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THE BLURRED BOUNDARIES OF BELGIANNES:

WALLOON INTELLECTUALS, PRIDE, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONALIST RHETORIC,

1884-1914

A Thesis in

History

by

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ABSTRACT

Most analyses of regionalist sentiments in Belgium are hindered by an overly finalist interpretation of Belgian history, in which Belgium is an "artificial" construct in which two "real" populations, Flemings and Walloons, have uneasily coexisted, waiting for the eventual break-up of the state. From this perspective, the Flemish and Walloon Movements are the "awakenings" of these primordial groups. I argue instead that regionalism is a form of discourse, a "political idiom" which historical actors develop and use in the course of political debates on a wide array of issues which are portrayed as connected to regional identities. In particular, I examine the Walloon Movement in the three decades before World War I. I propose that this movement was the domain of ambitious but frustrated men in the literary and political fields who felt symbolically "dominated" by a clerical, "Flemish" government. The development of Walloon regional identity was inextricable from anti-clerical and broadly "leftist" political viewpoints, which conflated "Wallonia" with the values of liberty and progressivism, thereby excluding Catholic Walloons as well as progressive Flemings from its rhetoric. The Walloon Movement's rhetoric emphasized three overlapping forms of identity as sources of pride and prestige: Walloon, French, and Belgian. I study the way in which Walloon Movement used each of these three forms of identity in elaborating a politicized regional discourse. Finally, I argue that as a discursive formation, we cannot see Walloon regionalism as the inexorable outcome of historical forces, but rather a contingent phenomenon, constructed in a particular set of political and social circumstances. A teleological narrative focusing on the "inevitable break-up of Belgium" is grossly inaccurate and denies the role of contingency in history.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: REGIONALISM, PRIDE, AND SYMBOLIC DOMINATION

At a 1911 conference at the Jeune Barreau of Brussels – a prestigious legal, literary, and political milieu – Catholic historian Godefroid Kurth, formerly of the University of Liège, gave a talk on the Flemish Question in Belgian public life. As a member of the small German-speaking minority in southern Belgium who used French in public life, Kurth described himself as having "a rather rare privilege: I am neither Flemish nor Walloon." After sketching some of the historical antecedents to the linguistic conflict of the time, he concluded that fighting against the Flemish movement would be like trying "to stop a moving train with an iron rod." Thus, all Belgians who desired a public career should learn both Flemish and French: "That in Flanders the peasant knows only Flemish, and in Wallonia only French, fine, but those who pretend to be the elite of the nation cannot content themselves with this provincial ideal." Thus, the Walloon's obvious choice was to learn Flemish, as the educated Fleming learned French; lest the Walloon's reticence become "resistance without an agenda, already fated to sterility."¹

Despite Kurth's suggestion that cultured Walloons would do well to learn Dutch, many did not. Literary historian, philologist, and Walloon Movement sympathizer Maurice Wilmotte accused Kurth, his former advisor at the University of Liège, "born *Germanic* and *plebeian*," of being unable to "appreciate the refinements of Latin civilization" and thus becoming the "sincere, to the most fanatical ardor, champion of Germanism in Belgium."² Jules Destrée, a lawyer, art critic, poet, and Socialist parliamentarian from the suburbs of Charleroi, and one of the leading names of pre-1914 Walloon regionalism expressed the low opinion which many members of the Walloon Movement held of the Flemish language in his oft-quoted 1912 plea for the "administrative separation" of

¹ "La Question flamande," reprinted in a collection of his essays: Godefroid Kurth, *La nation belge* (Namur, Belgium: Picard-Balon, 1913), 192, 203-204, 207-209.

² Maurice Wilmotte, *La culture française en Belgique* (Paris: H. Champion, 1912), 141. Emphasis added.

Wallonia and Flanders. In what is likely a reference to Kurth, Destrée noted that some have suggested that "if the Walloon wants to become [a civil servant], let him learn Flemish!" This reasoning, continued Destrée, "is plausible in theory, but does not take account of the facts. The first [of which] one might deplore, but [which] one must note, is the marked *repugnance* that the Walloon has for the study of the Flemish tongue..."³

A Question of Pride

At first blush, the intensity with which Wilmotte and Destrée objected to Kurth's idea that all educated Belgians should be bilingual seems far out of proportion to the actual burden which bilingualism would represent. After all, educated Flemings had long learnt French in order to access the higher echelons of Belgian society, could not Walloons do the same in learning Flemish? The ambitious, intelligent, bourgeois men who filled the ranks of the early Walloon Movement certainly had no trouble learning languages *per se*: the rigorous education which they received included many years of Classical Greek and Latin. Destrée was conversant in Italian; Wilmotte spoke German with enough facility that he could give academic lectures in the language. Certainly, unlike peasants and manual laborers in Wallonia, they would have had the time and the means to learn another language, at least to the extent that they could hold basic conversations with the public in Flanders. Why, then, the vociferous opposition to learning Flemish or Dutch?

This thesis argues that the early Walloon Movement, which began largely as a "defensive" action on the part of monolingual French-speakers worried about maintaining their position in state employment, can only be fully understood by examining *pride* as a motivating factor. In "rational" terms, it might seem like the acquisition of Flemish would not be a difficult task for educated men with significant amounts of free time. However, these men objected to the new linguistic demands

³ Jules Destrée, "Lettre au Roi sur la séparation de la Wallonie et de la Flandre," *Revue de Belgique* (August 1912), 749. Emphasis added.

of the Belgian state precisely *because* they were well-educated. As Pierre Bourdieu notes, regionalist movements tend to first make inroads among "the intelligentsia and the new petite bourgeoisie" because these movements are "directed against forms of *symbolic domination*," and these social classes are the best equipped with the "ethical dispositions and cultural competencies" necessary to be interested in and capable of dealing with issues of language and status.⁴ Bourdieu's insight is fruitful for my analysis of regional identity, which hopes to move beyond the solely economic and political (in the narrow sense of the term) explanation for regionalist identity formation and activism. Here Pierre Bourdieu provides an incisive critique: "Marxist research into the national or regional question has been blocked... by the combined effect of international utopianism (supported by a naïve evolutionism) and of economism" which leads them to look for a quantifiable explanation for these emotive issues, as well as to imagine that class solidarities always trump "ethnic" solidarities, something the facts usually contradict.⁵ As Raoul Girardet explains in his study of the political imaginary, "It is subjectively – in terms of personal feelings, intimately experienced – much more than by conditions considered as objective... that the state of alienation must be defined."⁶ Therefore, the "perceived" or "felt" attack on the identity of these Walloon civil servants and academics engendered a reaction of pride in several elements of these Walloons' identities.

A parallel example can be found in 19th-century Provence: in his study of the *Félibrige*, an Occitan literary society, Joseph Roza notes that it did not exist to "protect" Occitan as a language but rather to give literary *prestige* to a regional vernacular. The *Félibrige*'s founder, Frédéric Mistral – a lawyer by training and a poet by choice – harbored a "resentment of French" that in turn nurtured his love of Occitan. Insults to his Occitan language made him feel "*humiliated*, not just personally, but also for his family and for 'his whole race.' That is, Mistral perceived that his whole family and

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 287n8. Emphasis added.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 288n11.

⁶ Raoul Girardet, *Mythes et mythologies politiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 179.

community were being *ridiculed* when students mocked his provincial manners and speech."⁷ Here, the role of pride (and its negation, humiliation) in driving a linguistic and cultural movement is readily apparent.

The sources of regionalist attachment can be manifold, even contradictory. Czech historian Miroslav Hroch, in his study of the "revival" of "small nations" in nineteenth-century Europe, argues that the Flemish movement in nineteenth-century Belgium experienced difficulties in part because of its "openness" in two directions: towards "the emergent Belgian nation" but also towards "the Northern Netherlands." Hroch argues that the Flemings did not always have a clear demarcation between themselves and the latter.⁸ One can argue that the Walloon Movement faced a similar multiplicity of identity. During World War II, the Walloon Movement manifested "split identities," evincing affinities for Wallonia, France, and Belgium.⁹ This essay argues that these three categories of identification were also present in the pre-World War I Walloon Movement. Wallonia, France (and the Francophone world), and Belgium each played a strong emotional role in the emergent Walloon imagination. During the nineteenth century, French and German revolutionary nationalism "found reasons why men should love their country and nothing else, and... in due course came the unintended consequence that men should love their own country so much that they would have little left for any other."¹⁰ In the Walloon case, while the three loci of pride often changed their relative importance in Walloon rhetoric, they were never mutually exclusive.

⁷ Joseph P. Roza, "French Languages and French Nationalism: The Félibrige, Occitan, and the French Identity of Southern France, 1854-1914" (PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 2003), 64-65, 69. Emphasis added.

⁸ Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 115.

⁹ Chantal Kesteloot, "Belgique, Wallonie, France: Les identités déchirées du Mouvement Wallon," in *Bretagne et identités régionales pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, ed. Christian Beauregard (Brest, France: Centre de Recherche bretonne et celtique, Université de Bretagne Occidentale, 2002), 353-368.

¹⁰ Geoffrey Best, *Honour among Men and Nations: Transformations of an Idea* (Toronto et al.: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 23.

The World of Letters and Political Discourse

Much of the Walloon discourse examined in this work was elaborated in rather exclusive bourgeois literary and cultural circles. However, that does not mean that it was unimportant. Recent scholarship suggests that the quest for the "true" identity of the nation seems to have preoccupied Belgian men of letters more than it did Dutch or French ones. These men, so occupied with defining national identity, often straddled the cultural and political spheres. It has been argued that "a history of identity, and certainly one that takes as its point of departure the world of letters... is thus not solely cultural. It starts off with culture, but inevitably touches politics as well." Therefore, "a history of identity from the perspective of men of letters" is necessarily "an analysis of a *discourse* as well."¹¹

These postulates, developed in reference to the Flemish case, hold true for Wallonia as well. Jules Destrée, perhaps the best-remembered member of the Walloon Movement before 1914, spent much of his early years writing for literary reviews such as *La Wallonie* (1886-1892) and reporting on art shows. He became a Socialist member of Parliament in the mid-1890s while continuing his literary and artistic vocations. By 1912, he was making the bold statements about Wallonia's political destiny cited above. Thus, one student of Destrée's career justly remarked that "from an artistic interest [*aandacht*] in Wallonia, Destrée evolved towards a political engagement [*bekommernis*] for Wallonia."¹² Destrée has been seen by many historians as "the key figure who would allow the Walloon Movement to enter the political realm more rapidly than did the Flemish Movement. As a writer and art critic, he succeeded in making a connection between anti-clerical politicians and the traditional reserve [*arrière-ban*] of theatre and folklore enthusiasts."¹³ Destrée was also part of a

¹¹ Greet Draye, "Laboratoria van de Natie: Nederlandstalige literaire genootschappen in Vlaanderen over politiek, literatuur en identiteit, 1830-1914" (Doctoral dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven, 2007), 2-3, 14-15.

¹² Carla-Maria de Brandt, "Jules Destrées wallingantisme vóór de Eerste Wereldoorlog" (Licentiate thesis, Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven, 1977), 166.

¹³ Lode Wils, *Histoire des nations belges: Belgique, Wallonie, Flandre: Quinze siècles de passé commun* (Brussels: Éditions Labor, 2005), 214.

current to some extent peculiar to Belgian Socialism, in which the Parti Ouvrier Belge [POB] consciously linked the development of literature and the fine arts to the development of the Belgian working-class.¹⁴ The connection between "progressive" and anti-clerical politics – Wilmotte was a Liberal and Destrée a Socialist – and Walloon self-identification heavily informed the rhetoric of Walloon regionalism, as shown below.

This thesis will thus analyze the cultural and literary arguments of the Walloon Movement as a style of discourse, a rhetorical toolkit with which adherents to this emerging movement could attempt to dismantle offensive visions of the Belgian nation: obligatorily bilingual, clerical, ignorant, overly provincial, predominantly or even exclusively "Flemish," and so on. While Walloon regionalist discourse did not originate as a coldly-calculated strategy to deploy against Flemish "radicals" and the Catholic party, those regionalist representations of Wallonia which corresponded with the liberal and anti-clerical ideals of the early Walloon Movement were co-opted in service of political arguments. The mingling of the worlds of letters and politics allows for disquisitions on the funding of regional literary academies and the medieval history of the Low Countries to appear in the debates of the Belgian Parliament with some frequency, as "cultural" representations are deployed in support of anti-clerical, progressive policies.

A Different Perspective on "Regionalism"

This view of regionalist ideology as a "discursive" strategy used in the political sphere helps us broaden our understanding of regionalism. Celia Applegate, a historian of German regionalism, has lamented that most historiography on regional movements in Europe in the contemporary period has had a rather narrow focus:

¹⁴ Paul Aron, *Les écrivains belges et le socialisme (1880-1913): L'expérience de l'art social, d'Edmond Picard à Émile Verhaeren* (Brussels: Éditions Labor, 1997).

Much historical work on regionalism in European history has thus confined itself to the politics of autonomism and separatism – an important subject, to be sure, but not one that exhausts the possibilities of political regionality in the modern era. Regions should not be understood only as would-be nations; from that perspective, it takes only one small step to return to the notion that regionalism is therefore backward, archaic, and, above all, transitional.¹⁵

While historiography on nationalism and the role of sentiments therein has developed greatly over the past few decades, she notes, "the slowness to apply [Pierre] Bourdieu's or [Benedict] Anderson's insights to the phenomena of European regionalism continues to indicate the relative obscurity surrounding the role of regions in European development."¹⁶ More recently, Maiken Umbach, a historian of regionalism and federalism in Europe, has argued that regionalism should not be seen as an "alternative" to the nation as a form of political identification: "during the heyday of European nationalism, in the decades around 1900," she writes, "regional and national identities coexisted, and were mutually reinforcing."¹⁷

Applegate's remarks hold true for the Belgian case. Many scholars, both foreign and Belgian, concentrate on separatist tendencies in Belgian sub-national movements, especially in light of the continuing devolution of state structures in Belgium since the 1960s. In this optic, the Flemish and Walloon Movements of the era before World War I are seen as "foreshadowing" the "inevitable" break-up of Belgium. This interpretation is at best grossly oversimplifying and at worst just plain wrong. This study of the Walloon Movement will show that regional identities are not necessarily opposed to an overarching state or national identity. Indeed, as Chapter 5 will demonstrate, many Walloons developed a Walloon "regional" identity based on the maintenance of the Belgian state, thus supporting Umbach's claim. Instead, regionalist identities are in some ways the product of internal political maneuvering, as Maurice Wilmotte himself hinted when he argued that the Walloon

¹⁵ Celia Applegate, "A Europe of Regions: Reflections on the Historiography of Sub-National Places in Modern Times," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 4 (1999), 1171.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1176.

¹⁷ Maiken Umbach, "Nation and Region: Regionalism in Modern European Nation-States," in *What Is a Nation? Europe, 1789-1914*, ed. Timothy Baycroft and Mark Hewitson (Oxford *et al.*: Oxford University Press, 2006), 65.

Movement, which "Liberals have monopolized with alacrity," was "born of reaction," not the product of cultural givens. Indeed, he claimed it "will cease to exist as soon as it no longer has its current *raison d'être*."¹⁸ While certainly not all members of the Walloon Movement, nor enthusiasts of Walloon regional culture, would have agreed with Wilmotte's assessment, it provides a telling insight into the way in which an important figure viewed the Walloon Movement as contingent upon prevailing political conditions.

Outline of the Thesis

Chapter 2 will sketch the history of Belgium during the Belle Époque, with a particular emphasis on political and social developments which would feed into the growth of the Walloon Movement and a particularly "Walloon" identity. In doing so, it will demonstrate how the creation of Walloon identity was in many ways inseparable from the development of political tensions in Belgium along religious and class axes. The latter part of the chapter will examine the social makeup of the Walloon Movement, with a particular emphasis on education and employment and how career aspirations shaped the political and cultural engagement of these Walloons.

Chapter 3 will examine the role of "Walloon Pride" in the rhetoric of the Walloon Movement. This term refers to cultural and historical trends which we might call "regionalism" in the traditionally accepted sense, such as the provincial literary movements in late nineteenth-century France or the Heimat organizations which promoted local pride in Germany before World War I.¹⁹ This tendency originally concentrated on promoting regionalist literature, theatre, and music (in French and in Walloon) as well as sponsoring local antiquarian endeavors, with little emphasis on politics. However, the promotion of a regional, Walloon cultural and historical patrimony eventually

¹⁸ Maurice Wilmotte, *La Belgique morale et politique (1830-1900)* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1902), 208, 218.

