while it can be said that someone like Émile Verhaeren essentially remains fascinated with his native Flemish landscape, and is therefore an example of the all-important influence of geographical space on Belgian Symbolists (perhaps more clearly demonstrated in the fine arts), a poet like Maurice Maeterlinck exemplifies the rather more common type of Belgian Symbolist equally well at home in Ghent as in Paris or even London.

Maeterlinck's career is indeed exemplary in that it leads him from close imitation of the French to a style which, though still very much in step with French developments, especially in the theatre (see René Lalou), is specifically his own, and at the same time owes a great debt to Belgian circumstances. Maeterlinck's earliest poetic efforts (beginning in 1885) are still Parnassian in inspiration, though he had already during his stay in the Jesuit College Sainte Barbe in Ghent been in contact with Charles van Lerberghe and Grégoire Le Roy. Shortly after his poetic debut, Maeterlinck moved to Paris, and here he encountered Mallarmé and Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, whose influence upon him was to be enormous. Upon his return to Ghent, his talents turned in various directions. Whereas the important cycle of poems *Serres chaudes* of 1889 situates him squarely in the Symbolist movement, an article in the *Revue Générale* on Ruysbroeck, published in the same year, shows his interest in mysticism — a fascination which continued in 1891 when he translated from the Flemish Ruysbroeck's *L'Ornement des Noces sprituelles* and from the German Novalis' *Les Disciples à Saìs* and Jakob Bòhme's *Fragments.* Like most of his contemporaries, Maeterlinck was equally interested in English literature, as his translations of John Ford's *Annabella* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* prove. Parallel with these endeavours he began to write his short pessimistic, Angst-laden plays: *L'Intruse*, *Alladine et Palomides*, *Intérieur* and *La Mort de Tintagiles*, and the more important *Les Aveugles* and *Pelléas et Mélisande* (all between 1890 and 1896). And whereas his quest for an understanding of the inner life is shown in *Le Trésor des Humbles* (1896), the same year he gave evidence of an interest in popular song, in *Douze Chansons.* During his second sojourn in Paris, starting in 1896, which was several times interrupted by stays in Normandy, at the Château de Médan, and in Nice, at the Palais d' Orlamonde, Maeterlinck continued writing metaphysical works such as *La Sagesse et la Destinée* (1898), but also works dealing with the world of animals (*La Vie des Abeilles*, *La Vie des Fourmis* and *La Vie des Termites*), and plays in a more optimistic vein such as *Monna Vanna* (1902) and *Joyzelle* (1903). In 1911 he received the Nobel Prize. His later years were spent writing on the occult and on war; he also undertook major journeys, to the Orient and to the United States, where he also spent the years of the Second World War. He died on the fifth of May, 1949 in Nice.

Cosmopolitanism is equally evident in the career and output of Charles Van Lerberghe. Like Maeterlinck, he was born in Ghent (1861) and, with Maeterlinck and Grégoire Le Roy, educated at the Collège Sainte Barbe. In 1886 he published some poetry in the *Pléiade* and contributed to *La jeune Belgique* and *La Wallonie.* After his studies at the university of Brussels he embarked on a voyage to England, Germany and Italy, then retired to Bouillon sur le Semois, disappointed by the many works he had undertaken and been unable to complete. He died in Brussels in 1907.

Van Lerberghe was a great admirer of the English Romantic poets, but also of the circle around Stefan George, with Karl Wolfskehl and the painter Melchior Lechter; the latter illustrated the German version of Van Lerberghe's *Trésor des Humbles.*

Of Van Lerberghe's output one should mention his Symbolist drama in prose, *Les Flaireurs*, which in style and atmosphere is close to the early dramas by Maeterlinck (1889); the collection of poems *Les Entrevisions* (1898), which was influenced by Pre-Raphaelite painting and much admired by Rilke, and his great Symbolist poem *La Chanson d'Eve* (1904), "conçu comme un drame wagnérien, dit, en vers fluides, 'le mystérieux voyage' de la première femme au matin du monde, son éveil, sa faute et le crépuscule du premier soir mortel" (Gorceix, 181).

Although born in Tournai (in 1855), the author of the most important Belgian Symbolist work of prose, Georges Rodenbach, can be seen to be closely associated with Maeterlinck. He, too, studied at the Collège Sainte Barbe in Ghent, then law at the university. His appointment to the bar was preceded by a stay in Paris, where he he came under the influence of the prominent Parnassian, François Coppée. Like Maeterlinck, Rodenbach also became intimately associated with Mallarmé and Villiers de L'Isle-Adam. From his collection *La Jeunesse blanche* on (1886), Rodenbach's fascination with certain key themes and motifs becomes obvious, such as water and mirrors — elements which will play a major role in the novel which establishes his fame: *Bruges la morte* (1892). The whole novel can be said to be built on the Symbolist idea, in turn derived from Baudelaire, of correspondences and analogies. Bruges becomes for the protagonist the external image of his his inner grief; the death of his beloved wife is repeated in the "death" of this city of stagnant waters and mirroring surfaces. Rodenbach continued in this manner in his next collections of poetry and prose, some of whose titles themselves reveal the themes and moods which dominate his output, including *Le Carillonneur*, *La Vocation*, *Le Rouet des brumes*, *Les Vies encloses* and *Miroir du Sol natal*. These latter works are, however, already the product of a man physically exhausted by illness: Rodenbach died at the age of 43.

A pivotal figure for Belgian Symbolism is the poet Emile Verhaeren. Verhaeren evolved quickly from a poet influenced by Naturalism — primarily in his collections dealing with his native Flemish environment, such as *Les Flamandes* (1883), and *Les moines* (1886), products of his fascination with the pictorial tradition of Flanders — to a more truly Symbolist poet, as in the collections *Soir*, *Débacles*, and *Flambeaux noirs* (1887-1890). Given the rather conservative tone of the literary circles of his time, it is no wonder that Verhaeren's earthy and erotic *Les Flamandes* created a scandal; moreover, his language was severely criticized. By contrast, in the later cycles — the product of a severe mental and physical crisis, partially experienced during his stay in London — Verhaeren seems to have consciously held back his erotic and realist arsenal, and also have been more careful in his use of certain idiosyncratic linguistic usages, though the abandonment of regular verse proved to be permanent.