¹⁹ Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Écrire la France: Le mouvement littéraire régionaliste de langue française entre la Belle Époque et la Libération* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1991); Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

became politicized in the context of struggles regarding linguistic legislation, educational policy, and the like.²⁰

Chapter 4 looks at "French Pride" as a current within the Walloon Movement. This chapter treats "French" on a number of different levels, ranging from Walloon identification with the French "race" or "ethnicity," Walloon reference to "progressive" French political ideals and the French Revolution, to French language and culture writ large, seen as a superior to Flemish/Dutch. There were also a handful of Walloons who advocated the annexation of Wallonia to France, a position which never developed beyond the convictions of isolated individuals.

Chapter 5 addresses "Belgian Pride," examining how the Walloon Movement's rhetoric and action before World War I was based on a desire to maintain "Belgium" as these Walloons envisioned it. I have decided to make this the last expository chapter of my thesis because all too often contemporary scholars portray Belgium as a mismatched marriage doomed to fall apart, as the two major linguistic groups have "always" been in conflict. This vision, bolstered by perennial editorials in publications such as *The Economist* forecasting the end of Belgium, is deeply anachronistic and inapplicable to Belgium before World War I. It is true that the Walloon Movement often fought explicitly against those they labeled as "Flemish radicals" and advocated the maintenance of French as the sole language of public life in Belgium, but with a few scattered exceptions, this somewhat chauvinistic attitude reflected a desire to "maintain" the "Belgium of 1830" from the supposedly destructive forces of Flemish particularism, clericalism, and pan-Germanism, among others. Even the sporadic calls of some Walloons for "administrative separation" of Belgium into a federation of regions based on language (usually proposed as Dutch-speaking Flanders, French-speaking Wallonia, and bilingual Brussels and/or the province of Brabant) were couched in terms of pacifying and stabilizing Belgium as a whole.

²⁰ Arnaud Pirotte, *L'apport des courants régionalistes et dialectaux au Mouvement Wallon naissant: Une enquête dans les publications d'action wallonne de 1890 à 1914* (Leuven, Belgium: Éditions Peeters, 1997).

A Note on Vocabulary

Any attempt by a modern day academic to write the history of identity movements runs the risk of anachronistic terminology. That said, for simplicity's sake I will follow several conventions which will not always match the usage of the time. Many inhabitants of Belgium at the time would not have used these terms in daily life, especially in Wallonia, where a group consciousness independent of Belgium was slow to develop outside of the elites studied here. "**Wallonia**" refers to the southern region of Belgium which today has constitutional status and where, with the exception of a few German-speaking communities, French and Romance dialects are the mother tongues of the population. This includes the present provinces of Hainaut, Liège, Namur, Luxembourg, and Walloon Brabant (before the split of Brabant Province in 1995, this region was the *arrondissement* of Nivelles, occasionally called "Roman pays du Brabant"). "**Walloon**" refers to a person born in this region, whether or not they were living there.²¹ The "**Walloon Language**" refers to a set of Romance dialects closely related to French which served as the demotic speech for much of the Walloon population until the twentieth century. "**Flanders**" refers to the areas in northern Belgium, with the exception of the city of Brussels, where Dutch and related languages are the mother tongue of the population. This includes the present provinces of East Flanders, West Flanders, Limburg, Antwerp, and Flemish Brabant (before 1995, the *arrondissement* of Leuven). "**Fleming**" refers to people born in this region, whether or not they were living there. Flemings who chose to speak French were occasionally called "*fransquillons* [little Frenchies]" by other Flemings. In turn, many French-speaking Belgians, both Flemings and Walloons, would call Flemings they perceived as radicals "*flamingants*." This essay will more often than not use the term "**Flemish**" rather than "Dutch" to refer to the language of the Flemings, following the usage of the time, though today the language used by educated Flemings and Dutch people is the same. Finally, "**activists**" refers to

²¹ "Walloon" was also occasionally used to refer to the "*fransquillons*," French-speaking Flemings, as well as the French-speakers of Brussels.

people who participated in a movement (Flemish activists, Walloon activists, Socialist activists, etc.) and is my preferred translation for the French term "*militant*." This term is not to be confused with the use of the term "activist" in Belgium after World War I, which refers to those Flemings, and also a smaller group of Walloons, who collaborated with the German occupying forces.

CHAPTER 2 THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND TO WALLOON ENGAGEMENT

A Brief Overview of Belgian History

Too often, both regionalists of the pre-World War I era, as well as present-day foreign observers of Belgium portray the country as the result of a "marriage" of Walloons and Flemings (or of Wallonia and Flanders); the corollary to this metaphor is that should one side feel too aggrieved, the time is ripe for a "divorce."¹ Scholars are not exempt from such fallacies: as Charles Ehrlich complains in his discussion of Czech and Catalan regionalism in the early twentieth century, "many historians looking at multiethnic states have concluded that these states should not exist: they either need to be broken up, or the minority element needs to be removed through assimilation..."² Jean Stengers, the late renowned historian of Belgium, laments that this vision of history, in which "the artificial state of Belgium... attempted to bring together the Walloon and Flemish peoples" has gained so much ground outside of Belgium, despite the fact that during the Revolution of 1830 no one would have heard "We Flemings" or "We Walloons" as a rallying cry; nor did the terms "Flanders" (in the greater sense of the Dutch-language part of Belgium; not just the old County of Flanders) or "Wallonia" exist as we know them today.³ Indeed, the term *Wallonie* as a reference to the southern regions of Belgium where Romance languages are spoken only came into existence in 1844, created by philologist Joseph Grandgagnage.⁴ The term would not gain wide usage until the end of the nineteenth century.

¹ For example, Julien Delaite, "Français & Flamand," *L'Âme wallonne* (8 March 1898), cols. 95-96.

² Charles E. Ehrlich, "Ethnicity, Citizenship, and Identity in the Constitution of Multiethnic States: Lessons from Early-Twentieth-Century Spain and Austria," *The European Legacy* 2, no. 7 (1997), 1157.

³ The quote is from British aristocrat and Euroskeptic James Goldsmith. Jean Stengers, "La Révolution de 1830," in *Les grands mythes de l'histoire de Belgique, de Flandre et de Wallonie*, ed. Anne Morelli (Brussels: Éditions Vie Ouvrière, 1995), 139, 145-146, 148n23.

⁴ Jean Stengers, "Depuis quand les Liégeois sont-ils des Wallons?" in *Hommages à la Wallonie: Mélanges d'histoire, de littérature et de philologie wallonnes offerts à Maurice A. Arnould et Pierre Ruelle*, ed. Hervé Hasquin (Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1981), 447.

Belgium as a juridical entity with international recognition came into being in 1830, when the former provinces of the Austrian Netherlands (plus the principality of Liège) which had been annexed by France in the Revolutionary period and "reattached" to the Kingdom of the Netherlands by the Congress of Vienna revolted against the Dutch. Many historians have portrayed the Belgian Revolution as a "marriage of convenience" between Catholics who chafed under Dutch King Willem I's heavy-handed Protestantism and liberals who disdained Willem's authoritarianism. Some of the thinkers examined in this study have portrayed the Belgian revolution as an act mostly of liberal, French-speaking Walloons, thus attempting to tarnish the Flemings as unpatriotic (towards Belgium), and perhaps even pro-Dutch "traitors."⁵

The Belgian constitution of 1831 provided for a constitutional monarchy with a limited franchise based on property qualifications; this system would undergo several changes in the period studied here, though simple universal male suffrage did not come about until after World War I. The constitution also provided that the use of languages in Belgium was optional [*facultatief*] according to the will of the individual citizen; however, the economic and social situation in Belgium created a *de facto* Francophone state. Starting with small literary movements in the 1840s and expanding to more politicized activity in the following decades, Flemish intellectuals began to demand that Flemish have a position in public life equal to that of French.⁶

To understand the background and tenor of the debates, one must keep in mind the structure of the Belgian state before World War I. Belgium was a *unitary* state; there was no federalism or devolution of powers as one would see in Germany at the time. However, Belgium

⁵ Stengers, "La Révolution de 1830," 142; Chantal Kesteloot, "Eerst Belg, dan Vlaming en Waal: De Vlaamse en de Waalse Beweging en de Revolutie van 1830," in *Broedertwist: België en Nederland en de erfenis van 1830*, ed. Peter Rietbergen, Tom Verschaffel, and Jan de Hond (Zwolle, Netherlands: Waanders, 2005), 97.

⁶ Though dated, Shepard Bancroft Clough, *A History of the Flemish Movement in Belgium: A Study in Nationalism* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1930) remains a good English-language introduction to the Flemish movement before World War I.

was also not a *centralizing* state – there was no effort to turn "Peasants into Belgians."⁷ The liberal strand of thought in Belgian public life, Catholic distrust of secular intrusion into family and parochial matters, and a lingering memory of Dutch attempts at homogenization combined to produce a state which was rather less involved in its citizens' lives than elsewhere. Social legislation, compulsory schooling, military conscription, and other "incursions" of the state into social and economic life were far less developed in Belgium than in neighboring countries before 1914.⁸

A Changing Political and Cultural Milieu

My analysis of the role of different "levels" of pride in the Walloon Movement starts in 1884. While there were some small inklings of Walloon organization before this date, they were simply local folklore and literature societies without express political or even politicized aims. But a change in government would heighten "communitarian" tensions. From 1879 to 1884, there had been a very bitter "school war [*guerre scolaire*]" between the incumbent Liberal ministry and the Catholic opposition, concerning government support (or lack thereof) for confessional schools. In 1884, partly in reaction to Liberal measures concerning lay and religious schooling, the Catholics gained a majority in both houses of the Belgian Parliament, which they would maintain until the German invasion of Belgium in August of 1914.⁹ It is in the context of this bitter political bifurcation, which often split families and social circles, in which a politicized Walloon Movement would first appear.¹⁰

During this time period a series of laws changed the legal status of Flemish vis-à-vis French in Belgium. In the decade 1873-1883, the Belgian Parliament enacted new legislation geared at allowing Flemings who did not know French better access to public services. This was partly the

⁷ The reference is of course to Eugen Weber's classic *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

⁸ Cf. Gita Deneckere, *Les turbulences de la Belle Époque, 1878-1905* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 2005).

⁹ Jacques Lory, "Introduction," in *1884: Un tournant politique en Belgique*, ed. Emiel Lamberts and Jacques Lory (Brussels: Publications des Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, 1986), 1-5.

¹⁰ Arthur Edward Curtis, "New Perspectives on the History of the Language Problem in Belgium" (PhD dissertation, University of Oregon, 1971), 228-251.

result of the highly publicized Coucke and Goethals affair of 1860 in which the Flemish defendants, who may not have spoken French, were executed after trials conducted completely in French.

Other laws mandated the use of Flemish in certain levels of schooling in Flanders.¹¹

These laws were applied with renewed vigor after the accession of the Catholics to power in 1884. As will be seen below, such laws – especially those which required knowledge of Flemish on the part of public servants – would be one of the main targets of the nascent Walloon Movement's action. New laws were passed as well. In 1886, the Belgian Government opened a separate Flemish Royal Academy, a state-sponsored society for arts, letters, and science, alongside the French-language Academy. Besides the "symbolic" equation of a Flemish and a French-language learned society, which rankled some Francophones, the Flemish Royal Academy also came under attack from the Belgian Liberals as a little more than a collection of sinecures for loyal Flemish Catholics.¹²

In 1898, the Coremans-de Vriendt law, also known as the "Law of Equality," made Flemish an official language of Belgium, thus giving equal legal standing to Flemish and French texts of laws, requiring bilingual signage (at least in Flanders), and the like. This law in particular raised the ire of many members of the Walloon Movement, who saw it not only as a threat to their access to state employment, but also a symbolic attack on the French language which cheapened it by comparing it to Flemish. As Chantal Kesteloot notes, many of these men thought (or claimed to think that) "Flemish was not a language, but a dialect [*idiome*] of the same standing as Walloon. Thus, since they, Walloons, had abandoned their dialect[s], they asked the Flemings to do just as much."¹³ This reasoning was of course specious to a certain degree, for as Els Witte and Harry Van Velthoven argue, "In Wallonia, the move from the Walloon dialects to French as a related cultural language

¹¹ Jean Stengers and Éliane Gubin, *Le grand siècle de la nationalité belge, de 1830 à 1918* (Brussels: Éditions Racine, 2002), 89-101.

¹² Clough, 157-159.

¹³ Chantal Kesteloot, "Loi Coremans-de Vriendt (1898)," *Encyclopédie du Mouvement Wallon* (CD-ROM) (Charleroi, Belgium: Institut Jules Destrée, 2003) (hereafter *EMW*), notice no. 04219.

took place without much difficulty."¹⁴ Still, this kind of rhetoric, stressing the supremacy of French and the "illegitimacy" of Flemish would recur with regularity in the Walloon Movement before 1914.

The years 1885 and 1886 saw two important developments which would change the Belgian political scene: the foundation of the first durable Socialist party in Belgium, the Parti Ouvrier Belge [Belgian Workers' Party] in 1885, and the general strike (and subsequent state repression) of 1886. The Socialists were strong in both Wallonia's coal and metalworking regions as well as in the textile regions around Ghent in Flanders. Some of the great leaders of Belgian Socialism before World War I were Flemish, such as Edward Anseele and Camille Huysmans. However, as we will see, some Walloon Socialists began to conflate "Walloon" and "Socialist" in their rhetoric. This, despite the fact that the striking workers in Walloon mines and factories were often fed with bread baked by Flemish Socialist cooperative societies as a show of solidarity. The strike of 1886 has since been described as a potential catalyst for a generalized Walloon identity. This claim is doubtful at best. However, it did help bring the social question into relief in Belgian public discourse.¹⁵

In 1893, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Belgium was revised for the first time since its adoption in 1831. The most important change – what one Belgian political scientist of the time called "undoubtedly the most important event that has occurred in Belgium since [it] became an independent state," was the introduction of "plural" universal suffrage, in which the electorate, formerly restricted by property and income requirements, was expanded to include all Belgian adult men. This was *not*, however, the "pure and simple" universal suffrage that labor agitators and other progressives had envisioned. Instead, as the result of bargaining between Catholic and Liberal

¹⁴ Els Witte and Harry Van Velthoven, *Language and Politics: The Belgian Case Study in a Historical Perspective* (Brussels: VUB University Press, 1999), 104.

¹⁵ Deneckere, 53-70.

factions in the Belgian Parliament, the vote was "tempered" by according up to two "additional" votes to men who met certain property, income, family, or educational criteria.¹⁶

Despite the concession to conservative concerns in the form of the "plural" vote, this change would have far-reaching consequences. The electorate increased tenfold. The first elections under the new franchise returned a larger Catholic majority to Parliament, as well as an important Socialist minority, to the great detriment of the Liberals.¹⁷ This constitutional change also affected political campaigning. As Witte and Van Velthoven note, "in Flanders, hundreds of thousands of voters who did not speak French had the right to vote for the first time. This actually meant that the language of the people was recognized because henceforth it was the only language in which it was possible to make propaganda. Flemish newspapers and Flemish party activists became essential."¹⁸ The expansion of the monolingual Flemish electorate as well as the strengthening of the Catholic parliamentary majority would both heavily affect the Walloon Movement. Several years later, in 1899, the electoral system would again be changed. The first-past-the-post method of choosing members of Parliament gave way to proportional representation, which helped the Liberals and Socialists regain some seats in Flanders but on the whole reinforced the Catholic majority.¹⁹

In the decade preceding the German invasion, neutral Belgium felt the influence of international rivalries. Marie-Thérèse Bitsch has shown that Belgium was a sort of "battle ground" for France and Germany, as each state tried to woo Belgium to its point of view on world affairs. They did so not only through traditional diplomacy, but also through economic and cultural incentives, measures which today we might call "soft diplomacy." These intrigues would inform both the Walloon and Flemish Movements, as each on occasion saw the other as "conspiring" with

¹⁶ Maurice Vauthier, "The Revision of the Belgian Constitution in 1893," *Political Science Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (1894), 704-729.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 727n1.

¹⁸ Witte and Van Velthoven, 85.