In the enunciation of a literary Symbolist aesthetic, Verhaeren is an important figure. Characteristically, his thinking about Symbolism was to a large extent determined by the fine arts. That connections between the fine arts and literature can be extremely productive is demonstrated by the fact that Van Lerberghe himself was influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites, whereas he in turn inspired illustrations by Lechter; or again by the productive relationships that existed between Maeterlinck, Minne and Khnopff. Verharen himself was actively involved in the journals *La jeune Belgique* and *L'Art moderne* as well as in the movements of Les XX and La libre Esthétique. Painting was a major influence on his own writing, as can be seen in the article he published in *L'Art moderne* (signed, which was not usual) on Delacroix. One feels that Delacroix's achievement is one to which Verhaeren himself wanted to aspire, and which indeed characterizes his own art. In the words of Lucien Christophe: "Dans les bornes d'une vie étroite et rigoureusement réglée, il [Delacroix] a su introduire et développer le haut sentiment et les grands mouvements de l'action. Il a réalisé le rêve qui est le sien [Verhaeren's]" (Christophe, 37). Painting also influenced his thinking about literature. In an enquête for *L'Art moderne* (unsigned this time), Verhaeren stressed the visionary aspect of modern art of the Symbolist movement; even more importantly, it was in an article on his compatriot painter Fernand Khnopff, the brother of Georges Khnopff for whom Verhaeren had great affection, that he in fact formulated one of the crucial tenets of the Symbolist movement, namely its ability to present a valid image of the contemporary soul:

> Un recul formidable de l'imagination moderne vers le passé, une enquête scientifique énorme et des passions inédites vers un surnaturel vague et encore indéfini nous ont poussé à incarner notre rêve et peut-être notre tremblement devant une nouvel inconnu dans un symbolisme étrange qui traduit l'âme contemporaine comme le symbolisme antique interprétait l'âme d'autrefois ... Seulement nous n'y mettons point notre foi et nos croyances, nous y

> mettons au contraire nos doutes, nos affres, nos ennuis, nos vices, nos désespoirs et probablement nos agonies (Christophe, 39).

Finally, it was under the influence of Henry van de Velde, the co-founder of the Section of Art of the Maison du peuple, that, starting in 1893, Verhaeren began to write those great poems in free verse which deal with the metamorphosis of the rural landscape into an urban one, and with the social and moral problems associated with the modern world in general: *Les Campagnes hallucinées* (1893), with verses like these:

> Les rivières stagnent ou sont taries,
> Les Flots n'arrivent plus jusqu'aux prairies,
> Les énormes digues de tourbe,
> Inutiles, tracent leur courbes;
> Comme le sol, les eaux sont mortes;
> Parmi les îles, en escortes
> Vers la mer, ou les anses encore se mirent,
> Les haches et les marteaux voraces
> Dépècent les carcasses
> Lamentables de vieux navires.
> C'est la plaine, la plaine
> Sinistrement, à perdre haleine,
> C'est la plaine et sa démence
> Que sillonnent des vols immenses
> De cormorans criant la mort
> A travers l'ombre et la brume des Nords;
> C'est la plaine, la plaine,
> Mate et longue comme la haine,
> La plaine et le pays sans fin
> Où le soleil est blanc comme la faim,
> Où pourrit aux tournants du fleuve solitaire,
> Dans la vase, le coeur antique de la terre.
> ("Les plaines")

Equally violent and pathetic poems can also be found in *Les villages illusoires* (1895) and *Les Villes tentaculaires* (1895), perhaps his most famous collection. In all these poems the visual component once again seems to point back to his continued fascination with painting. From the preoccupation with the vast changes being wrought in Flanders also flow his later works, celebrating technology and the metropolis of the 20th century: *Les Forces tumultueuses* (1902) and *La multiple Splendeur* (1906). In the last period of his life, however, Verhaeren returned to the memories of his native villages and landscapes, and also to regular verse (*Toute la Flandre*, 1904-1911).

Though by no means to be measured against Maeterlinck or even Van Lerberghe in artistic output and international reputation, Albert Mockel's importance for Belgian Symbolism cannot be denied. Mockel is one of the most productive theoreticians of the movement, not only as founder of *La Wallonie* but also as writer of the *Propos de Littérature* (1894). Mockel was primarily interested in aesthetics, in the meaning and interpretation of the symbol, and in the philosophical basis of literature. He wrote important essays on Mallarmé, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Maeterlinck and Van Lerberghe, as well as on Claudel. He was personally acquainted with Mallarmé, whose Tuesday gatherings he attended faithfully. His somewhat minor poetry includes *Chantefable un peu naïve* (1891), *Clarté* and *La Flamme immortelle.*

The most problematic figure in Belgian Symbolism is perhaps Max Elskamp, since it is difficult to classify him as either a nationalist or a cosmopolitan writer. Elskamp was born in Antwerp in 1862, studied law at the Université libre in Brussels, but soon gave up the bar and travelled all over Europe and the Mediterranean as sailor on a three-master. His fascination with artifacts from various cultures, such as ancient tools and marine instruments, led to his founding of the Conservatoire de tradition populaire in Antwerp. While Elskamp was in a general way interested in foreign cultures and their artifacts, his poetry shows a peculiar mixture of refinement and Flemish folk art. In collections such as *Dominical* (1892), *Salutations, dont d'Angélique* (1893) *Six Chansons pauvre homme pour célébrer la semaine de Flandre* (1895) he mixes great learning with primitive elements. Above all his collections *Enluminures*, in which the emblematic method is revived, and *L'Alphabet de Notre-Dame de la Vierge* (1901) earn for Elskamp the reputation of being a "naïf imagier de la Flandre." Subject to inner crises, in which he turns to the study of oriental philosophy, Elskamp ceases to publish for twenty years. Only in 1921 (after having spent the First World War years in Holland) he begins to write once more: *Sous les tentes de l'exode, Chansons désabusées, La Chanson de la rue Saint Paul, Maya* and *Aegri Somnia* might be cited here. Elskamp died in 1931 in Antwerp.