¹⁹ Henk de Smaele, "Politiek als hanengevecht of cerebraal systeem: Ideeën over politieke representatie en de invoering van de evenredige vertegenwoordiging in België (1899)," *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 114, no. 3 (1999), 328-357; Lode Wils, *Histoire des nations belges: Belgique, Wallonie, Flandre: Quinze siècles de passé commun* (Brussels: Éditions Labor, 2005), 208.

their "racial brothers," though this was rarely the case.²⁰ Indeed, the German mission in Brussels, while it held a stereotypically binary view of progressive, gallophile Walloons and traditional, germanophile Flemings, specifically discouraged any "pan-German" agitation in Flanders on the part of German subjects, lest such activity endanger diplomatic relations with Belgium.²¹

In June of 1912, new Parliamentary elections were held in which the Liberal-Socialist electoral cartel hoped to unseat the Catholics who had been in power since 1884. Instead, the Catholics increased their majority. Louis Piérard, a young Socialist and anti-clerical from the outskirts of Mons in Wallonia and a member of Jules Destrée's Société des Amis de l'Art Wallon,²² wrote a brief on the "Political Crisis in Belgium" for *Le mouvement socialiste*, a Parisian journal, in which he attributed the "clerical" victory in part to election fraud by Catholic politicians and clergymen. While the Catholics were still entrenched in power and "Flanders became more clerical than ever," Piérard asserted that there was still hope: "Happily, there is more in Belgium than just Brussels, with its indifference, and Flanders with its fanatical clericalism. There are also those ardent industrial regions of Wallonia, which do not cease giving impressive majorities to anti-clericals, and where clerical influence is reduced to naught, so to speak."²³

Piérard's anger and his bombastic language are indicative of the rhetorical process which Yves Quairiaux has studied in Walloon representations of Flemings. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, many Walloons, in particular Socialists, came to see themselves as liberators of their "unfortunate Flemish brothers" who had been "submitted to the clerical yoke." Thus, Wallonia took on an enlightened, prosperous self-image, at the same time denigrating Flemish leadership. This vision, though, was not separatist; if anything it saw Walloons as the necessary saviors of

²⁰ Marie-Thérèse Bitsch, *La Belgique entre la France et l'Allemagne, 1905-1914* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1994).

²¹ José Gotovitch, "La légation d'Allemagne et le Mouvement Flamand entre 1867 et 1914," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 45, no. 2 (1967), 438-478.

²² Marinette Bruwier and Paul Delforge, "Louis Piérard," *EMW*, notice no. 05096.

²³ Louis Piérard, "La crise politique en Belgique," *Le mouvement socialiste* (September-October 1912), 165-175.

Flanders (and Belgium) from the obscurantist forces of clericalism.²⁴ The Catholic victory of 1912, seen as a product of Flemish predominance, would provide the impetus for Jules Destrée's "Lettre au Roi sur la séparation de la Wallonie et de la Flandre" which will be discussed below.

Pillarization and Ethnic Identity Formation

The bitterness surrounding the "school war" of 1879-1884, the political compromises necessary to reform the Constitution in 1893, and the almost belligerent language surrounding the election of 1912 all support the argument that Belgian society before 1914 underwent a process of "pillarization." This term, originally developed by social scientists attempting to explain "horizontal" divisions within Dutch society, refers to a situation in which political-religious groups each create their own, parallel civil societies – "pillars." These pillars would each organize their own newspapers, unions, credit associations, youth groups, sporting clubs, professional societies, charitable organizations, and the like. Pillars reproduced themselves not only through these organizations but also through unofficial preferences in consumption and hiring patterns.²⁵

In the Belgian case, pillars developed in Catholic, Liberal, and later Socialist circles. One should note that these pillars did not always correspond to *personal* religious belief; a good number of Liberal politicians in Belgium were practicing Catholics, for example, but did not support the Catholic political program.²⁶ Jean Stengers stresses the primacy of such political differences in Belgian public life as compared to other cleavages, including that of language. Accusations of godlessness or benighted clericalism were prominent in public discourse and were felt on an individual level. Stengers recounts the anecdote of an old Flemish colleague who, in the 1880s, was

²⁴ Yves Quairiaux, "Le stéréotype du Flamand en Wallonie: Explications économiques et sociales (1880-1940)," in *Stéréotypes nationaux et préjugés raciaux: aux XIXe et XXe siècles: Sources et méthodes pour un approche historique*, ed. Jean Pirotte (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium: Collège Érasme, Bureau de recueil, 1982), 140-142.

²⁵ Harry Post, *Pillarization: An Analysis of Dutch and Belgian Society* (Aldershot, United Kingdom et al.: Avebury, 1989), 1-2, 114-122.

²⁶ Paul Gérin, "À propos de la 'polarisation' en Wallonie," *Revue belge d'histoire contemporaine* 13, no. 1 (1982), 161-176.

obliged to go to a Liberal rather than a Catholic cobbler because of his position in the Liberal "pillar," despite the fact that the Liberal shoemaker's handiwork tended to hurt one's feet.²⁷

While this example is banal, there are other, much more striking instances of this divide which will appear in this analysis. The evidence presented here clearly shows that pillarization affected the linguistic debates in Belle Époque Belgium. While the Flemish Movement was often equated with the Catholic milieu (a gross overgeneralization), the Walloon Movement was seen – and usually saw itself – as allied with the Liberals and the Socialists. This operation of linking linguistic appurtenance and political position, this work argues, accounts for much of the sharp language employed by the Walloon Movement, as well as its patterns of recruitment. In the pithy words of the Flemish historian Lode Wils, "the ethnic opposition between Walloons and Flemings was born of an ideological opposition."²⁸

As might be expected, the intellectual realm did not escape this pillarization either. Paul Aron and Marnix Beyen argue in their survey of the history of intellectuals in Belgium that the pillarization of Belgian society meant that the Belgian state had to act as a "neutral" arbiter between these ideological formations and thus did not enjoy the same autonomy in regards to intellectual and cultural policy as, say, the French state. In the early days of the Belgian state, as Belgium's relations with its neighbors remained tense, Aron and Beyen claim that "intellectual elites had from the beginning been forced to invest a large part of their energy in legitimizing and defending Belgian nationality." As pillarization became more acute, Belgian intellectuals expressed their political views in national terms, with the Catholics claiming "ancient Belgian liberties" and downplaying any "Ultramontanism," while Liberals tried to distance Belgian liberals from the "excesses" of the French Revolution. As the nineteenth century wore on, Flemish and Walloon specificities also developed among certain intellectuals. Flemish intellectuals often appealed to local specificities to claim

²⁷ Stengers and Gubin, 75-87.

²⁸ Wils, *Histoire des nations belges*, 209.

"ancestral values against the modern and universalist ideas of the French Revolution." On the other hand, Walloon intellectuals, usually connected to the Left, "underlined Wallonia's belonging to Latinity and, therefore, to the modern world," though they almost never wanted Wallonia to become purely and simply become part of French culture; they instead "called on regional specificities (of historic, linguistic, artistic, or folkloric nature) to demarcate Wallonia from France without... detaching it from Latinity."²⁹

Local historical societies played an important role during these decades, complementing academic history in the creation and transmission of historical knowledge, and these too were riven by ideological divides. Paul Gérin shows that larger towns and cities in Belgium, such as Liège, might have "competing" Catholic, Liberal, and occasionally Protestant antiquarian and "bibliophile" groups. These organizations, which by requiring annual dues and/or sponsorship from current members as a condition of adherence excluded most of the laboring and agricultural classes,³⁰ played a role in promoting specifically "Walloon" patrimony as will be seen in Chapter 3. Thus, the fact that they often had ideological overtones becomes important in understanding the linkage between certain pillars of Belgian society and the Walloon Movement.

The Walloon Movement: An Affair of Ambitious Elites

In the present, when Wallonia suffers from severe hardship while Flanders booms, many politically-engaged Walloons use the theme of economic disparity as a mobilizing tactic. In the Belle Époque period, though, large-scale economic concerns rarely entered into the Walloon Movement's discourse, with the exception of debate on the rerouting of international trains away from Wallonia,

²⁹ Paul Aron and Marnix Beyen, "L'histoire des intellectuels en Belgique: Specificités locales et actualité de la recherche," in *L'histoire des intellectuels aujourd'hui*, ed. Michel Leymarie and Jean-François Sirinelli (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2003), 411-415, 421.

³⁰ Paul Gérin, "La condition de l'historien et l'histoire nationale en Belgique à la fin du 19^e et au début du 20^e siècle," *Storia della Storiografia* 11 (1987), 82-85.

a move which was seen as potentially harmful to the heavy industry and commerce of the Walloon regions.³¹ The strikes of 1886 which affected much of the coal and steel regions of Wallonia did lead to an upsurge in socialist activity in the southern part of Belgium. This has led Marinette Bruwier to claim that while there were still divisions in Wallonia between workers, the bourgeoisie, and the countryside, the strikes led to "a unity of formation in working-class Wallonia in the Belgian context of the POB [Parti Ouvrier Belge], while [Flemish] cooperatives reinforced particularism."³² On the other hand, Carl Strikwerda argues that in Wallonia, especially in the area around Liège, the "*esprit de clocher*" (parochialism) actually led to a bevy of local cooperatives which rarely coalesced into any kind of larger organization or consciousness.³³ Whether or not the economic upheavals of the late nineteenth-century did lead to the formation of a *popular* Walloon consciousness, the fact remains that the organized political movements which made claims based on some sort of "Walloon" nature were almost exclusively drawn from the ranks of the well-educated bourgeoisie.

In 1899, *L'Âme wallonne*, published by the Ligue Wallonne de Liège, ran a short news-in-brief item concerning a doctoral dissertation recently defended at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. The dissertation, a treatise on Flemish poetry, was written in and was to be defended in Flemish, which led the paper to remark that "the *flamingants*... are already bathing in the sweetest jubilation."³⁴ As Sophie de Schaepdrijver notes, on the eve of World War I (1910), many Belgians did not finish primary schooling and in Wallonia, 224 out of 1000 people could not read or write.³⁵ In this context, the language in which an academic thesis is written, as well as the debate over the language

³¹ Paul Delforge, "Transport ferroviaire," *EMW*, notice no. 00074.

³² Marinette Bruwier, "1886 en Wallonie," in *1886: La Wallonie née de la grève?*, ed. Marinette Bruwier *et al.* (Brussels: Éditions Labor, 1990), 105, 114.

³³ Carl Strikwerda, *A House Divided: Catholics, Socialists, and Flemish Nationalists in Nineteenth-Century Belgium* (Lanham, MD *et al.*: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 178-179.

³⁴ "Une thèse flamande à l'Université de Bruxelles," *L'Âme wallonne* (3 June 1899), col. 358.

³⁵ Sophie de Schaepdrijver, *La Belgique et la Première Guerre Mondiale* (Brussels *et al.*: Peter Lang, 2004), 33.

of instruction at the University of Ghent in Flanders,³⁶ another issue dear to the Walloon Movement, both seem unlikely to have inflamed the passions of the working classes in Belgium, who did not even receive the franchise, and then only in a limited fashion, until 1893.

In his groundbreaking study of the relationship between modernization and identity-(re)formation in pre-World War I Belgium, Aristide Zolberg characterizes the Flemish movement of the time as dedicated to a generally bilingual Belgium. This vision was in no way anti-Belgian, or "chauvinistic" vis-à-vis Flanders, but it would have an impact on the unquestioned supremacy of French in Belgian public life. This view of Belgium (or at least Flanders and Brussels) as generally bilingual "did not challenge the notion that Flemish speakers must become bilingual in order to enter public life; but policies founded on it would have as their effect a less one-sided distribution of the costs... of membership in the Belgian state by shifting part of the burdens of bilingualism to the hitherto exclusively French-speaking officials." This engendered resistance among French-speakers, argues Zolberg, as "official bilingualism... imposed new costs on them and reduced the value of their hitherto costless membership in the dominant cultural group."³⁷

Therefore, it is not surprising that numerous studies of the Walloon Movement have shown that the first groups who were politically engaged *qua* Walloons took shape in Brussels, and to a lesser extent in French-speaking pockets in Flanders, during the 1880s. Brussels was historically a Flemish city; as the capital of independent Belgium it attracted political, economic, and cultural elites from throughout Belgium who tended to be French-speaking, at least in their public affairs. The combination of relocated Walloons, Frenchified Flemings, the local Flemish population, as well as Flemish migrants and commuters gave Brussels a unique linguistic makeup: while at least forty

³⁶ See Marie Bourke, "The Flemish University Question and the Development of a Modern Dutch-Language Culture in Belgium, 1890-1914" (DPhil dissertation, Oxford University, 1989), esp. 92-103; Alain Colignon, "Flamandisation de l'Université de Gand," *EMW*, notice no. 02431.

³⁷ Aristide R. Zolberg, "The Making of Flemings and Walloons: Belgium, 1830-1914," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5, no. 2 (1974), 206, 231.

percent of the Brussels population spoke only Flemish before 1910, Brussels was also the Belgian city with the largest number of Francophones, far surpassing second-place Liège. This combination made Brussels a key reference point for both French- and Flemish-speakers in Belgium. Some ambitious monolingual French-speakers felt threatened by the *de facto* bilingualism of the city, as they feared that they would be required to know Flemish if they sought state employment in the city.³⁸

As Astrid Von Busekist notes in her study of language policy in Belgium, "it was... the status of functionaries in Brussels, as well as the Francophone minority in Flanders, from now on constrained [*sic*] to bilingualism, that the first *wallingants* wanted to protect."³⁹

Jeannine Lothe's brief overview of the early Walloon Movement also lists "the immigration of numerous Walloons to the capital, the important place they had acquired in the already-Francophone administration, and the prospect of bilingualism, more directly felt in Brussels than in Wallonia" as the reasons why the first politicized Walloon Movements started in Brussels, not Wallonia itself. The first small Walloon meetings during the period 1890-1893, Lothe stresses, restrained their priorities to the protection of governmental careers for monolingual French-speakers and the repeal of certain language legislation. These meetings were in no way radical: "During these Congresses, attachment to the unitary Belgian state was reaffirmed every time, with, as a corollary, the maintenance of the French language as the only official language. It was never a question of separatism, federalism, or even regional autonomy."⁴⁰

In her discussion of the short-lived Standing Committee of these Walloon Congresses (1890-1893), Corinne Godefroid notes that the majority of active members came from societies based in Brussels or in Flanders, worried about maintaining their (privileged) position as French-speakers in bilingual areas. This imbalance meant that representatives from organizations (mostly folklore and

³⁸ Strikwerda, 38, 57-58.

³⁹ Astrid Von Busekist, *La Belgique: Politique des langues et construction de l'État, de 1780 à nos jours* (Paris: Duculot, 1998), 219.

⁴⁰ Jeannine Lothe, "Les débuts du mouvement wallon," in *La Wallonie: Le pays et les hommes* (Brussels: La Renaissance du livre, 1977-1979), 2:192-193.

literature societies) based in Wallonia itself had a hard time making their voices heard. The tone of the Standing Committee was overwhelmingly Belgian. Godefroid asks: "Could such lukewarm Congresses, where the defense of the Belgium of 1830 rendered any sympathy towards France suspect... really mobilize... defenders of Walloon particularism?" Indeed, in propositions which would become more and more anathema in the following years, the Standing Committee made several inquiries into finding efficient ways of learning Dutch so that French-speakers could remain competitive throughout Belgium. Some Liégeois members of this Committee, such as Julien Delaite and Maurice Wilmotte, looked askance at the thought of "introducing" Flemish into the Walloon provinces.⁴¹

The fact that the Walloon Movement began outside of "Wallonia proper" and consisted largely of state employees worried about keeping their positions led Lode Wils to suggest a rather controversial parallel between the Walloon Movement in Flanders and the German *Ostmark* Movement in Prussian Poland. Wils claims that, like German state employees in Polish lands, Francophone bureaucrats in Flanders accepted "equality" for the language of the region only so far as did not "close [them] off... to public offices." As the German *Ostmark* movement was a product of German civil servants in Polish lands, so did the Walloon Movement begin among state bureaucrats in Brussels and the "colonized region" of Flanders, not in Wallonia itself. Thus, both movements were not really centered on the defense of threatened rights so much as they were organs of a "colonizing" power that felt its dominance threatened. Only such an attitude, Wils asserts, could lead to the Walloon Jules Destrée's haughty complaint against the "*flamingants*" (discussed in Chapter 5): "They have taken Flanders from us."⁴²

⁴¹ Corinne Godefroid, "Un premier 'exécutif' du Mouvement wallon: Le Comité permanent des Congrès wallons (1890-1893)," in *Studium et museum: Mélanges Édouard Remouchamps* (Liège, Belgium: Éditions du Musée de la Vie Wallonne, 1996), 2:696, 699, 706.

⁴² Lode Wils, "Een historische parallel: Duits-Poolse en Waals-Vlaamse verhoudingen," in *Huldeboek André Demedts* (Kortrijk, Belgium: Davidsfonds, 1977), 137-145.