The brief biographical sketches offered above hint in many cases at the crucial relationship between art and literature at this time; it is an element which certainly ought to be added to the various characteristics which people like Gorceix have given of Belgian Symbolism. French-speaking Flemish poets seek for inspiration not only in the works of English and German writers and philosophers,

but also in contemporary Pre-Raphaelite, Jugendstil and of course Symbolist painting, as particularly the case of Verhaeren indicated. The reverse was often also true. Verhaeren possessed a number of early paintings by Emile Fabry, while Fabry himself underwent the influence of Maeterlinck, "car Fabry a véritablement transposé dans sa peinture le climat douloureux et souffrant de son 'théâtre de l'incommunicable" (Legrand, 96). Fabry is in fact a good example of the kind of interrelationships established between the arts along the lines of Baudelaire's 'correspondences,' since, in the words of Legrand, "ses thèmes sont toujours littéraires et correspondent aux mythes que nous avons maintes fois évoqués: Salome, Dalila, les Parques, la Gorgone, les âges de la vie. ..." (96). Many of the concerns of the painters were indeed similar to those of the writers; both groups were interested by theosophy, freemasonry, the Kabbala, hermeticism, spiritism, mysticism and astral light: see for example Fernand Khnopff's painting of Mrs Stuart Merrill. Khnopff's search for himself was similar to that of the Symbolist writers; Legrand writes: "Khnopff se cherche dans leur vers, car il sait s'y pouvoir trouver. Le thème de l'âme errante, à la poursuite de son double, est familier au Symbolisme et rejoint celui de l'androgyne" (70). Khnopff's painting "I look down upon myself" was inspired by a poem of Christina Rosetti, the sister of the pre-raphaelite painter, and incarnates the baudelairian spleen; his "À la nue accablante" is inspired by Mallarmé's poem of the same name. James Ensor's themes, too, are essentially those of Symbolism in literature, those of Poe (also an important author for Degouve de Nunques), Baudelaire, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, Barbey d'Aurevilly and Huysmans, but direct influence by contemporary authors seems to be much less pronounced than in some others; he is in any case a more robust artist than most of those just mentioned. De Saedeleer, by contrast, is greatly influenced by Minne, and his "métamorphose intérieure" has been ascribed to his reading of Guido Gezelle. Well known is the picture which Levy-Dhurmer painted of Georges Rodenbach.

Often personal connections existed between painters and poets: Henry de Groux had among his friends Emile Zola and Léon Bloy; he greatly admired also certain earlier literary artists like Baudelaire, Balzac and Dante. Spillaert's taste for literature led him, after 1902 to the editor Edmond Deman, who directed him to Verhaeren, living in Paris at the time; consequently, "Spillaert se trouve pendant quelques années au coeur du mouvement littéraire le plus avant-gardiste" (136), and is strongly inspired not only by Nietzsche and Chateaubriand, but also by his contemporary Maeterlinck.

Perhaps the most significant association of painter and writer was that between Minne and Maeterlinck. Minne was 20 when he met Maeterlinck, who was 34. In their particular constellation, Minne was the mirror for Maeterlinck's attempts at self-definition; during the latter's reading of *La princesse Maleine* in front of Grégoire Le Roy, Charles van Lerberghe and Minne, the latter is reported to have been profoundly moved. In Paris, Maeterlinck introduced Minne to Moreau and Redon. They certainly shared a number of affinities common among the Symbolists, such as a taste for mysticism, for visionary art, and an interest in the comon people. Legrand makes the claim that "leur intimité était telle que si Maeterlinck n'avait pas demandé à Minne de composer les dessins pour ses écrits, tout porte à croire que les mêmes motifs auraient vue le jour dans l'oeuvre de Minne, sous la poussée des seules nécessités intérieures. La poésie de Maeterlinck est, pour l'artiste, comme une incantation qu'il entend monter du dedans de lui" (Legrand, 156).

VI Van Nu en Straks: Flemish Literature from Naturalism to Symbolism

When one now turns to the case of the Flemish-speaking Symbolists, two important questions must be settled first of all. The one is linguistic, the other relates to what one might call the Weltanschauung of this group.

French-language Symbolism, despite the important variants which we have encountered above, is, when all is said and done, dominated by French thinking about literature, especially poetry, and about the symbolic value of art. For Flemish literature of this period, which, in as far as it is a modernist movement, is closely allied with Symbolism, the very same ancestors can be claimed. This means, as one of the crucial figures connected with the journal *Van Nu en Strak*, August Vermeylen, puts it: "De wegen van de beweging werden meer bepaald door het inheemsche, Fransch-Belgische voorbeeld, dan door invloeden uit Holland" (Vermeylen, 58). Characteristically, Vermeylen does make an important exception; he admits "dat de Nieuwe Gids van overwegende beteekenis bleek voor de vorming van het literaire taalgevoel der meeste jongere schr-

ijvers" (56).

The question of language is of primary importance for an understanding of both the aims and methods of Flemish letters in this period. We cannot here deal in detail with the problematic state of the Flemish language towards the last third of the 19th century. Historical, political and social phenomena would have to enter into the discussion. What is to be retained, however, is that the renaissance of Flemish letters is often attributed to the single-handed effort of one poet, Guido Gezelle. Gezelle may almost be called a voice crying in the wilderness, since Flemish cultural life generally ran along French-language lines. A crucial change in this intellectual climate occurred in 1883 through the introduction of a language law specifying a minimum number of hours of Flemish language instruction in secondary schools. Flemish now acquired a greater esteem; the law made it possible for the figures of the journal *Van Nu en Straks*, who themselves had not yet profited from these reforms, to find a large enough audience for their ideas to have some repercussions.

With the renewed vigour of Flemish culture came necessarily the wish to in fact "catch up" with what had been happening in French-language culture, and Vermeylen indeed phrases it in those terms: "Wat ons dreef was het verlangen, dat ons Vlaamsche wereldje niet achterblijven zou bij het intenser kunst- en gedachtenleven, waarvan de hoofdstad nu het voornaamste brandpunt was" (58). Hence the idea of a journal that would take its place beside those already well established French-language journals mentioned above. Vermeylen has sketched the inception of the journal *Van Nu en Straks* in anecdotal form in his book *Van Gezelle tot Timmermans* (later called *De Vlaamsche Letteren van Gezelle tot Heden*) and has provided a characteristic not only of its tone, but even of its physical appearance. The first editorial board consisted of Vermeylen himself, Cyriel Buysse, Prosper van Langendonck and Emmanuel de Bom; the first series ran between 1893 and 1894. For the context in which we have been discussing this literature the format of this first run is of prime importance:

> Van Nu en Straks had alle schamelijke kleinburgerlijkheid verzaakt: het zag er royaal uit, quarto-formaat, kostelijk Hollandsch papier, letters and vignetten van Henry van de Velde, Dijsselhof, Roland Holst, Thorn Prikker, Theo van Rijsselberghe, Georges Lemmen, Richard Basseleer, platen van Mellery, Toorop, Jan Veth, James Ensor, Charles Ricketts, Lucien Pissarro en anderen meer. Een geheel nummer werd voorbehouden aan de verheerlijking van Vincent van Gogh, een keur van zijn brieven werd gepubliceerd (Vermeylen, 60).

The list of artists involved in the enterprise truly reads like a Who's who of Modernist painting, not only in Belgium, but in Holland as well. This once again underlines the cosmopolitan character of the whole Belgian Modernist movement, in art as well as in literature, and in French as well as in Flemish. The authors included in the first ten issues of the journal embrace a similarly large selection: "nog nooit had een Vlaamsch tijdschrift zulk een beeld gegeven van toenadering tusschen Noord en Zuid: het mocht zich verheugen in de medewerking van Albert Verwey, André Jolles, Bierens de Haan en verschillende andere Hollandsche dichters en schrijvers" (60). In fact, it was largely because of Dutch support that the project survived; many more subscribers came from Holland than from Belgium, and there were also some in France, England, Denmark, the United States, and even in Persia. The journal heralded a much closer cooperation between North and South on the basis of equality, as Albert Verwey pointed out (Musschoot, 51). Until then, Belgian authors had been often considered as strange and slightly inferior cousins by editors like Kloos and Van Deyssel, and publications of Flemish writings in Dutch journals were rare. Now, with *Van Nu en Straks* in place, not only were Dutch writers willing to publish in it, but there began a reverse stream from Flanders to Dutch journals, as e.g. in the case of Cyriel Buysse.

As far as the actual content of the writings included in *Van Nu en Straks* is concerned, we must touch here upon certain questions of Weltanschauung which made the journal a rather problematic forum. In a recent article in *Dutch Crossing*, Anne-Marie Musschoot discusses the "rise and fall" of the journal, and stresses particularly the socio-political tone of the early writings included in the journal. She emphasizes the idea of a communal art involved in the journal, in contrast to the ambitions of *De Nieuwe Gids*, and of the movement of the Tachtigers which went rather more in the direction of an individualistic, quasi-Romantic conception of literature. August Vermeylen himself underlines these differences between *De Nieuwe Gids* and *Van Nu en Straks* when he writes, "hier overwoog een zekere gemeenschapsgeest, daar overwoog een individualisme, dat zich graag voor onbegrensd hield" (64).

It is in this light also that he interprets the crisis in *De Nieuwe Gids* of 1893 as having to do with "de tegenstrijdigheid ... tussen het individualisme in zijn uiterste consequenties en een verlangen naar vernieuwing door het leven buiten het ik" (64).

In Flanders, thinking about art was coloured by the idea that art must play also a social role. This in turn is connected with the origins of the new literature in the issue of a Flemish-language culture, the so-called Vlaamse Beweging. This movement was considered "als onderdeel van de algemeene sociale beweging, — niet taalstrijd in de engere opvatting, maar strijd voor een vrijere en schoonere menschelijkheid in Vlaanderen, waarbij ook de economische zijde van het vraagstuk in beter licht werd gesteld. ..." (Vermeylen, 66). Paradoxically, Vermeylen saw in anarchism a binding element for most of the contributors to the journal. "Onder de vrienden, door wier zorg *Van Nu en Straks* uitgegeven werd, waren haast allen het anarchistische ideaal toegedaan. ... Kropotkin werd druk gelezen ... Uitgaande van de beschouwingen van Walter Crane en William Morris droomde Henry van de Velde van een nieuwe gemeenschapskunst rijzend in het teken van een albevrijdend communisme. Tegelijk wies de invloed van Ibsen en Nietzsche, en over Nietzsche grepen we naar Stirner en de revolutionaire geschriften van Richard Wagner: Die Kunst und die Revolution, Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft" (Vermeylen, 62).