Wils is justified in noting the rhetorical similarities between the Walloon and German *Ostmark* movements.⁴³ However, his characterization of Francophone presence in Flanders as "colonization" is intemperate and misleading at best. Many of the upper class in Flanders had used French for centuries before the formation of the state of Belgium in 1830. Career pilgrimages (to borrow Benedict Anderson's terminology⁴⁴) for educated Belgians from both the Francophone and Flemish linguistic communities frequently included stints in both Flanders and Wallonia. One could just as easily invert Wils's argument to claim – as did some Walloons, facetiously or not⁴⁵ – that there was a Flemish "colonization" of Wallonia, evinced through the presence of Flemish workers in Walloon mines, Flemish parliamentarians representing Walloon districts, such as the Socialist Senator for Liège, Edward Anseele of Ghent, and the appointment of a Flemish bishop of Liège in 1902, Martin-Hubert Rutten.

Perhaps a much more fitting parallel could be found in the Habsburg Empire of the late nineteenth century, notably the Czech lands. Here, German had gained a place in local society over the course of several centuries, as French had in Flanders. Likewise, as Francophone public employees in Belgium worried that bilingualism requirements would limit their job opportunities, so did German-speaking bureaucrats in the Czech lands react with indignation over measures that would require them to know Czech or which would turn German-language universities into Czech-language institutions.⁴⁶

John Hutchinson has argued that Irish cultural and political nationalism around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century can partly be explained by the reaction of Irish elites to

⁴³ See Richard Wonsler Tims, *Germanizing Prussian Poland: The H-K-T Society and the Struggle for the Eastern Marches in the German Empire, 1894-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 133-150.

⁴⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 47-65.

⁴⁵ Yves Quairiaux, *L'image du Flamand en Wallonie (1830-1914): Essai d'analyse sociale et politique* (Brussels: Éditions Labor, 2006), 123-209.

⁴⁶ See Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002); Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2006).

"blocked mobility," as they felt that their talents and ambitions could not properly flourish in a British framework. Hutchinson argues that in terms of identity concerns, perception often shapes reality. Whether or not a group is "really" experiencing discrimination, he suggests, "all that is required for the potential nationalization of the intelligentsia is the *belief* that one's community is being disadvantaged, together with a *genuine shortage of opportunities*, for whatever reason." In the Irish case, Hutchinson locates the "genuine shortage of opportunities" in the overproduction of university graduates in the late nineteenth century, the so-called "plague of BAs."⁴⁷ Can this argument shed some light on the Walloon case? Could a lack of opportunities combined with a perceived linguistic and/or ideological bias against monolingual, "progressive" French-speakers help account for the development of Walloon identity?

In his examination of Belgian literary modernity, Québécois literary scholar Michel Biron attributes the rise of an independent literary field in Belgium during the 1880s partly to a surplus of university-trained men, some of whom "had to envision a career unrelated to their education, notably in cultural and political movements" which were critical of existing political institutions. These men were sometimes resentful at a society which had not "kept its promises" and often supported progressive political movements.⁴⁸ Andrew Jackson Mathews also describes the contributors to *La Wallonie*, the first major Walloon regionalist literary journal, as frustrated bourgeois:

From 1880 to 1890 a whole generation of young bourgeois, at the beginning of their careers, found the social order in which they were bred involved in a rapid decline of power. Their livelihood was not immediately threatened. ... The decline took place more on political and ideological levels... the bourgeois right to govern simply no longer seemed "divine." The supporting faith in bourgeois institutions suddenly dissolved. After 1880, a generation of young men found themselves belonging to a

⁴⁷ John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation-State* (London and Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 267, 271. Emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Michel Biron, *La modernité belge: Littérature et société* (Brussels: Éditions Labor; Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1994), 63.

class and taking economic support from a system for which they had only contempt.⁴⁹

This development would seem to go hand-in-hand with the "exclusion" of monolingual French-speakers from bilingual employment, and, as will be seen below, the difficulty of these men – often Liberal or Socialist – to find employment in the post-1884 Catholic government.

Maurice Wilmotte provides an excellent case in point for many of the ideological and professional tensions which animated the Walloon Movement before World War I. The Dutch historian E. H. Kossmann describes Wilmotte as "the founder of Romanist philology in Belgium and... a warm friend of the Symbolists. His publications are distinguished by their light elegance and fine scepticism but at the same time by a near-total lack of knowledge and understanding for all non-French culture. This has often led him to write surprising nonsense."⁵⁰ Wilmotte came from a background which he described as one of "old-fashioned liberalism, conservative and routine." He disliked Christian Democracy as represented by his former teacher Godefroid Kurth and Adolf Daens, the Flemish priest who preached social justice for the working-class. He also distrusted radical liberalism and socialism with its "violent" rhetoric, though friends of his and fellow members of the Walloon Movement, most notably Jules Destrée, became involved with the Socialists.⁵¹

Wilmotte studied with the historian Godefroid Kurth (mentioned in the introduction) at the University of Liège in the 1880s. In his memoirs, written during World War II, he remembered Kurth as an excellent teacher, though his "political celebrity [as a prominent Catholic and Christian Democrat] damaged his reputation as a scholar." Indeed, while Wilmotte kept socialism at arm's length, he was also a devoted anti-clerical, which led him to very publicly break with Kurth.

According to Wilmotte, Kurth's "sectarianism (of which I was the victim) was ingenious and

⁴⁹ Andrew Jackson Mathews, *La Wallonie, 1886-1892: The Symbolist Movement in Belgium* (Morningside Heights, NY: King's Crown Press, 1947), 11.

⁵⁰ E. H. Kossmann, *The Low Countries, 1780-1940* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 1978), 483n2.

⁵¹ Maurice Wilmotte, *Mes mémoires* (Brussels: La Renaissance du livre, 1948), 139-152.

vehement..." Wilmotte goes on to recount that the nomination of professors in pre-World War I Belgium was a highly politicized affair, "each party wanting to impose its own creations" to faculty positions "like the prebends of the *Ancien Régime*." This caused the anti-clerical Liberal Wilmotte some trouble in gaining an academic post. Wilmotte claimed that at one point a Liberal Senator who had argued with the Catholic government to win Wilmotte a teaching position was told "we cannot entrust this course to a man who will praise Voltaire and condemn [seventeenth-century Catholic orator Jacques-Bénigne] Bossuet!"⁵² Here one can see the way in which ideological differences – "pillarization" – could obstruct the career aspirations of a well-educated, ambitious man such as Wilmotte.

In his later years, Wilmotte seemed to denigrate Kurth by reference to the latter's lack of "Frenchness." He characterized Kurth as "born in a frontier town [in Belgian Luxembourg] whose patois is Germanic," intelligent but not eloquent, adding that "he had kept... a guttural accent which harmed his [French] diction."⁵³ Here again Wilmotte seemed to be excluding Kurth from fully participating in the prestige of French culture. Wilmotte, like many other members of the Walloon Movement, began to link the ideological differences such as those which interfered with his career advancement to "ethnic" or linguistic differences. As seen above, Wilmotte would frequently link his critique of Kurth's Christian Democratic and "*flamingant*" sympathies to his "Germanic" background. This process reflects Aristide Zolberg's description of the way in which linguistic issues in Belgium intensified from their origins as the concerns of upwardly-(im)mobile individuals: "justice for the culture becomes a goal valued in itself, quite independently of the instrumental concerns related to the upward mobility of individuals that usually gave rise to the issue in the first place."⁵⁴

⁵² *Ibid.*, 24-26, 32-33.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁵⁴ Zolberg, 233.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the early Walloon Movement was as "above all the business of lawyers, engineers, civil servants, white-collar workers, artists, and representatives of the tertiary sector, for whom the French language was a means of social promotion and a status symbol."⁵⁵ The prevalence of worries over civil service shows itself in a short piece in *L'Âme Wallonne*, a self-described "journal of Walloon defense," which claims that "it is not the defense of the French language that we preach, but **the defense of the interests and rights of the Walloons**... under the guise of Flemish intrigues **there** [would be]... **almost no more public employment or office for Walloons**, and is it against that which we wish that [Walloons] fight."⁵⁶ Still, while *L'Âme Wallonne* claimed that its involvement in the Walloon Movement was not necessarily about the French language, the analysis presented here will show to what extent the prestige of *francité* – and indeed, prestige *tout court* – played a large part in motivating the political engagement of many Walloons.

The political Walloon Movement before World War I was never a mass movement. The membership figures for the various groups of "Walloon Defense" founded during these decades demonstrate the extent of their appeal. We must keep in mind that, as with most formal organizations, the numbers for these institutions likely include a fair amount of non-active members, and that rosters of these groups tended to overlap heavily with one another. In Brussels, this latter phenomenon was pronounced, leading to the creation of the Ligue Wallonne du Brabant as an umbrella for the various Walloon circles in the capital. This organization, however, was rather disorganized and its "'federative" mission poorly carried out. Most of the members of the steering

⁵⁵ Deneckere, 182.

⁵⁶ "Distinguons," *L'Âme wallonne* (11 March 1899), col. 147.

committee of this group, such as Hector Chainaye, came from the Ligue Wallonne de Bruxelles, with other Brussels organizations poorly represented.⁵⁷

In 1910, Chainaye, with the support of the Ligue Wallonne du Brabant ran at the head of the first specifically Walloon electoral list, the "Liste Wallonne Bruxelloise Anti-Flamingante," which campaigned on a list of demands which were common in the Walloon Movement: freedom for the head of the household to choose the language in which his children will be schooled, a minimum of linguistic requirements for state employees, and the defense of the interests of small business-owners, state employees, and the petty bourgeoisie. Chainaye and the Ligue Wallonne du Brabant received harsh criticism from the Liberal party, who saw this list as egotistical, misguided, and potentially "spoiling" the chances of the opposition to the benefit of the Catholic majority. In the 22 May 1910 elections, this list received a paltry 4,148 votes.⁵⁸

Besides Brussels, Liège was the main center of Walloon organizational activity. The Ligue Wallonne de Liège (1897-1919) was largely responsible for the Congrès Wallons of 1905 and 1912 in the city, as well as the creation of the Assemblée Wallonne after the latter Congress, which was envisioned as a sort of Walloon shadow parliament. The membership of the Ligue Wallonne de Liège fluctuated between two hundred and one thousand during its existence; in 1902 it counted seven hundred members. The Assemblée Wallonne, on the other hand, was never meant to be a mass organization, as shown by its "parliamentary" structure. The original plan for the Assemblée called for one member per 40,000 inhabitants of Wallonia to be chosen from various local Walloon organizations; these members were soon joined by men representing Brussels. The Assemblée debated resolutions considering various legal and cultural issues which were seen to affect "Walloon" life, though tending towards concerns of the educated elite. It also published a monthly

⁵⁷ Chantal Kesteloot, "Ligue Wallonne du Brabant (1905)," *EMW*, notice no. 04183; Chantal Kesteloot, "Ligue Wallonne de Bruxelles (1900)," *EMW*, notice no. 04086.

⁵⁸ Philippe Carlier, "Hector Chainaye," *EMW*, notice no. 00945; Chantal Kesteloot, "Ligue Wallonne d'Ixelles (1887)," *EMW*, notice no. 04180.

digest of its discussions, *La Défense wallonne*. Some Walloons, such as Jules Destrée, attached great importance to the Assemblée; most viewed it with bemusement or indifference. As some historians have noted, "Catholics were conspicuous by their absence" in this "mini-parliament."⁵⁹ The religious and ideological make-up of the Assemblée and other Walloon activist organizations will be discussed in greater detail below.

Ria Van Alboom, in her study of Walloon organizations based in Brussels before the First World War, analyzes the occupations of 495 (male) members of these groups for whom she could find relevant data. Her results break down as follows:

Liberal Professions (engineers, lawyers, physicians, etc.): 24.44%
Artistic Professions (painters, writers, musicians, etc.): 18.79%
Public Sector Employees (employed by a government ministry): 12.73%
Industrialists (ownership and management): 9.09%
Small Business Owners: 8.89%
Politicians (holding elected office): 6.06%
Higher Education (professors, school inspectors, university students, etc.): 4.85%
Military: 4.65%
Press: 4.24%
Non-Employed (rentiers, titled aristocracy): 4.24%
Service Sector (banking and insurance): 1.82%
Religious [*Geestelijke*]: 0.20% (one individual).⁶⁰

Van Alboom's figures show the overwhelmingly upper-middle-class nature of the Walloon Movement during this time period. These were men who made a living using their intellect, though not always "intellectuals" in the strict sense of the term. The absence of manual laborers and agricultural workers is total. While the latter can be explained away, as these figures only deal with the city of Brussels, it is still telling that there are no manual laborers in these organizations. Also telling is the quasi-absence of clergy in these groups. While the Flemish Movement before World War I could boast of several prominent clergy such as poet Guido Gezelle and the aforementioned

⁵⁹ Philippe Carlier and Paul Delforge, "Ligue Wallonne de Liège (1897)," *EMW*, notice no. 04122; Paul Delforge and Sophie Jaminon, "Assemblée Wallonne (1912)," *EMW*, notice no. 00140.

⁶⁰ Ria Van Alboom, "Aspecten van de Waalse Beweging te Brussel (1877-1914)," *Taal en Sociale Integratie* 6 (1982), 44-45.

priest Adolf Daens, as well as support from local parish priests, no such figures could be found in the Walloon Movement of this time period. Why not?

The Walloon Movement: Catholics Need Not Apply

The answer lies in the linkage between the Walloon Movement and a certain ideological point of view. The Flemish Movement, though stereotyped by many members of the Walloon Movement as a wholly reactionary, clerical organization, was able to bring together members from the three major political currents in Belgium, as symbolized by the "Three Crowing Roosters" who united in Parliament to represent Flemish concerns during the early 1910s: Camille Huysmans, the Socialist, Louis Franck, the Liberal, and Frans van Cauwelaert, the Catholic.⁶¹ The Walloon Movement remained almost wholly Liberal in its original form, with a handful of Socialists such as Destrée adhering as well.⁶²

Given the animus which men like Destrée and Wilmotte demonstrated to Catholic principles and the Catholic government which ruled Belgium from 1884 onward, it is not surprising that with a few exceptions, Catholics – and certainly clergy – did not feel welcome in the Walloon Movement. Élie Baussart, a young Catholic who would become an important member of the Walloon Movement after World War I, wrote a short piece on the eve of the war about "Catholics and the Walloon Movement." Baussart notes that "on the whole, Catholics have withheld their cooperation from the emerging [Walloon] organizations." Many Catholic Walloons, Baussart claims, have rejoiced in the efforts of the small group of Walloon activists who have tried to "recover" the history of Wallonia and "repatriate" artists whom the Flemings have supposedly claimed as their own. The artistic efforts of the Walloon Movement, Baussart argues, have nourished "our love of the soil" and

⁶¹ Cf. Lode Wils, "Beproefde samenwerking: Katholieken en vrijzinnigen in de Vlaamse Beweging, 1860-1914," *Wetenschappelijke Tijdingen* 58, no. 3 (1999), 155-189.

⁶² Lothe, 206-207.

"the soul of the race." Baussart also lauds the Walloon Movement's attempt to prevent the "Germanizing" of the University of Ghent, this "danger... for Roman culture in Belgium."⁶³

However, Baussart continues, Walloon Catholics have for the most part declined to join the political wing of the Walloon Movement. It is difficult for "Catholics who would like to participate in the anti-*flamingant* movement" to join, as this "movement, from the anti-*flamingant* one that it was at the beginning, has become, for many, anti-government." On the other side of the equation, Baussart accuses many members of the Walloon Movement of reluctance to dissociate Anti-*flamingant* and anti-clerical sentiments, preferring instead to use the Walloon Movement to pursue their party-related goals as well. Indeed, says Baussart, the recently-created Assemblée Wallonne "is almost exclusively composed of anti-clerical activists" creating "an atmosphere which is no longer tolerable for Catholics. Jules Destrée will not contradict me." Still, Baussart hopes that Walloon Catholics and the then anti-clerical Walloon Movement can come to an understanding, as "the grievances of the Walloons are serious" and the rectification of the state which "considerably menaces them" is a necessity.⁶⁴

Baussart's piece is relevant for the way it illustrates the role of ideological battles in forming Walloon identity. Read together with Piérard's account of the 1912 Parliamentary elections, we can see that the "official" Walloon Movement more often than not married its defense of Walloon patrimony, the superiority of French as a vehicular language, and the unity of the Belgian state with a decidedly "progressive" and anti-clerical agenda. Concerns of political pride became attached to concerns of cultural pride. Let us now turn to the artistic and historical "awakening" of Wallonia to which Baussart alluded.