As the list of contributors as well as illustrators shows, the journal was not only literary in scope, but more broadly concerned with the revival of the arts. The contributors were united by a kind of messianism derived from ideas of the Arts and Crafts movement rather than those of the Tachtigers. The ideas of this movement were introduced into the Low Countries by two exhibitions in Brussels organized by Les XX and by articles in *L'Art moderne.* When Vermeylen, in association with van de Velde, took up the cause of a specifically Flemish culture and literature, he was clearly influenced by the Arts and Crafts ideas which Les XX had propagated. But the Flemish variant shows some important differences. Whereas Walter Crane's essay *The Claims of Decorative Art* and Jan Veth's Dutch adaptation of this essay, *Kunst en Samenleving* (1893) stress a utilitarian and materialistic view of society and the arts, "Vermeylen's conception of art [which he expressed in *De kunst in de vrije gemeenschap*] refers to an atheist religiosity or a humanism that is experienced as an immanent necessity" (Musschoot, 48)

Particularly the connection with Henry van de Velde shows the essentially Art Nouveau character of the early stages of the journal as far as the pictorial arts are concerned. In literature, things are slightly different for this first series. As Musschoot remarks, "what Van Nu en Straks achieved in literature proved to be very much the same combination of late-romantic poetry and naturalist prose promoted by *De Nieuwe Gids*" (46). The authors, in contrast to the painters, are in many ways still transitional figures, partly belonging to Naturalism, partly under the influence of the Tachtigers. This latter influence is particularly evident in the case of Prosper van Langendonck and Alfred Hegenscheidt. Van Langendonck's earliest poems date from 1883, they are somewhat in the vein of the Dutch poet Jacques Perk and rather a quantité négligable. Later he wrote more classical poems, using the sonnet form. At the same time, however, the emphasis on the inner life, the "symbolic" value of his images and descriptions, qualify him to be included in this contex: "Zijn meest objectieve landschappen zijn nog tafereelen van het innerlijke" according to Vermeylen (70); "Van Langendonck is de eerste geweest, die in de Vlaamsche dichtkunst sommige geestes- en gemoedstoestanden van den modernen mensch heeft weergegeven" (71). Hegenscheidt, almost completely forgotten today, was the celebrated author of a play in verse, *Starkadd* (1898), which was concerned with the inner life of a legendary hero and singer.

More important figures were Cyriel Buysse and Karel van de Woestijne. The former had left the editorial board of *Van Nu en Straks* by 1895, however, and the latter belongs to a slightly later generation. By 1895 important shifts had occurred in the policies of *Van Nu en Straks* — shifts partially the result of a re-thinking of the role of art, and partly the result of necessity.

Vermeylen himself has argued that the important changes occuring between the first series of issues (1893-94) and the second (1896-1901) were the result of a deliberate change in direction: "die weidsche uitgave kon ons niet langer bevredigen: zij was niet geschikt om door te dringen in de massa van dat Vlaamsche publiek dat we bewerken wilden. Na een onderbreking van een jaar, verscheen Van Nu en Straks in eenvoudiger dracht, zonder zijn geleide van graphische kunstenaars" (61). Buysse had left the editorial board, and the cooperation of the Dutch authors had practically ceased, but a number of extremely important authors had joined the editorial board among others Stijn Streuvels, Hugo Verriest, Karel van de Woestijne, Herman Teirlinck and Fernand Toussaint, so that the brilliance of the literary component of the journal was by no means diminished.

Musschoot sees things slightly differently. According to her, the journal, though very successful and even reprinted, left the editors in debt; on the other hand, it was precisely because of the many artists and their contributions that the first series had been so successful, particularly in Holland. Vermeylen had been able to round up this support partly because at the very time *Van Nu en Straks* was launched, the split between Albert Verwey and Willem Kloos over the direction of *De Nieuwe Gids* had left a vacuum; secondly because there were obviously strong affinities between Vermeylen and Verwey (Musschoot, 51). With the availability of new journals in 1894, the contributions by Dutch authors to *Van Nu en Straks*, which were in a way essential for the continued existence of the journal, ceased. Yet even with their support, *Van Nu en Straks* could not have survived solely by the support of its readers: for this the readership was simply too small.

While the lavishness of *Van Nu en Straks* was gone — for whatever reasons — its new literary contributors could be considered even more important for Flemish letters than the first group, and literature in fact now overshadowed all other topics. It was now that van Langendonck published his series of sonnets which Vermeylen has so praised in his literary history, and the controversy over Hegenscheidt's drama *Starkadd* erupted. Now also Emmanuêl de Bom's novel *Wrakken* was published, and in 1900 Stijn Streuvels' short novel *De Oogst* appeared.

By far the most important figure of this second generation of writers, however, is Karel van de Woestijne, brother of the painter Gustave. Karel van de Woestijne was a rather eclectic writer, admirer of the French symbolists and their precursors Baudelaire, Rémy de Gourmont and Jules Laforgue, but who also, like his French-speaking counterparts, loved the German Romantics, the mystics of the Middle Ages, and knew his Shakespeare and Ibsen. Van de Woestijne demonstrates another quality we had occasion to stress in connection with the French-speaking Symbolists: his fascination with art. Thus he heaped lavish praise on Jean Delville and George Minne, and fostered and promoted his brother Gustave, as well as Servaes, De Valérius and de Saedeleer. Van de Woestijne also wrote a series of important essays about art.

Vermeylen's characterization of van de Woestijne seems to be intent on placing him not only in the context of Belgian letters, but of a broader European tradition: "Van de Woestijne is de dichter van de moderne psyche in haar uiterste ontwikkeling; en haar samengesteldheid, haar tegenstrijdigheden zijn het, waarvan zijn werk de resonantie uitbreidt" (91). In describing the themes and attitudes of van de Woestijne's work, he uses a vocabulary which is immediately reminiscent of that employed to describe the Decadents:

> ...
> de zonen van een overoude beschaving dragen in zich de erfenis van vele eeuwen, hun zenuwen en hun geest hebben zich verscherpt tot het ziekelijke toe, de vermogens van hun ziel zich meer en meer gesplitst en verfijnd, de gewaarwording dringt zoo schielijk diep dat ze haast een pijn wordt, hun hyperaesthesie maakt ze aan alle zijden kwetsbaar; en daar ze zeer moe zijn, hebben ze behoefte aan het intense, den alkohol van de sensatie die prikkelt en verdooft (91).