⁶³ Élie Baussart, "La question wallonne et les Catholiques," *La Belgique artistique et littéraire* (March 1914), 353-363.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 3 WALLOON PRIDE

The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed a flowering of interest in local art, folklore, literature, and history across Europe. The importance of such "purely" folkloric or philological interests to the development of political regionalism should not be underestimated. As early as 1916, the American scholar Carl Buck, summarizing the conflicts of nationality which led to World War I, claimed that "several of the nineteenth-century revivals had their beginnings in the field of language and literature... Even the dry-as-dust philologist, all innocent of political interest, has in more than one instance contributed to this end."¹ In Czech historian Miroslav Hroch's typology of the "national revival" of "small" European nations, "the beginning of every national revival is marked by a passionate concern on the part of a group of individuals, usually intellectuals, for the study of the language, the culture, the history of the oppressed nationality. These individuals remained without any widespread social influence, and they usually did not even attempt to mount a patriotic agitation." Instead, "their interest was motivated by... an active affection for the region in which they lived, associated with a thirst for knowledge of every new and insufficiently investigated phenomenon."² The same may even be said regarding some of the later Walloon literary societies. Even though her study of eight Walloon literary reviews between 1890 and 1914 "shows that they participated in their own manner to the flowering of a Walloon sentiment," Anne-Eloïse Bossens argues that that "was not their primary goal. The original objective of these reviews was to be the receptacle for contemporary literature."³

¹ Carl Darling Buck, "Language and the Sentiment of Nationality," *American Political Science Review* 10, no. 1 (1916), 49.

² Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 22-23.

³ Anne-Eloïse Bossens, "Littérature et combat régionaliste: L'apport d'écrivains d'expression française au Mouvement Wallon, 1884-1914" (Licentiate thesis, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1998), 98.

Such interpretations of "purely" folkloric regionalist groups can be misleading, however. As Greet Draye has said of such societies in Flanders, "their research into the roots of their language" provided "sources of the fatherland": "With their research, they incited historians towards national historiography. They gave inspiration to writers for national historical novels, to painters for national historical tableaux, and to politicians for national cultural policy."⁴

As shown below, the first Walloon philological societies may not have seen themselves as political in the traditional sense, but their discussions of regional history and culture helped create a language of regional pride which could then be used in the political arena. Indeed, in this time period, simmering political rivalries could appropriate "popular" culture as a terrain of debate, as James Wilkinson has shown in the case of Alsace.⁵

Maiken Umbach has advanced the notion that regional identities combined "ethnic" notions of common descent with a reference to a "civic" tradition of local patriotism, citing the examples of Hamburg in Germany and Florence and Venice in Italy, among others.⁶ The old Episcopal Principality of Liège often played this role for the Walloon Movement, to the extent that some members of the Walloon Movement accused the Liégeois of "chauvinism," setting themselves above the rest of Wallonia.⁷ This entity, which under the *Ancien Régime* was not part of the hereditary lands of the Austrian Habsburgs as was the rest of what was to become Belgium, but instead an independent state under the Holy Roman Empire, was somewhat larger than the current Belgian province of Liège and was a bilingual polity, as it included much of what is today Belgian Limburg in

⁴ Greet Draye, "Laboratoria van de Natie: Nederlandstalige literaire genootschappen in Vlaanderen over politiek, literatuur en identiteit, 1830-1914" (Doctoral dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven, 2007), 14-15.

⁵ James Wilkinson, "The Uses of Popular Culture by Rival Elites: The Case of Alsace, 1890-1914," *History of European Ideas* 11 (1989), 605-618.

⁶ Maiken Umbach, "Nation and Region: Regionalism in Modern European Nation-States," in *What Is a Nation? Europe, 1789-1914*, ed. Timothy Baycroft and Mark Hewitson (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2006), 65-66, 70.

⁷ Cf. Yves Moreau, "La genèse du drapeau wallon," *Enquêtes du Musée de la Vie Wallonne* nos. 185-188 (1987), 140, 146-147.

Flanders.⁸ Liège, nicknamed "la cité ardente" after the 1905 historical novel of the same name by the Catholic Walloon politician and future Belgian Prime Minister (1920-1921), Henry Carton de Wiart, embodied the so-called "spirit of the principality [*esprit principautaire*]." This attitude was held to represent defiance to unjust authority, a healthy skepticism to received ideas, and openness to the Enlightenment emanating from France.⁹ Such an image of Liège – and by synecdoche, all of Wallonia – was easily contrasted with a subservient, clerical, lethargic Flanders in the context of linguistic and political debates. This use of regional identity to further national-level goals was not uncommon, as the rest of this chapter will show. These examples bolster Umbach's argument that regionalism "is best thought of not as a political force, but as a political *idiom*."¹⁰

Folkloric, Dialectal, and "Regional" Concerns

In his discussion of literary trends in nineteenth-century Belgium, Henri Pirenne notes of writers from the *Jeune Belgique* school that "even those who were of Walloon origin and took their subjects from popular life carefully avoided letting themselves be influenced by the Walloon dialect." Still, he notes, this demotic speech was still the language of daily life in many places in southern Belgium, though the progress of industry and modernization were pushing it back. This development and the concomitant fear of "losing" the dialect led to the foundation of the Société Liégeoise de Littérature Wallonne (SLLW) in 1856. "Never before," Pirenne affirms, "had one published so much in Walloon." Soon, "philological research would... go hand-in-hand with the development of a flavorful dialectal literature, and all of this would assure the future of romanism in

⁸ Jean Stengers, "Depuis quand les Liégeois sont-ils des Wallons?" in *Hommages à la Wallonie: Mélanges d'histoire, de littérature et de philologie wallonnes offerts à Maurice A. Arnould et Pierre Ruelle*, ed. Hervé Hasquin (Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1981), 431-447.

⁹ On the idea of the "*esprit principautaire*," see Philippe Raxhon, "Esprit principautaire, es-tu là?" *Cahiers marxistes* 190 (1993), 7-11.

¹⁰ Umbach, 80. Emphasis added.

this Belgium which [was] the northernmost stronghold of it in Europe."¹¹ Michel Biron does note that the *Jeune Belgique* writer Georges Eekhoud heralded the work of Camille Lemonnier, son of a Flemish mother and a Walloon, who in his realist novel *Happe-chair* took care to pepper his characters' dialogue with Walloon and Picard to add an air of "authenticity."¹² This fascination on the part of authors such as Lemonnier for patois is not necessarily a form of "regionalist" literature on the level of, say, the *Félibres* in Provence – indeed, such a label might have been repugnant to such "serious" authors. However, the "authenticity" such dialogue was thought to bring helped add to the "realism" and thus "prestige" of the author's work.

Indeed, neither the "hints" of regional vernacular in the work of more "cosmopolitan" authors such as Lemonnier, nor the paeans to rural Wallonia in French or Walloon on the part of "regionalist" authors should be construed as separatist in the least. As Jeannine Lothe notes, some of the first Walloon regionalist literary circles, such as the SLLW "never had any political activity... Walloon 'linguistic patriotism' was inscribed in the same context as that of a general regionalist movement of folklore and literature [such as] the Provençal Félibrige..."¹³ Élisée Legros argues that the SLLW's patriotism was "Belgian and Liégeois at the same time." The Society was founded in 1856 to coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary of Leopold I's accession to the Belgian throne, while also celebrating the "*esprit principautaire*," the supposedly anti-authoritarian and carefree nature of the descendants of inhabitants of the independent Episcopal Principality of Liège. The SLLW did not want to "dethrone French to the benefit of Walloon," neither did it have explicitly political separatist or *rattachiste* sympathies. While these partisans of the Walloon dialect "freely supported

¹¹ Henri Pirenne, *Histoire de Belgique* (Brussels: Maurice Lamertin, 1932), 7:262-263.

¹² Michel Biron, *La modernité belge: Littérature et société* (Brussels: Labor; Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1994), 97-98.

¹³ Jeannine Lothe, "Les débuts du mouvement wallon," in *La Wallonie: Le pays et les hommes* (Brussels: La Renaissance du livre, 1977-1979), 2:191.

French ideas of liberty, they did not feel drawn to the French state at all," fearing the annexationist regime of Napoleon III.¹⁴

In regards to the Walloon language itself, some Walloons wished to see it given more favor in schooling – without, of course, challenging the primacy of French. For example, philologist and Walloon activist Jules Ferrer, best known today as creator of the standardized orthography for Walloon, advocated in the early 1900s the use of Walloon in tandem with French in primary schools throughout Wallonia. In this way, he argued, Walloon schoolchildren would not be ashamed of their heritage, and so would not defensively recoil against the usage of French as an alien imposition. Ferrer also argued that in higher stages of schooling, Walloon and French could be used in Latin classes as examples of differing linguistic developments from the same source tongue.¹⁵ Here, the use of Walloon is not an end in and of itself, but rather a pedagogical tool for the teaching of French and comparative philology.

Though at no point since Belgian independence in 1830 to the present have Walloon intellectuals (seriously) sought official status for the Walloon language, some still took offense to perceived "slights" against it, occasionally to the point of denouncing other Walloons whom they judged too dismissive of it. Célestin Demblon, for example, was a prominent member of the POB from the Liège region who wrote several collections of poetry and prose in Walloon dialect, contributed French-language pieces to several Walloon literary journals such as Albert Mockel's *La Wallonie*, and was one of the first Socialists elected to the lower chamber of the Belgian Parliament under the institution of plural universal suffrage of 1893. In the spirit of internationalism, he supported many of the linguistic demands of the Flemish Movement, notably the conversion of the

¹⁴ Élisée Legros, "La fondation de la 'Société liégeoise de littérature wallonne' et le rôle de celle-ci de 1856 à 1897," *Orbis: Bulletin international de documentation linguistique* 7, no. 1 (1958), 223-227; Arnaud Pirotte, "Société Liégeoise de Littérature Wallonne," *Encyclopédie du Mouvement Wallon* (CD-ROM) (Charleroi, Belgium: Institut Jules Destrée, 2003) (hereafter *EMW*), notice no. 05757. On the rumors of Napoleon III's designs on Belgium, see Patrice Baubeau, "Les rumeurs d'annexion de la Belgique à la France, de la II^e République à Sedan," in *France-Belgique, 1848-1914: Affinités-ambiguïtés*, ed. Marc Quaghebeur and Nicole Savy (Brussels: Éditions Labor, 1997), 29-50.

¹⁵ O[scar] C[olson], "Chronique wallonne," *Wallonia* 17, no. 11 (1909), 307-310.

University of Ghent into a Dutch-language facility.¹⁶ Despite his anti-clericalism, socialism, and use of Walloon as a medium of artistic expression, many members of the Walloon Movement resented Demblon for supposedly supporting "*flamingantisme*." *L'Âme wallonne*, the journal of the Ligue Wallonne de Liège, published several attacks on Demblon in the late 1890s. Among these was a poem in Walloon titled "Traitor! Traitor!" credited to "Lucien D..." which chided Demblon for his words, shocking for "A son of Wallonia / And even a Walloon author!" It ended by promising Demblon that "at the next elections... you will not have any votes from the Walloons!"¹⁷ A passing reference to Demblon in a 1906 issue of the literary journal *Antée* sarcastically referred to him as "a brave man and an extraordinary Meetingist,"¹⁸ referring to the Meetingpartij, a political party connected to the Flemish Movement. During a parliamentary discussion in 1908, Demblon stated that "if Walloon is but a patois, in contrast Flemish is incontestably a language." Unsurprisingly, this statement – made in the context of extending language rights to Flemings – elicited strong negative responses from several other Walloon politicians.¹⁹

There were never any serious attempts to make Walloon a language of state administration, or indeed to give it any official recognition, with the exception of some calls for funding Walloon-language artistic endeavors in the same way that the state provided for French- and Flemish-language works. However, some members of the Walloon Movement employed Walloon as an instrument against the "*flamingants*" supposedly outrageous calls for generalized French-Flemish bilingualism in state organs. Attacking Flemish as a "mere patois" (see Chapter 4 below), some

¹⁶ Alain Colignon, "Célestin Demblon," *EMW*, notice no. 01770.

¹⁷ *L'Âme wallonne* no. 11 (14 May 1898), col. 186.

¹⁸ "Crossoptylon," "Notes," *Antée* 2, no. 3 (1906), 277.

¹⁹ Yves Quairiaux, *L'image du Flamand en Wallonie (1830-1914): Essai d'analyse sociale et politique* (Brussels: Éditions Labor, 2006), 43-44; 344n323.

Walloons would occasionally give speeches in the Belgian Parliament in Walloon, hoping to make Flemings "realize" how "ridiculous" their use of Flemish in the Chambers was.²⁰

Walloon-minded intellectuals often turned to France for intellectual inspiration, a theme that will be further developed in the next chapter. However, this interest for things French did not manifest itself only as a simple Francophilia. On some occasions, the emerging regionalist movement in France provided direct inspiration for Walloons who considered a "federalization" – most commonly called "administrative separation" – of the Belgian state (see Chapter 5 below for a discussion of this concept). Indeed, in 1903 the *Fédération Régionaliste Française*, a group which incorporated numerous regionalist groups in both France and elsewhere (such as Catalonia) unilaterally named the journal *Wallonia* as an affiliate of the group, which the editors of *Wallonia* found to be a great honor. While *Wallonia* did not subscribe to all of the points of the Federation's political program, "which reacts... to points of view more or less French," there were still "many common points between this French effort and *that which needs to be undertaken in Belgium*." Indeed, note the editors, "we read with the liveliest interest the documents assembled by *l'Action régionaliste*, notably the periodic anthology of opinions... on federalism and decentralization."²¹

As noted above, the early Walloon literary movement had several parallels to the trajectory of the *Félibrige* in Southern France. Frédéric Mistral himself, founder of the *Félibrige*, wrote in late 1903 a short letter to the Walloon author Rodolphe de Warsage (pen name of Edmond Schoonbroodt), providing a reference to an encyclopedia article on the *Félibrige* and sending Schoonbroodt "the assurance of all [his] sympathies for the Walloon Movement." While the letter

²⁰ Arnaud Pirotte, *L'apport des courants régionalistes et dialectaux au Mouvement Wallon naissant: Une enquête dans les publications d'action wallonne de 1890 à 1914* (Leuven, Belgium: Éditions Peeters, 1997), 251-257.

²¹ "Chronique wallonne," *Wallonia* 11, no. 5 (1903), 131. Emphasis added. On the *Fédération régionaliste française*, see Thiébault Flory, *Le mouvement régionaliste française: Sources et développements* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1966); Julian Wright, *The Regionalist Movement in France, 1890-1914: Jean Charles-Brun and French Political Thought* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2003), 164-198.

from Schoonbrodt to Mistral is lost, Jean-Marie d'Heur argues that in all likelihood, "it situated this [Walloon] movement to the Félibréen movement in a rather clear fashion..."²²

As a brief aside, the Walloon regionalists' reference to the Félibrige as a source of inspiration, while certainly true, masks the fact that many of the first followers of the Félibrige in Belgium were Flemings. Flemish poet Karel van de Woestijne, in a column published in the Dutch *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* of 3 September 1924, notes that "the first Belgians who recognized the Félibrige in all of its forms were Flemings... the first readers of *Mireio* and *Calendau*... were not Walloons, they were Flemings of the purest blood." And, added van de Woestijne (perhaps in a subtle jab at the persistent monolingualism of many Walloons), in the late 1890s he knew some young Flemish students around the age of 15 who were trying to learn Provençal to read Mistral in the original version!²³

That Schoonbrodt contacted Mistral is of some interest, as the former was heavily involved in both cultural and political Walloon Movements. Schoonbrodt, a lawyer by training, wrote a short *Historical Sketch of the Walloon Movement*²⁴ and was for some time president of the Ligue Wallonne de Liège, one of the largest political Walloon organizations before World War I and a driving factor behind the creation of the Assemblée Wallonne in 1912, as well as in the committee for a monument to the "600 Franchimontois," celebrating troops from Liège who perished fighting against Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, in the fifteenth century (on which more below). Schoonbrodt was also an avid collector of folklore as well as an enthusiast for popular puppet theater, providing significant financial and organization support for the form before and after World

²² Jean-Marie d'Heur, "Une rencontre du Félibrige et du Mouvement Wallon dans une lettre inédite de Frédéric Mistral à Rodolphe de Warsage," in *Mélanges de philologie romane offerts à Charles Camproux* (Montpellier, France: Centre d'études occitanes, 1978), 2:573-577.

²³ Reproduced in Karel van de Woestijne, *Verzameld journalistiek werk*, ed. Ada V. Deprez (Ghent: Cultureel Documentatiecentrum, 1994), 13:117-118.

²⁴ Edmond Schoonbrodt, "Historique du Mouvement Wallon," *Moniteur officiel du Mouvement Wallon* (August-October 1913).

War I.²⁵ It is salient to note that Schoonbroodt, whose real name is heavily Flemish in character and reflects the history of Flemish migration to Wallonia (as the Gallic names of many "*flamingants*" reflected migrations in the other direction), chose a pen name which referenced the village of Warsage in the Province of Liège, thereby sealing his "credentials" as a "real" Walloon.