Van de Woestijne's style is dark, complex, and Vermeylen narrates how, in reading the poetry anthology *De Gulden Schaduw* he was often frustrated by mysteries and riddles, and had to put the book aside. Part of the complexity of this poetry is caused, Vermeylen argued, by the tragic contrasts between the inner life and the unharmonious world outside. Again, as in Langendonck's poems, van de Woestijne's work is primarily concerned with the inner life: "Zelfs de epische verhalen zijn in den grond beelden van den binnenmensch. Het zichtbare is slechts middel. Dat stempelt het werk van Van de Woestijne tot het meest geestelijke wat we in onze poëzie bezitten" (92). Musschoot, too, sees the poetry of van de Woestijne's poetry as expressing a basic dualism, but she phrases it slightly differently: "The narcissistic emotional life of the lyrical subject prevents him from developing a harmonious relation with his beloved. He, or rather, the lyrical subject, is troubled by a persistent discord, a continuous conflict between the sensual and the spiritual realm. ... His spleen is the result of a personal duality ..." which she locates in van de Woestijne's Christian (Catholic) upbringing, but also explains from the literary tradition of the decadent poets.

Van de Woestijne's early poems, including *Het Vaderhuis,* were collected in 1905 in *Verzen*; in 1910 appeared *De Gulden Schaduw*; in 1920 *De Modderen Man*, in 1926 *God aan Zee*, en in 1928 *Het Bergmeer* — the latter three collections considered by van de Woestijne to form a trilogy. In addition to these poems, he also wrote a considerable number of stories, collected in *Interludiën* (1924 and 1926) and *Zon in den Rug* (1924). Van de Woestijne's style changed somewhat over the years; what Vermeylen calls his "tikje gongorisme" dissappears completely from his

last works. Concern with his own death, in "Zegen en Zee" for example, inspired him to write such simple and straigh-forward verses as the following:

> Dit is misschien het laatste lied,
> en deze trage reven
> die, zilt-doorzilverd, zond-bedreven
> mijn dijzende ooge deinzen ziet,
> de laatste van mijn leven ...
> Mijn lijf is krank, mijn hoofd bezwaard;
> maar hebbe ik niet gewonnen,
> dat, in mijn binnenste saëm-geronnen,
> blij wissel-wankt in eigen klaart
> de maat van zee en zonne?

In many respects, van de Woestijne can be seen as the end-product of the 19th century: his baudelairian spleen, his emotional and intellectual tiredness, his somewhat self-indulgent pose remind us of English and French decadents. On the other hand, his ties with the foremost painters of his time, his cosmopolitanism and openess to foreign literatures recapitulate attitudes we found in his French-speaking compatriots, particularly the Symbolists. But whereas his influence and reputation in his own country is considered great, neither in Holland nor in the rest of Europe can we speak of a reputation which rivals that of contemporaries such as Maeterlinck, Verhaeren, or even Rodenbach. This is also (or even primarily) a linguistic problem, no doubt; it is a fate which befell also the Dutch authors we could call Symbolists.

VII Symbolism in Holland

"De liefde tot de schoonheid was bij de Tachtigers een koorts geweest van zoeken naar sensaties, een koorts die geëindigd was in een delirium, waarbij de kunst ten onder ging in ultra-individualistische verbijzondering. ... Rond 1890 was bij de meeste Tachtigers de koorts uitgewoed, had de bezinning haar intrede gedaan en daarmee het zoeken naar een levens- en kunstbeschouwing die solider grondslagen bood dan alleen maar de allerpersoonlijkste ontroerbaarheid." Thus writes Gerard Knuvelder (140-41) about the change between the atmosphere of the 80's and that of the 90's. One way in which this search for more solid foundations manifested itself is already evident in the crisis of *De Nieuwe Gids*: beyond the individual lies society, and several authors choose the larger community provided by either socialism and catholicism. Something similar we noted in the progress of the Flemish journal *Van Nu en Straks*. In art itself, realism and impressionism are no longer sufficient as ideals; objective or subjective observation, providing a primarily sensual pleasure, is gradually being replaced by a search for a more intellectual and spiritual focus in the Idea, and Symbolism is "discovered" as the most productive manner in which the Idea can be made into form. In Holland this Symbolism manifests itself in two ways: as a psychic or subjective Symbolism, and as a more objective Symbolism. The former is directly related to the originators of Symbolism in France and in Belgium; the latter is a more specifically Dutch form of Symbolism, of which Albert Verwey is the originator.

The subjective Symbolism of which Karel van de Woestijne provides a good example in Belgium can be seen as essentially a transitional stage between the hyper-individualism of the Tachtigers and the Beweging which came to the fore in the 1900's. Beside new authors which are associated with the latter movement, a number of prominent authors of the earlier movement also achieve the transition from Naturalism and Impressionism to Symbolism in their thinking and in their works. A good example is Lodewijk van Deyssel. Having himself been a Naturalist in the early 80's (his most famous and most controversial novel being *Een Liefde*, (1887), he begins to reject the methods of this movement, "deze zinnelijke en walgelijkheden beschrijvende kunst," because of the lack of a unifying idea (Knuvelder, 147). In 1891 he proclaims the death of Naturalism (in *De Dood van het Naturalism*), and in 1895 he shows that he has made the transition from Zola to Huysmans and Maeterlinck (*Van Zola tot Maeterlinck*). Here he also establishes a link with mystics such as Ruysbroec, the model for some of his Belgian counterparts. He begins to read Goethe, Novalis, and especially Spinoza. This mystical period resulted in such works as *Apocalyps*; his psychic experiences he wrote down in his autobiographical *Op weg naar het goede leven*, and in the pseudo-autobiographical novel *Het leven van Frank Rozelaar* (1911).