Joan Gross has demonstrated that the Walloon puppet theater, especially as it existed in Liège, exerted an important influence on Walloon regionalism during the *Belle Époque*. The uniqueness of the theater "captured the imagination" of symbolist movement of the 1880s and 1890s – of which Albert Mockel and his *Wallonie* were key representatives. Indeed, university students began to frequent puppet theaters in the bohemian quarter of Liège around 1885, when Mockel was a student at the University of Liège. In his satirical, whimsical, pseudo-autobiographical account of the founding of the symbolist and regionalist literary review *La Wallonie*, written in 1887, Mockel describes how the "Walloon Movement," his term for the early contributors to the review, attended a puppet theater in a poorly-lit, cramped room and were surprised to hear the characters talk in Walloon, thereby inspiring their artistic creation.²⁶

Gross argues that the working-class art form attracted the sons of the bourgeoisie as a kind of repository for the "soul" of the people – to the extent that some bourgeois spectators disapproved when newly enriched puppeteers began to improve their stages and marionettes. This renewed interest in puppetry and folklore led Schoonbroodt to organize an exhibition of puppets in 1902 at the "Old Liège" museum, attracting 18,000 visitors in ten days.²⁷ The role of the puppet theater as a "transmission belt" for "authentic" proletarian culture to the bourgeois seems to be reinforced by Schoonbroodt's account of having been introduced to Liégeois puppet theater at the

²⁵ Alain Colignon and Paul Delforge, "Edmond Schoonbroodt," *EMW*, notice no. 05656.

²⁶ Joan Gross, *Speaking in Other Voices: An Ethnography of Walloon Puppet Theaters* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001), 55-66; L. Hemma [Albert Mockel], *Les fumistes wallons: Histoire de quelques fous* (Liège, Belgium: Vaillant-Carmane, 1887), 89-107.

²⁷ Gross, 55-66.

age of five by "a worker in [his] father's factory" despite the stern disapproval of his mother: "This escapade among the amateurish wooden actors [*cabots de bois*] revealed my vocation to me."²⁸

Schoonbroodt's first exposure to "authentic" Walloon folklore came through the medium of a laborer at his father's factory – Schoonbroodt's family was obviously one of means. Indeed, on occasion these bourgeois sometimes framed their appropriation of working-class culture in quite condescending terms. In 1895, Auguste Gittée, a Flemish folklorist from Ghent who usually wrote in Dutch [!], penned an article in the folkloric journal *Wallonia* in which he argued for a Museum of Walloon Folklore. In doing so, Gittée claims that attempts at "harvesting" (*récolte*) will be more fruitful in smaller towns such as Herve or Stavelot where "the leveling current of modern ideas is less powerful" than in large cities such as Liège. Though traditionally ethnographic museums had focused on "primitive" peoples, Gittée maintains that "we have lost time in studying those who ... belong to the lower strata of our intellectual life." Indeed, he continues, "there are white Congolese among us ... our primitives – every folklorist knows it – are hardly above veritable primitives, intellectually speaking."²⁹ The time period in which Gittée wrote this piece corresponds to the beginnings of the Museum of Central Africa in the outskirts of Brussels. Both museums can be seen as expressions of the quest for "authentic" identities.

Walloon History

On 10 August 1895, Jules Destrée, arguing for equal state subsidies for Flemish and Walloon artistic production, claimed that it was in poor taste for certain parliamentarians "to try, in a country where we already have too many divisive issues, to establish comparisons between our two national races that are derogatory for one of them," including in the realm of history. Indeed, Destrée

²⁸ Rodolphe de Warsage [Edmond Schoonbroodt], *Mémoires d'un vieux Liégeois (1876-1936)* (Liège, Belgium: Imprimerie Centrale, 1936), 52.

²⁹ Auguste Gittée, "Un musée de folklore," *Wallonia* 3, no. 3 (1895), 37-38.

boasted, "if we oppose the history of the Walloon provinces or that of the province of Liège to the history of Flanders, we would thereby have as many great deeds to cite to the honor of the Walloons."³⁰ This brief excerpt from one of Destrée's first "Walloon"-themed speeches in the Belgian Parliament demonstrates to what extent the "merely" folkloric and antiquarian concerns of regionalist societies began to make themselves felt in the political life of the Belgian state.

In light of the real or perceived lack of attention to Walloon history, the Congrès Wallon of 1905 in Liège – an affair mostly of intellectuals, politicians, and high-level bureaucrats – solicited the renowned historian of Belgium, Henri Pirenne (himself a Walloon from Verviers, in the province of Liège) to give a talk on "the role of Walloons in history." The choice of Pirenne is telling, as he was not only a "native son" of Wallonia, but also one of the most renowned public intellectuals in Europe at the time, having achieved notoriety not only in Belgium (Paul Aron and Marnix Beyen have called him the first true Belgian intellectual³¹) but in France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Great Britain as well. Thus, Pirenne's *prestige* was a crucial symbolic issue for the Walloon Movement, as Pirenne's "support" or lack thereof for the Walloon regionalist "cause" could have a massive effect on the latter's symbolic capital.

The Congress's organizers wished for Pirenne, noted for his multivolume *Histoire de Belgique*, to bring balance to Belgian historiography by addressing the Walloons. These men felt that Walloons and Wallonia received short shrift in comparison to the Flemish. Walloon activists cited remarks by Flemish parliamentarian Edward Coremans to his Walloon colleagues to the effect of "Don't we have, in all regards, a past that is more brilliant than yours?" as well the relative lack of space given to the "great events" of Wallonia, such as the "epic of the 600 Franchimontois" in comparison to, say, the Battle of the Golden Spurs in Flanders in 1302 in primary school history

³⁰ Jules Destrée, *Discours parlementaires* (Brussels: Henri Lamertin, 1914), 635.

³¹ Paul Aron and Marnix Beyen, "L'histoire des intellectuels en Belgique: Specificités locales et actualité de la recherche," in *L'histoire des intellectuels aujourd'hui*, ed. Michel Leymarie and Jean-François Sirinelli (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2003), 417.

textbooks as proof that Flanders dominated the writing of Belgian history. Hector Chainaye – a fierce critic of Pirenne, whom he saw as too fixated on Flanders's role in Belgian history – and Albert Mockel claimed that this paucity of "Walloon" actors in the Belgian historical narrative had a negative effect on the pride of Walloon pupils in their past.³²

Pirenne thought that the title of the speech, "The Role of Walloons in History," chosen by the organizers of the Congress, was an apt one, as there was no such thing as a "History of the Walloons" nor, he added, a "History of the Flemings." Instead, with the exception of language, the difference between Walloons and Flemings was not as large as typically imagined. Flemish and Walloon national sentiments existed, Pirenne conceded, but only as variation of the "community of civilization" which Belgium experienced over the centuries. Pirenne, quite aware of the political tendencies of his audience, urged them to be objective: "Let us not, I beg of you, do history with sentiments but with the only serious means [we have], the documents."

Addressing the critiques which some Walloons made of the relative space he gave to "Walloon" history in his historiography, he countered that the history of the Episcopal Principality of Liège – which must not be confused with history of the rest of Wallonia – was that of a *bilingual* land, and that this history was "quite real and highly interesting." The resistance of the 600 Franchimontois of the Episcopal Principality of Liège to the forces of the Dukes of Burgundy was indeed heroic, but it was a product of dynastic politics and did not reflect any "national antipathy" between Flemings and Walloons. Pirenne recognized that the role of Flemings in Belgian history was better known than that of Walloons, even in France, but that this is a product of chance as the "great political events" of the Middle Ages tended to take place in Flemish rather than Walloon territory. Pirenne also maintains that while Flemish art did eclipse that of their Walloon "brothers" (Pirenne's term) during the medieval period, in contrast Walloon music composed in that age was

³² Philippe Carlier, "Henri Pirenne, historien de la Wallonie?" *Cahiers de Clío* 86 (1986), 69-70.

"dominating" in comparison to that of the Flemings. In short, he concluded, "of the two races [a term Pirenne admitted he disliked for its vagueness] which live in Belgium, the Walloon and the Flemish, neither of the two have anything to envy of the other... They have each collaborated in our history in reciprocal emulation and they cannot have for one another anything but admiration. It is not far from there to sympathy, and to *entente cordiale*." In the words of Léon-É. Halkin, "Pirenne spoke with authority. No one dared contradict him. Then, he left, never to return."³³

The Walloon critique of Pirenne has persisted among some Walloon circles to the present day. François Perin, lawyer, amateur historian, and *rattachiste* (partisan of annexing Wallonia to France) begins his take on Belgian history by castigating Godefroid Kurth's Catholic and Francophobe interpretation of Belgian history, as well as the supposedly Flemish-centered history of the liberal Pirenne: "The Principality of Liège bothers Henri Pirenne. The House of Burgundy was detested there. However, Pirenne fawns over the Dukes of Burgundy [*porte les ducs de Bourgogne aux nues*]. The history of Liège is relegated in his work to a subaltern rank of 'local history' while that of the County of Flanders is a part of 'national history'." Perin goes on to criticize Pirenne for his monarchist inclinations and for labeling the period of French rule (1795-1814) as one of "domination."³⁴

In some ways, it seems as if Pirenne faced criticism from all sides. Contrast Perin's dismissal of Pirenne with that of Dutch historian and "pan-Netherlandic" scholar Pieter Geyl, who consistently denied the right of the Belgian state to exist and who became popular among Flemish separatist circles:

Pirenne was a Walloon, teaching history, in French, to Flemish students at the only public university in the Dutch-speaking part of the country, in Ghent. In other

³³ Parts of Pirenne's address are reproduced in *Wallonia* 13, no. 12 (1905), 511-516; and Léon-É. Halkin, "Henri Pirenne à Liège," *Cahiers de Cléo* 86 (1986), 20-22. For more on the conflict between Pirenne and "*wallonisant*" partisans of a particularist history, see Hervé Hasquin, *Historiographie et politique en Belgique* (Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles; Charleroi, Belgium: Insitut Jules Destrée, 1996), 109-119.

³⁴ François Perin, *Histoire d'une nation introuvable* (Brussels: Paul Legrain, 1988), 9-10.

words, he occupied an advanced post in the movement of penetration and conquest which French civilization, under the auspices of the centralized Belgian state, was carrying on in Flanders. He never understood [*vid!*] the resentment, or the feelings of responsibility towards their own people, animating the Flemish intellectuals who were behind... the Flemish movement... which aimed at the re-nationalization or de-Gallicization of public life in Flanders. On the contrary, Pirenne contributed to the struggle by offering this historical conception of the interdependence of Wallonia and Flanders – under French auspices!³⁵

To some extent, the criticisms that "Walloon" history was devalued vis-à-vis Flemish history were based on fact, though this critique is dependent on a fluid definition of historical terminology and often implies a more sinister, intentional adumbration to historians than may have been present. Thibaut Hogge has analyzed the way in which 38 primary school history textbooks, both in Flemish and in French, published between 1830 and 1914, allotted space to the various *Ancien Régime* principalities which predated the Belgian state, as well as to historical artistic and political figures. Hogge critiques many of these texts as a falling into a kind of "finalism" with regard to the Belgian state. This point of view, he argues, was conditioned by the external threats to the new state's integrity in the decades following independence: historiography needed to create a legitimating genealogy for the Belgian state. He concludes that from the 1880s onward, school texts focused most of their space on the old County of Flanders and the Episcopal Principality of Liège. While the preponderance of the latter partially negates some Walloons' claims that Walloon history was "absent" in texts, Hogge notes that the Counties of Hainaut and Namur were rarely mentioned in most accounts. He also argues that the emphasis placed on the County of Flanders – which did *not* correspond to "Flanders" in the sense of the Dutch-speaking regions of Belgium – may have subtly helped "*flamingant*" propaganda purposes, though this was in no way the intent of the authors. In terms of artistic figures, the emphasis was on people from the County of Flanders or the Duchy of Brabant, artists from the "Romance" areas of what is today Belgium figuring far less. Hogge concludes that the emphasis placed on the "Frenchified" Germanic County of Flanders as the

³⁵ Pieter Geyl, *Debates with Historians* (Cleveland, OH and New York: World Publishing Co., 1958), 216.

precursor to Belgian unity was an attempt to create a patriotic Belgian national narrative, but inadvertently served as a cause "of the difficult birth of a Walloon Movement with a popular base... for so long confined to intellectual milieus."³⁶

The real or perceived dominance of a Flemish element in Belgian historiography figured among the grievances in Jules Destrée's now famous "Lettre au Roi sur la séparation de la Wallonie et de la Flandre," written in the aftermath of the large Catholic victory in the parliamentary elections of 1912, in which Destrée paints a picture of a free-thinking and socialist Wallonia dominated by a clerical, backwards Flanders, and posits administrative separation as the method of regulating this otherwise intractable conflict. Destrée lists eight items which the Flemings "took from us [the Walloons," of which one is "our past": "We have let them write and teach the history of Belgium... Because Belgium was [ours] as well as [theirs], who cared if its history, difficult to write, was more or less that of the glory days of Flanders? Today, we are beginning to see the extent of the problem..." The emphasis on "Flemish" history began to have sinister consequences, according to Destrée, when the celebration of the Battle of the Golden Spurs of 1302 (in which Flemish burgers successfully fought off partisans of the King of France) became tinged with "the hatred of France... certain fanatic *flamingants*, when they speak to you of history, still seem to regret the times when a poor pronunciation of *schild en vriend* ["shield and friend," a Dutch-language shibboleth] was punished with instant death." This ignorance of the "Walloon" past meant that "in Liège, as in Hainaut, people are demanding regional histories, for which they feel a need."³⁷

³⁶ Thibaut Hogge, "Des Wallons sans histoire? Le passé belge conçu par les manuels d'histoire de l'enseignement primaire avant 1914," in *L'imaginaire wallon: Jalons pour une identité qui se construit*, ed. Luc Courtois and Jean Pirotte (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium: Fondation Wallonne Pierre-Marie et Jean-François Humblet, 1994), 51-77.

³⁷ Jules Destrée, "Lettre au Roi sur la séparation de la Wallonie et de la Flandre," *Revue de Belgique* (15 August 1912), 747-748. For the role of the Battle of the Golden Spurs in Flemish identity formation, see Gevert H. Nörtemann, *Im Spiegelkabinett der Historie: Der Mythos der Schlacht von Kortrijk und die Erfindung Flanderns im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Logos, 2002).

Indeed, to remedy this perceived imbalance in Belgian historiography, several Walloon-minded organizations actively sponsored the writing of specifically "Walloon" histories. In the journal *Wallonia*, for example, we find this announcement:

Liégeois History Contest. The communal council of Liège has been taken with the proposition originating from three of its members, our collaborator Victor Chauvin and Émile Digneffe and Charles Francotte. These *patriots* demanded the creation of a quinquennial contest to award a prize of 5,000 francs for the best work on the history of the former Principality of Liège; they also proposed that a prize of 1,000 francs be awarded to the author of the best textbook written for the purpose of teaching the history of the former Principality in middle schools.³⁸

Belgian ≠ Flemish: Walloon Identity at Home and Abroad

Though better remembered today for his political Walloon activism, Jules Destrée, who always considered himself a man of letters, also promoted Walloon art and folklore.³⁹ These two vocations, as we have seen, are in no way contradictory and in fact often went hand-in-hand in prewar Belgium. Shortly before the outbreak of World War I, Destrée wrote a short book entitled *Wallonie* aimed at a French readership, in which he celebrated his vision of Wallonia. A passage from his introduction to *Wallonie* is instructive in regard to the preoccupations of prewar Walloon regionalists and deserves to be quoted at length:

One night in Compiègne [in France], the bar association of Charleroi went out for an excursion. The jurists were as happy as schoolchildren on vacation. All this gaiety brought a comely Parisian woman to ask the hotelier [what was going on, he] responded: "Those are Flemish lawyers." The young woman was stunned to hear us speaking French, and, emboldened by our warm welcome, she asked if one or another of our companions wouldn't mind singing or dancing a tune from our homeland for her. Poor girl! She thought that these foreigners had to be curious savages, and forgot that Charleroi is closer to Paris than the majority of the large cities in France.

There were some among us who were vexed and wanted to explain to her that Walloons were the French from the other side of the border. As for me, I didn't

³⁸ *Wallonia* 18, no. 11 (1910), 342. Emphasis added.

³⁹ Carla-Maria de Brandt, "Jules Destrées wallingantisme vóór de Eerste Wereldoorlog" (Licentiate thesis, Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven, 1977), 88-91, 160-163.

harbor any grudges towards you, you little symbol of the ignorance of superficial Parisians, and here are some tunes of my homeland!⁴⁰

In this passage we find a concise airing of one of the grievances that fueled Walloon regionalist thinking, namely, the fear that Belgium's cultural identity abroad would be seen as exclusively Flemish.⁴¹ Indeed, this concern manifests itself to such a degree that Destrée worried that the others would see him and his fellow Walloons as "savages," unworthy of prestige in French eyes. Destrée often returned to this theme, for example castigating art historians and museum curators who referred to the fifteenth-century painter from Tournai, Rogier de le Pasture [*sic*], as "Rogier van der Weyden," accusing them of occluding his "Walloon" identity behind a Flemish name.⁴² This, despite the fact that de le Pasture/van der Weyden started using the Dutch version of his name of his own accord when he moved to Flanders to follow his career in the arts.

Philologist Jules Ferrer wrote a short notice on "The Name of Rogier de le Pasture" for *Wallonia*, noting that at the time, both given and family names were translated *in toto* depending on where and for whom the artist worked: "The artist held no more integrity in his name than in the [intellectual] property of his work... Rogier de le Pasture, authentic Tournaisien, thus let himself without the least bit of repugnance change into [*travestir en*] Rogier van der Weyden." Indeed, he would have been "Ruggieri da Bruggia" to an Italian of the time and "el maestro Rogel" to a Spaniard. While Feller's exposé would seem to indicate that projecting current nationalist concerns onto the name of a person who lived in a time of much more fluent, contingent identities, Feller takes pains to note that "his integral, exact name is **Rogier de le Pasture**."⁴³ This concern for "integrity," the labeling of de le Pasture/van der Weyden as an "authentic Tournaisien," and the fact

⁴⁰ Jules Destrée, *Wallonie* (Paris: Société des Trente, 1914), 3.

⁴¹ Cf. Philippe Raxhon, "La Belgique, c'est la Flandre," in *Images de la Wallonie dans le dessin de presse (1910-1961)*, ed. Luc Courtois and Jean Pirotte (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium: Fondation Wallonne Pierre-Marie et Jean-François Humblet, 1993), 81-86.

⁴² See Destrée's discussion of "Walloon" artists who have in his mind been misappropriated by the Flemings: Destrée, *Wallonie*, Chapter 3, "La Wallonie, terre d'art."

⁴³ Jules Ferrer, "Le nom de Roger de le Pasture," *Wallonia* 21, no. 4 (1913), 249-252. Boldface in original.

that *Wallonia* published such a disquisition are themselves evidence that these Walloon intellectuals were concerned about "bragging rights" to this medieval master.

In 1911, there was an exhibition held in the city of Charleroi, the largest city in the Walloon province of Hainaut, Jules Destrée's hometown, and heart of the Walloon "Black Country" which produced much of Belgium's coal. The exhibition, patterned after the spate of World's Fairs at the turn of the century, would showcase technology, the exploitation of natural resources, the social projects of the city, as well as cultural production. The preview of the exposition in *Wallonia* waxed bitterly sarcastic, bemoaning the lack of attention given to Walloon art in "official" circles: "Thanks to the initiative of Jules Destrée, we will have a section of old and modern Walloon art... 'Walloon' art? So it exists, then? True, it is not the last exposition of eighteenth-century 'Belgian' art which would give you an idea of it..."⁴⁴

Indeed, in her study of regional authors and the development of a Walloon consciousness, Bossens notes that the organizers – prominent among whom was Jules Destrée – of the exposition had several goals for the program. Among these was "distinguishing 'Walloon art' from Flemish art. This amalgamation... in Belgium [and] abroad, constituted in the eyes of the organizers and of Walloon activists an unfortunate habit which needed to be remedied." Bossens argues that while the exposition was not "officially" hostile towards Flemings, as evinced by the presence of the French-language Flemish writer Émile Verhaeren on the steering committee, some of the language which Destrée employed was rather belligerent vis-à-vis "Flemish tenacity." Destrée for example claimed that "We are attempting to reinforce Walloon energies because we shall never accept a peace based on abdications and humiliations, a peace resigned to hassles [*tracasseries*], vexation, and injustice..."

⁴⁴ Arille Carlier, "L'Exposition de Charleroi," *Wallonia* 19, no. 5 (1911), 174.

This language, says Bossens, "could have been written in any other context," not just that of art.⁴⁵ Thus, the field of art became another ground for asserting Walloon specificity.

The discourse of Walloon regionalism was intimately connected with France (or at least a certain idea of it) in many ways. French regionalist movements such as the *Félibrige* and the *Fédération Régionaliste Française* provided models to Walloon philologists, authors, and political activists. The desire to separate Wallonia from Flanders in popular consciousness was largely driven by concerns of being esteemed as "inferior" or "savage" in French circles. Let us now turn to the role of issues of "French" pride in the production of Walloon identity.

⁴⁵ Bossens, 115-116.

CHAPTER 4 FRENCH PRIDE

The late medievalist Léopold Genicot began his pioneering survey of Walloon history with a pithy outline of its complexities: "Wallonia is a region contiguous with France, which does not belong to her but which has for centuries shared her language and civilization. Herein lies the problem."¹ This "problem" could be understood as solely a historiographical one, but could be construed as a political problem as well. This chapter explores the different ways in which identification with France – on various levels – played a role in Walloon intellectuals' rhetoric in the three decades before World War I.

Both the French state and the French language were used as a rhetorical tools in the context of Walloon identity-building vis-à-vis the Flemish. Members of the Walloon Movement would sometimes make explicit comparisons between Belgium and France for rhetorical purposes, claiming that Walloons were being treated by the "*flamingants*" as the Germans treated the inhabitants of Alsace-Lorraine. The parallel to *revanchisme* was also occasionally used in reference to the small Walloon-speaking community in Malmedy, the so-called "Belgian" or "Walloon Alsace-Lorraine," a Prussian village on the border with Belgium where these Walloons – like their brothers in "*flamingant*" Belgium – were allegedly undergoing a harsh process of Germanization.²

Given that the Walloon Movement was overwhelmingly Liberal and Socialist in character, it is not surprising that it often called upon the "*laïcité*" and "progressive" nature of the French state as a model. This concern was reflected in the reference to the French Revolution as a point of pride not only for France, but for Wallonia as well.³

¹ Léopold Genicot, "Introduction," in *Histoire de la Wallonie*, ed. Léopold Genicot (Toulouse, France: Privat, 1973), 5.

² Eric Defoort, "Het Belgische nationalisme vóór de Eerste Wereldoorlog," *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 85 (1972), 527-529. Malmedy was annexed to Belgium in 1919 under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

³ The undisputed expert on the use of the French Revolution in Walloon rhetoric is Philippe Raxhon. See his *La mémoire de la Révolution Française, entre Liège et Wallonie* (Brussels: Éditions Labor, 1996) as well as his *La Marseillaise ou le devenir d'un chant révolutionnaire en Wallonie* (Charleroi, Belgium: Institut Jules Destrée, 1998).

"Annexionist" or "irredentist" sentiments, such as those of the *rattachistes* mentioned below, were not common even within Walloon milieus which had a general "affinity" for France and French culture. Indeed, as Sophie de Schaepdrijver points out, "Belgians of 1914 felt as neutral as today's Swiss."⁴ Some of the Walloon thinkers analyzed in this study would call upon this language of neutrality, arguing that in their defense of the "French" aspects of Belgian life they were attempting to counter what they perceived as a dangerous pan-German influence in the state, especially among the Flemish and the small German-speaking Belgian population.

Rattachisme

Perhaps the most extreme – and by far the least prevalent – manifestation of "French pride" on the part of Walloon intellectuals was the *rattachiste* (or *réunioniste*) sentiment. Never a fully formed or organized "movement" before World War I, this tendency advocated the annexation of Wallonia to France.⁵ The call for "reattachment" or "reunion" is slightly misleading. With the exception of parts of the province of Hainaut, none of what is now called Wallonia belonged to France except during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods (1794-1814) when all of what are today the Benelux countries were annexed and divided into French *départements*. Except for the year following the outbreak of the Belgian Revolution (1830-1831), and at the Walloon National Congress of October 1945, heavily influenced by the recent experience of World War II, *rattachisme* found extremely few supporters in any social stratum in Wallonia.⁶ Indeed, in her analysis of the Walloon Movement in Brussels from 1877 to 1914, Ria Van Alboom claims that neither in Wallonia proper

⁴ Sophie de Schaepdrijver, *La Belgique et la Première Guerre Mondiale* (Brussels et al.: Peter Lang, 2004), 44.

⁵ Paul Delforge, "Réunionisme," *Encyclopédie du Mouvement wallon* (CD-ROM) (Charleroi, Belgium: Institut Jules Destrée, 2003) (hereafter *EMW*), notice no. 05409.

⁶ See Jean Stengers, "Sentiment national, sentiment orangiste et sentiment français à l'aube de notre indépendance," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 28, nos. 3-4 (1950), 993-1029 and 29, no. 1 (1950-1951), 61-92; Francis Dumont, *L'irredentisme français en Wallonie de 1814 à 1831* ([Charleroi, Belgium]: Institut Jules Destrée, 1965); Philippe Raxhon, *Histoire du Congrès Wallon d'octobre 1945: Un avenir politique pour la Wallonie?* (Charleroi, Belgium: Institut Jules Destrée, 1995).

nor in the Belgian capital did the idea of fusion with France gain any hold among Walloons, with a few exceptions such as Albert du Bois and Raymond Colleye.⁷

Count Albert du Bois was a minor noble from Walloon Brabant and perhaps the best-known – or even the only widely-known – proponent of *rattachisme* before World War I. Du Bois had served with the Belgian diplomatic corps in London before "retiring" in 1901 and living off of his inheritance in the family château in Nivelles in Walloon Brabant until his death in 1940.⁸ Despite his aristocratic background, du Bois was anti-clerical, "Voltairean," and vaguely Liberal in his tendencies. Du Bois produced a large amount of prose, poetry, and theater over the course of his life, which met with praise from certain Walloon quarters. He was thus a writing rentier, exempt from the need to make money from his work, and thus freer to express unpopular opinions like *rattachisme*. In 1902 he published a sixteen page "Walloon's Catechism" which outlined the supposedly French nature of Walloons and their need to be reincorporated into a greater France. Du Bois published this pamphlet with his own funds and distributed it free of charge among the Walloon population.

In 1912, du Bois published a revised version of his novel, *Waterloo ("Belges" ou Français?)* with a new thirty-nine page preface expanding on the ideas of his earlier "Catechism."⁹ The quotation marks around the word "Belgians" leave little doubt as to the low esteem in which du Bois held the Belgian state. The novel tells the story of Jean Van Cutsem, a Frenchified "*métis*" of Fleming and Walloon extraction, affianced to a Walloon woman, who in 1815 serves in the Allied army against Napoleon, only to realize that his "true" calling is in the service of the Emperor. After switching his allegiance, he dies on the battlefield at the hand of an English soldier, having thereby redeemed

⁷ Ria Van Alboom, "Aspecten van de Waalse Beweging te Brussel (1877-1914)," *Taal en sociale integratie* 6 (1982), 27, 56. On du Bois, see Philippe Muret, "Albert du Bois," *EMW*, notice no. 02096. On Colleye, see Philippe Muret, "Raymond Colleye," *EMW*, notice no. 01132.

⁸ Wiesław Malinowski, "'Deux sœurs sous la même toit': Sur les rêves 'pangalliques' d'Albert du Bois," *Vie wallonne* 71 (1997), 92.

⁹ Albert du Bois, *Waterloo ("Belges" ou Français?)* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1912).

himself in service of the French fatherland. Du Bois's choice of a "*Belgeoisant*" – a noun based off of the present participle ("-ing"), implying an action or performance, not an adjective, which would suppose a "real" essence – as the protagonist is interesting. In his extended preface, du Bois wrote that "it is the troubled soul of one of these *métis* which the author has studied in the following pages. It would have been too repugnant to him to follow a *real* Walloon in his fight against his French brothers."¹⁰ The story of Jean Van Cutsem is in many ways that of a "tragic mulatto" whose unfortunate birth as the mixture of two ideally separate people causes him internal strife until his death. Thus Belgium, born of the "marriage" of Flemings and Walloons, was symbolically portrayed as a grotesque hybrid whose existence contravenes nature and cannot last.

In his preface, du Bois sketches a portrait of Belgian history which would become increasingly prevalent among both Flemish and Walloon detractors of the Belgian state. Belgium was a "buffer state," the stillborn child of a diplomatic compromise between Britain and France.¹¹ Instead of an ephemeral "Belgian nation," "the French and the citizens of the buffer state named 'Belgium' who are Walloons and Picards make up one and the same nation."¹² Wallonia and France are joined, in du Bois's conception, by seven factors: "race" (Gallo-Roman), language (French, which developed in Wallonia without being imposed by the French state), Religion (Catholicism tempered by Voltairean skepticism), legal systems, mores, history, and "a solemn will to live together." This final point, which echoes Ernest Renan's voluntarism despite du Bois's repeated emphasis on race and descent, again calls on the history of Liège. Du Bois levels a sharp criticism of the Catholic Belgian historian Godefroid Kurth here, attacking the "German [*sic*] writer" who supposedly played down the importance of Liège's plebiscite to join the French Republic in 1793.¹³

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xxxi n1. Emphasis added.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xviii-xxix.

¹² *Ibid.*, i.

¹³ *Ibid.*, xxviii n1.

Du Bois's efforts also went beyond the symbolic; he also attempted to promote a great rapprochement between Wallonia and France in practice, albeit modest practice. At the Congrès Wallon of Liège in 1905, he proposed the creation of a postal union between Belgium and France. Though such a project might seem eccentric or picayune at first, du Bois's presentation shows a thinly disguised *rattachisme* all the same, expressed as a call for intellectual exchange between Wallonia and France. Du Bois deplored that although Wallonia had a "French soul" and towns such as "Avesnes and Valenciennes [in France] are towns of Hainaut, as much as Mons and Chimay [in Belgium]," the free exchange of "ideas and sentiments" between people in Wallonia and the French Republic was "burdened with an onerous tax." After reciting several statistics showing the supposed financial hardships in the mailing of letters and periodicals between France and Belgium, du Bois claimed that "our Flemish associates" have succeeded in having the Belgian government lower postal duties with the Netherlands. Du Bois ends his short exposé by calling for a uniform domestic postal tariff throughout France and Belgium, adding that "we cannot allow the French soul of Wallonia [to be] bastardized."¹⁴

Du Bois's ideas gained practically no ground with other members of the Walloon Movement before the First World War. Maurice Wilmotte, the Walloon philologist and historian of French-language literature, expressed the prevailing Walloon sentiment vis-à-vis du Bois's *rattachiste* ideas. Du Bois's "diffuse and confused developments... teeming with historical errors and logical fallacies, had no repercussion whatsoever in Belgium." *Rattachisme* was for Wilmotte both ahistorical and politically impossible. However, he saw it as an understandable, if not tenable, reaction to the "sad political outcome of the Liberal Party" whose loose organization was inadequate in navigating the world of mass politics after the introduction of weighted universal suffrage in 1893, and the success of language legislation seen as "detrimental" to Walloon interests: "It is possible [that this led to

¹⁴ Albert du Bois, "Des relations entre la France et la Wallonie au point de vue postal," *Wallonia* 13, no. 10 (1905), 300-303.

rattachisme], discouragement being poor counsel and extremes inevitably engendering counter-extremes."¹⁵ Thus, even the extreme rhetoric of *rattachisme* is an extension of "intra-Belgian" conflicts, as the anti-clerical du Bois deplored the Catholic "yoke" which he imagined the "*flamingants*" had hitched to the Walloons. Du Bois's fulminations are in some ways a more extreme expression of the same frustrations which motivated Jules Destrée to write his call for administrative separation of Wallonia and Flanders following the failure of the Liberal-Socialist electoral pact to unseat the Catholic government in 1912.