A development similar to that of van Deyssel can be seen in the careers of Herman Gorter and Frederik van Eeden. Gorter, who supplied the movement of the Tachtigers with one of its lasting monuments in the form of the long poem *Mei* (1889, begun in 1886), confessed that in this poem he had been inspired by the "Fransche en Hollandsche realistische, naturalistische en impressionistische school" (Knuvelder, 76), but the poem is also one in which the earthly and human existence, symbolized by the figure of Mei, longs for union with the blind god Balder, symbol of the philosophical and religious

world-soul. This union cannot exist for very long, however, the finite and infinite can merge only in a momentary vision. In his next collection, *Verzen* (1890), Gorter again shows himself interested in the timeless realm of the abstract beyond physical appearances, albeit primarily via the exploitation of a kind of poetic ecstasy rather than by means of an intellectual or symbolic effort. The collection is a kind of "lyrical diary" (Vooys/Stuiveling, 151) of the most refined sensations. But Gorter could not remain on the level of sensation and emotion for ever, and there is a noticeable shift in his work after his reading of Spinoza's *Ethics* (in 1895). The poems which resulted from this reading have as central theme the experience of the unity of all creation (pantheism). His highest ideal at this stage of his creative activity was to grasp the nature of God through an intuitive effort. Though strictly speaking these sonnets cannot be called Symbolist, for "de suggestieve kracht is deze poëzie ten enen male vreemd" (van Bork & Laan, 162), they do provide an anticipation of the Ideeënpoëzie as practised by Verwey and the poets of De Beweging. Meanwhile, Gorter had become involved with socialism, as editor of the monthly *De Nieuwe Tijd* and as speaker at the SDAP meetings. The collection *Verzen* of 1903 provides the evidence of his new standpoint, as does his series of articles *Kritiek op de litteraire beweging van 1880 in Holland* (in *De Nieuwe Tijd*). That he was moving towards a more radical form of socialism than that represented by the SDAP can be seen in his long epic poem, *Pan* (1916): socialism is here presented as the salvation of man. Unfortunately, the poem is problematic in its lack of clear thought, and in its unproductive mixture of realism and symbolism.

A similarly curious mixture of realistic and emotional means characterizes the early work of Frederik van Eeden, notably his *De kleine Johannes* (part one published in *De Nieuwe Gids*, 1885). Fascinated with German literature, especially with the Romantics (most clearly seen in the influence of the Märchen on *De kleine Johannes*), with Heinrich Heine, David Friedrich Strauss, Goethe and Meister Eckhardt, van Eeden was at the same time inspired by socio-ethical ideals, as evidenced in the third part of *De kleine Johannes,* in which the new main character is Markus, a type of social prophet. At first in harmony with the contributors to *De Nieuwe Gids* because of their rejection of pre-Tachtigers poetic efforts, van Eeden could not find a true home here; he felt affinity neither with the Naturalists — because like van Deyssel he finds no evidence of an integrating idea (though his most famous novel, *Van de koele meeren des doods* (1887-1900) certainly belongs to that tradition) — nor with the Neo-romantic attitude of Kloos because of its lack of solidarity with common humanity and its sufferings. Given the divergence in opinion between himself and the followers of Kloos, van Eeden soon was compelled to go his own way, as demonstrated in the novel *Johannes Viator* (with as subtitle "Het boek van de liefde") and a number of stage works (*Lioba, Drama van Trouw*, 1897, *Ijsbrand*, 1908 and *Het beloofde land*, 1909). Indicative of the direction in which he was moving is the long philosophical poem *Het lied van Schijn en Wezen*, written between 1892 and 1895, in which he rejects science as being able to provide us with an understanding of life's mysteries: only music and language can lift a corner of the veil of these mysteries. This idea is reinforced in his aphorisms entitled *Redekunstige grondslag van verstandhouding* (1897). Van Eeden's philosophical interests ultimately steered him not only towards practical social activities (the establishment of the colony Walden), but towards Christianity, initiated by the novels *Pauls ontwaken* (1913, inspired by the death of his son) and *De nachtbruid* (1909) in which the belief in reincarnation and a life after death is argued intellectually before these ideas are grasped in totality.

Like van Eeden, Henriëtte Roland Holst was influenced by socialist ideas, while at the same time subscribing to Platonic philosophy. Like so many of her contemporaries, she made her debut in *De Nieuwe Gids*, in 1893, with sonnets in which the strict form is revitalized with freer rhythms and frequent enjambements. Her art truly began to fourish, however, with her discovery of socialism (*Opwaartse wegen*), though she soon broke with her colleagues over policies of the party (1909); as a result her poetry temporarily became more pessimistic. The loss of courage was not permanent, however: the collection *Het feest der gedachtenis* (1915) gives a more positive view of socialist reality. By contrast, the death of her mother inspired her to write mystical poems about death and eternity. In later years, Roland Holst turned her attention to Russian communism, though her commitment to the socialist and communist ideals remains counterbalanced by different forms of Indian mysticism.

J. H. Leopold, who made his debut in *De Nieuwe Gids* in 1894 with five poems later collected under the title *Scherzo*, demonstrates in most of his poetry the rejection of the external world in favour of the individual inner life which is so typical for the Tachtigers. In his case this rejection is based on personal psychological factors: his hyper-sensitive

nature and fundamental loneliness. Throughout his life, Leopold tried to find a counter-weight to these aspects of his personality, first through love, then through intellectual understanding (he too read Spinoza), and in Eastern wisdom (re-working of some of Omar Khayyam's poems from the *Rubayat*). Though in style close to Impressionism, Leopold's work is formally, and especially as far as content is concerned, much closer to European Symbolism, in that it suggests more than it says. This can be seen especially in the long poem "Cheops," which Leopold wrote after the publication of his first collection of poems, *Verzen* (1912). In this poem Leopold depicts his own inescapable destiny: "alles gezien, erkend en doorpeild hebbende, heeft Cheops niets van zijn eenzaamheidsdrift verloren en keert hij weer in de piramide die alles van hem afsluit wat niet hijzelf is, ook van het bewustzijn van zijn eigen eeuwigheid. De ziel blijft gevangen. ... in de symbolen van de machtsvolkomenheid der Ikheid" (Knuvelder, 157). Even structurally, these poems "symbolize" the poets existential situation: "Cheops" has been characterized by the poet Van Eyck as having the structure of a downwards spiral; in his poem "Molen" a centrifugal turning movement can be discerned. Typically Symbolist is especially his poem "Regen," in which the single raindrop comes to mirror all of the cosmos.

P. C. Boutens' poetry shows certain affinities with that of Leopold, though Boutens as a person was far less withdrawn than the latter. His literary debut, the collection *Verzen* of 1898, was introduced by van Deyssel, who correctly stressed the fact that these poems were concerned far less with the external world than with the inner emotional life. The consciously dark and hermetic character of Boutens' early poems makes them relatively inaccessible, whereas in *Praeludiën* (1902), *Stemmen* (1907), *Vergeten Liedjes* (1909) and *Carmina* (1912) there is a greater simplicity and classicism. His later poems, collected under the titles *Lente-maan* (1916) and *Zomerwolken* (1922) show the strong influence of his neo-Platonism; they demonstrate the general shift in Dutch letters to a more sober, more intellectual poetry.

Finally, Albert Verwey, the most crucial figure in the formulation of a specifically Dutch form of Symbolism, is himself a good example of the kind of intellectual progress which many poets of this period underwent. From being a true disciple of Kloos, he came to reject the subjective impressionism of which Kloos is the most prominent representative and of which he himself had provided examples in his *Cor Cordium* (1886), and began to write more philosophically oriented cycles of poems, such as his *Aarde* (1896). In his articles and in his editorial activities associated with the *Tweemaandelijkse Tijdschrift* (1894-1902), later called *De Twintigste Eeuw* (1902-1905), which he edited together with van Deyssel, he propagates a vision of humanity as a single unity — a humanity which loves life here on earth. Verwey was interested not only in literature, but in all the arts and in the philosophy of his time. Only after the break with van Deyssel, however, which would lead to Verwey's founding his own journal, *De Beweging* (1905), can we say that he found the true formulation of his own philosophy. By then the individualistic and subjective forms of Symbolism had, mainly under the influence of the reading of Spinoza by all the prominent members of this generation, been replaced by the more objective form of Symbolism ("late" Symbolism), with which De Beweging became synonymous.

Two generations of De Beweging are generally recognized. The first group can be said to consist mainly of admirers and followers of Verwey; to this group belong Is. P. de Vooys, Maurits Uyldert, Th. van Ameide, Alex Gutteling, François Pauwels, Nico van Suchtelen, Marie Cremers and Laurens van der Waals. This group is, according to Knuvelder, "evenzeer subjectivistisch als die van 1875, maar terwijl de Tachtigers hun persoonlijkheid als het ware ondergeschikt maakten aan hun schoonheidsverlangen, en de verwerkelijking daarvan, wensten de dichters en proza-schrijvers van 1905 allereerst de bevrediging van hun geluksverlangen. Ook het dichten wordt aan de bevrediging van dit verlangen ondergeschikt gemaakt" (221). Indeed, these poets are diametrically opposed to the kind of self-inflicted isolation from the external world which Frans Coenen characterized as the necessary condition for literary production of the Tachtigers. These writers, and the subsequent group which came to the fore in 1913 (Geerten Gossaert, A. Roland Holst, P.N. van Eyk, J.C. Bloem and others), was very much involved with contemporary events, such as the building of the Peace Palace in the Hague, the second Socialist International in Amsterdam (1904), the Boer War and the Congress of Esperantists. In this sense, they are much closer to the spirit of *Van Nu en Straks* than the earlier generation. On the other hand, the fusion of philosophical and political ideas with those of the Symbolist tradition makes the works written by these authors far more problematic than the work of the earlier phases. Particularly the temptation to become too abstract in art is seen as a danger, and as such treated by a number of theoreticians who

accompany De Beweging, such as Bierens de Haan and Julius de Boer. Nevertheless, the fusion of "het transcendente en het tijdelijke" on the one hand, and "het persoonlijke en het algemene" on the other remains the ideal of this generation (van Bork & Laan, 170).

It has been argued that in fact since 1913 a return to a new kind of classicism can be noted, and a turning away from the doctrines of the Tachtigers which had heralded the renaissance of Dutch letters. Typical for this attitude is Geerten Gossaert's attack on the movement because of its lack of technique: "Daarom werd door ons allen een buitengewone nadruk gelegd op de techniek, in scherp onderscheid met de eigenlijke poëzie. ... De techniek is iets, dat in [des dichters] eigen macht ligt; wanneer hij deze na veel strijd eindelijk volkomen beheerscht, dan heeft hij recht daarop trotsch te zijn, omdat dit de vrucht is van zijn eigen inspanning; en in deze techniek ligt dan ook uitsluitend zijn recht op den meesterstitel" (Knuvelder, 226). Verwey, giving his blessing to this kind of thinking in his essay *De Richting van de Hedendaagsche Poëzie* (1913), accepts the fact that the well-chosen classicist image is to be preferred over the constant search of new images such as practised by the Tachtigers. From this point of view, then, we can say that with the Beweging, with its return to more traditional syntax ("de volzin"), more traditional forms of poetry such as the sonnet, and the emphasis on rhetorical figures ("bezielde retoriek"), we enter a new period in Dutch letters. On the other hand, if we see Symbolism primarily as having to do with Weltanschauung, with "pogingen de immateriële Ideeënwereld in woorden te vangen, zodat de geestelijke eenheid tussen mens en wereld kan worden bezongen," (van Bork & Laan, 172), then this period is still part of the Symbolist movement. It is only with the advent of Expressionism, Futurism and Constructionism that this period can be said to end completely.

Notes:

[1] See: "The Dutch Novel 1880-1910." *Tijdschrift voor Nederlands en Afrikaans*, 2,1 (1984), 20-37.

[2] For the following short discussion of the more important ones I am heavily indebted to Paul Gorceix, whose book is the best discussion of the French language Symbolists in Belgium to date.

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