French Language and Culture

Still, despite his rejection of *rattachisme*, Wilmotte's passion for French language and culture was among the most ardent to be found in Belgium: "Belgians [both Flemings and Walloons] have over the centuries not ceased to feel, as through an indefatigable [*incompressible*] instinct, the influence of the thought and work [emanating] from Paris." This "vassalage" was in no way a humiliation, argued Wilmotte; it was simply the recognition of a cultural superiority in which Belgians took great pride.¹⁶

For Wilmotte, as for many Walloons as well as Francophone Flemings, the French language itself was an object of veneration and thus worthy of "protection" from the "*flamingant* ogre."¹⁷ In 1912, Wilmotte published an article whose title and provenance are both significant: "Why One Should Speak French," appearing in *Cahiers alsaciens* [The Journal of Alsace].¹⁸ The symbolism of Wilmotte's writing in a journal of French-speakers under the "yoke" of a Germanic power was likely not unnoticed. The article is a long paean to the French tongue, replete with hyperbolic statements of its superiority couched in academic language. For Wilmotte, French is "the well-tailored garment

¹⁵ Maurice Wilmotte, *La culture française en Belgique* (Paris: H. Champion, 1912), 126-130.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, vii-ix.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁸ Maurice Wilmotte, "Pourquoi il faut parler français," *Cahiers alsaciens* (January 1912), 4-15.

of an ever more delicate and nuanced thought: that is the secret of its *prestige*, which has resisted all ordeals and all disasters."¹⁹ The small part of the French vocabulary which comes from a Frankish (thus Germanic) substrate has been "humanized," "abstracted," and "refined," and "the Flemish, English, and German contribution [to French] is not worth the bother" of study. French has enjoyed "universality" since at least the twelfth century; "knowledge of French [is] the basis of a respectable education;" all European literatures are but "tributaries of that of Paris;" French was "not a language, but *the language* of civilization." The list of plaudits for the language of Voltaire continues for several pages.²⁰

Wilmotte approvingly cited the eighteenth-century German author Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (who, Wilmotte neglects to mention, rejected a facile imitation of French letters) who noted in his work *Laocoon* that he decided to write it in French as the German language was "not fully formed" for literary purposes. Here, as with the discussion on Walloon history, we see how pre-1830 developments have been taken out of context to better "fit" a given political and cultural vision. Wilmotte also reproached those who accused Flemish authors who wrote in French such as Émile Verhaeren or Georges Rodenbach of "lacking patriotism... because they too renounced Dutch. No, the truth is that all of these writers have obeyed the same instinct, just and profound."²¹ Wilmotte's seemingly endless praise for the French language seems to bolster one anthropologist's assertion that "ethnic and nationalist claims to superiority or authenticity are often associated with the assumed age, the complexity, the difficulty of learning or the beauty of a particular language, although... such predicates do not make a lot of sense from the view of linguistics."²²

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4. Emphasis added.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 12, 14.

²² Thomas Hylland Eriksen, "Language in Identity Politics," in *Language Contact and Language Conflict*, ed. Unn Røyneland (Volda, Norway: Volda College, 1997), 25.

The use of the superiority of French as an anti-"*flamingant*" argument is apparent in the first issue of the journal *L'Anti-flamingant*, whose subtle title leaves little doubt as to its agenda. Without any explicit references to Belgium, Wallonia, or Flanders, the paper reprinted a short essay by the well-known British author H. G. Wells lauding the supremacy of French as a language for science and higher learning.²³ In the context of the paper's rather obvious mission, though, it becomes clear that by displaying a (prestigious) non-native French-speaker's praises for French as a vehicular langue for learning and culture, the editors of *L'Anti-flamingant* were discursively denigrating the "*flamingants*" for their bullishness in refusing to use French in public life.

Hector Chainaye, a Liégeois who lived in Brussels and who was active in the Ligue Wallonne du Brabant (an umbrella organization for various Walloon groups in Brussels), was one of the most ardent members of the Walloon Movement, as shown by his fierce opposition to Henri Pirenne in the previous chapter, gave a speech in 1905 to the Ligue Wallonne du Brabant in which he applauded "the legitimate demands of the awakened Wallonia and the feelings of solidarity which unite the peoples of the French language, without prejudice towards their respective originality." Here is the ubiquitous Romantic language of "national awakening." Chainaye, though himself an author of several works in the Walloon tongue and a great proponent of dialectal and folkloric activity, linked "real" Walloon consciousness to a French identity – cultural, if not political. Interestingly enough, the meeting at which Chainaye gave this speech ended with a "march of protest" through Brussels to the monument for the Liégeois Charles Rogier, one of the heroes of Belgian independence, where they laid a wreath at the foot of the monument.²⁴ The role of Belgium in the Walloon intellectuals' imagination will be further explored in the next chapter.

²³ "La langue française: Opinion de M. H.-G. Wells," *L'Anti-flamingant* 1, no. 1 (15 April 1911), 9-10.

²⁴ "Notes," *Antée* 1, no. 7 (1905), 320.

Denigration of Dutch

The rhetorical complement to the celebration of French was the denigration of Dutch, especially Dutch as manifested in the Flemish dialects of Belgium. A nascent anti-Flemish discourse among Walloons (including circles in Brussels) portrayed standard literary Dutch as an essentially foreign tongue, the language of the Netherlands from which Belgium gained its independence in 1830, while the language actually spoken of Flanders was little more than a collection of unstandardized dialects. If, as some Walloons argued, people in Wallonia had to use French instead of Walloon dialects, why could not the Flemish do the same, making French a language of "national unity?" Besides the fact that this argument rests on spurious grounds, as it would be much easier for a Walloon-speaker to learn French than for a Flemish-speaker to do the same, it also ignores the long presence of Dutch in public life in the areas that would become "Belgium" during the *Ancien Régime*, including the Episcopal Principality of Liège, which included much of what became the Flemish province of Limburg.²⁵

The strategy of mocking or otherwise insinuating the inferiority of the language of a group seeking more rights is of course not specific to Belgium. In late nineteenth-century Norway, for example, partisans of the linguistic status quo (the use of a more-or-less Danish speech as the official language), equated the importance of learning Nynorsk ("New Norse," the synthesis of rural accents from around Norway proposed as a new national language) to the importance of "straw-weaving" as a school subject.²⁶ In an even closer parallel to the Belgian situation, a Swiss-French geographer in 1906 attacked Germanic Swiss who migrated to Romandy and refused to "integrate," saying that in adapting to a French-speaking society, "is not the language which they learn far

²⁵ Jean Stengers, "Depuis quand les Liégeois sont-ils des Wallons?" in *Hommages à la Wallonie: Mélanges d'histoire, de littérature et de philologie wallonnes offerts à Maurice A. Arnould et Pierre Ruelle*, ed. Hervé Hasquin (Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1981), 431-477; Sébastien Dubois, *L'invention de la Belgique: Genèse d'un État-Nation, 1648-1830* (Brussels: Éditions Racine, 2005).

²⁶ Gregg Bucken-Knapp, *Elites, Language, and the Politics of Identity: The Norwegian Case in Comparative Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 38.

superior to any Alemannic dialect? In the presence of a universal language, known around the world, what can some disharmonious patois spoken in small circles do?"²⁷

How, many Walloon regionalists asked, could one force the legal equality of French, one of the premier languages of culture and civilization, with "Flemish," portrayed as a jumble of mutually unintelligible dialects that bore little resemblance to the standard Dutch of the Netherlands? Even cultured Dutch, in the eyes of many Walloon writers, was no equal to the language of Voltaire: did it not "borrow" most of its scientific and intellectual vocabulary from French anyway?²⁸ Maurice Wilmotte, using rather vitriolic language, claimed that at the time of Belgian independence, "rare... were those Belgians who dreamed, for the varied gibberish [*divers charabias* – referring to the Flemish dialects] the dignity of a common tongue and the same prerogatives as for French, rich in a literary past and literary present."²⁹

A frequent motif in the small *wallonisant* press was the linkage of the supposedly inferior language of the Flemish with attempts to introduce it in Wallonia. One news-in-brief piece in *L'Âme wallonne*, a periodical issued by the Ligue Wallonne de Liège, claimed that there was a building in Liège, "capital of Wallonia," with a sign that read "Posterijen-spaar-lijfreut-en-levensverzekeringskas [*siz*]." The author explained that "this kilometeric expression [*vocabale kilométrique*], worthy of the Eskimos," was an overly-long way of saying "post office." After fulminating that the government is using "our [Walloons'] money... for these useless acts of ignominy," the piece claims that "our masters" – that is, the Flemings – will soon get their comeuppance once the Walloons "have figured out [the Flemings'] infamous conduct."³⁰ In this representation, Dutch thus becomes a laughable, primitive language (fit but for Eskimos) which is

²⁷ Charles Knapp, quoted in Alain Clavier, *Les Helvétistes: Intellectuels et politique en Suisse romande au début du siècle* (Lausanne, Switzerland: Société d'histoire de la Suisse Romande and Éditions d'en-bas, 1993), 97.

²⁸ Arthur Edward Curtis, "New Perspectives on the History of the Language Problem in Belgium," (PhD dissertation, University of Oregon, 1971), 232-236, 242-243.

²⁹ Wilmotte, *La culture française en Belgique*, 90.

³⁰ Ch[arles] J. C[omhaire], "Les saletés," *L'Âme wallonne* (22 July 1899), 460.

invading territory which "rightfully" belongs to Walloons. The Walloons' "Flemish 'brothers'" (the scare quotes are from the article) are not their compatriots in the Belgian state but rather a colonizing force, sullyng the French character of Liège.

An anonymous editorial comment in *Antée* deplored legal developments which, it frantically claimed "do not tend towards anything less than making Flemish the exclusive medium of education in Belgium from now on." This supposed attack on freedom and conscience would widen "the rift which separates... the Latin population from the Germanic population [of Belgium], Wallonia from Flanders, *civilization from barbarousness*." Indeed, the editorial claimed that mandatory bilingualism in schooling would prevent students from mastering any one language, thereby preventing them from even forming, let alone expressing, thought and thus contribute to the overall intellectual decline of Belgium. Trilingual Switzerland, claimed the editorial, has produced no intellect of importance save Rousseau, and "in Canada, it is even worse." The editorial ends on a deeply pessimistic tone, claiming that the self-image of many Belgians that theirs was a land of material, not intellectual, production was becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, and lamenting that "it is not our sad, unlettered politicians... who will have the foresight to contradict or warn them."³¹

In the first issue of *Le Coq hardy*, another of the ephemeral "little reviews" of politics and literature which were so prominent in Walloon intellectual circles of the time, and to which Destrée and others contributed, an editorial entitled "Wallons toujours" claims that, while "at first, the Flemings could rightly complain about the situation they were given [in 1830]," they had been "given a taste [and] wanted too much. Above all, they had the pretention to regulate our destinies and *to deprive us of the shining influence of Latin culture in attacking the French language*."³²

The symbolic role of French as a language of culture and bond between all Belgians was further put into relief by the question of the University of Ghent. Like all universities in Belgium

³¹ "Notes," *Antée* 3, no. 2 (1907), 190-191. Emphasis added.

³² Georges Durempart, "Wallons toujours," *Le Coq hardy: Revue du Mouvement Wallon* 1, no. 1 (1913), 2. Emphasis added.

before World War I, the University of Ghent (in Flanders) used French as the language of instruction and examination. Many members of the Flemish Movement, desirous of a university in their own country where Flemings could receive instruction in Dutch, called for the University of Ghent to become bilingual (Dutch-French) or even solely Dutch-language. This issue was not, however, a simple matter of "Flemings" against "Walloons" over the maintenance of French at the university. Some French-language Flemings, the so-called *fransquillons*, joined with those Walloons who did not want to see a "beacon of French culture" in Flanders extinguished. Some in this group supported creating a Dutch-language university elsewhere in Flanders (such as Antwerp), others did not. Dutch-language Flemings such as Paul Fredericq, a colleague of the Walloon Henri Pirenne at the University of Ghent's History Department, favored bilingualism at the university because the complete elimination of French at the institution would, in their mind "provincialize" the university by making it unattractive to foreign students. Still other Flemings as well as Walloons sympathetic to the idea of a Dutch-language institution (such as Célestin Demblon, see Chapter 3) thought that a bilingual institution would perpetuate Francophone dominance in Flanders, as the French part of the university would remain more prestigious. This question, like many other linguistic questions, took on an ideological hue as Ghent was the only state university in Flanders. The Catholic University at Louvain/Leuven, also (at the time) a French-language institution in Flanders, was seen as an instrument of clericalism by many *fransquillons* and Walloons; thus sending their sons to Louvain/Leuven instead of a "Dutchified" Ghent was out of the question.³³

L'Anti-flamingant claimed that the "*défrancisation*" of the University of Ghent would "lead to the depopulation and ruin of that institution," as the Walloons, Francophone Flemings, and

³³ "Enquête de *Wallonia* sur la néerlandisation de l'Université de Gand et sur le Mouvement flamingant," *Wallonia* 19, nos. 3-4 (1911); Shepard Bancroft Clough, *A History of the Flemish Movement in Belgium: A Study in Nationalism* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1930), 159-169; Camille Huysmans, "The Flemish Question," *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* 9, no. 5 (1930), 680-690; Marie Bourke, "The Flemish University Question and the Development of a Modern Dutch-Language Culture in Belgium, 1890-1914" (DPhil dissertation, Oxford University, 1989); Alain Colignon, "Flamandisation de l'Université de Gand," *EMW*, notice no. 02431.

foreigners who constituted a significant portion of the student body would be forced to learn Flemish or cease their studies there, the subtext being that most would choose the latter. In addition, the extirpation of French from Ghent would prevent the spread of learning and culture by removing the vehicle by which so much scholarly work was transmitted worldwide. In one particular passage, concerns about prestige and the extent of the field of cultural production are evident:

the project which some persons entertain, of excluding French from [the University] would... not only accentuate of the separation of the country into two parts with different languages and customs, but [also] raise a barrier between Belgium and one of the great civilized peoples... with whom [Belgium] has always maintained steady relations...³⁴

Sometimes the language was bombastic: the Union pour la Défense de la Langue Française à l'Université de Gand claimed that replacing French with Dutch at Ghent would be "a crime of *lèse-civilisation*, a crime of *lèse-patrie*, and a crime of *lèse-cité*."³⁵

The German-Speaking Belgians³⁶

Though it did not occupy anywhere near as large a place in the Walloon imaginary as did the Flemish (or "*flamingant*") threat, the small German-speaking community in the south of Belgium, near the border with the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, also served as a foil to Walloon notions of *francité*.³⁷ Godefroid Kurth, the Catholic historian from Arlon mentioned above, was active in the Deutscher Verein, a group of local notables formed in 1893 who wanted to promote the use of German as a cultural and administrative language in the region. Harkening back to the anecdote that

³⁴ "La lutte contre la défrancisation de l'Université de Gand," *L'Anti-flamingant* 1, no. 1 (15 April 1911), 12-13.

³⁵ Quoted in Clough, 168.

³⁶ The following paragraphs draw heavily on Jean-Marie Triffaux, *Combats pour la langue dans le Pays d'Arlon: Une minorité oubliée?* (Arlon, Belgium: Éditions "La vie arlonnaise" and Institut Archéologique du Luxembourg, 2002), 111-167.

³⁷ This does not refer to the cantons of Eupen and Saint-Vith which Belgium annexed after World War I, but the area around Arlon where the demotic language was a form of Luxemburgish. Today, this latter region gives no legal recognition to the German language.

opened the first chapter, Kurth's "Germanic" origins rankled some Walloon scholars and led them to consider Kurth suspect.

The Deutscher Verein's small, elite membership was uniformly Catholic in political tendency. Some of the original members, though not Kurth himself, were concerned about the dominance of the Liberals in local politics, whom some German-speaking Belgian essayists accused of trying to "expand and reinforce the language of Voltaire, judged unhealthy for Christian morality. For these Arlonnais, only the Catholic Church preserved and defended the local mother tongue and traditions..."³⁸ However, Kurth took pains to note that the Deutscher Verein was not anti-French language or anti-Walloon, and that the Belgian patriotism of its members and of German-speaking Belgians in general was beyond reproach. The Deutscher Verein made mostly symbolic attempts to create German-language secondary schools in the region, force the hiring of German-language public servants in the area, effect the translation of all national-level legislation into German, and promote local literary production in German. On a small scale, the Deutscher Verein did achieve success in organizing cultural events in the provinces of Liège and Luxembourg (not the Grand-Duchy).

The actions of the Deutscher Verein quickly became suspect in the eyes of French-speakers, especially those sympathetic to the Liberals. After Kurth publicly denounced the supposed mistreatment of German-speaking defendants in criminal cases, paralleling the Coucke and Goethals affair of 1860, several anonymous pamphlets were distributed starting in August 1906, claiming to defend the rights of Francophones in the region and accusing Kurth and the Deutscher Verein of targeting French-speakers as a way of attacking the Liberals. The author accused these Catholic notables of going on a "job hunt [*chasse aux emplois*]," as they would be the only people with the educational and linguistic expertise to fill government posts which required French-German

³⁸ Triffaux, 111-112.

bilingualism. Here again, the preoccupation with state-related employment as well as the ideological clash over "French" ideas comes into play, adding several layers to the "linguistic" conflict between French-speakers and Belgians of a different mother tongue.

Here as elsewhere the most public opponent of Kurth was Maurice Wilmotte. In 1908, with the help of the French-speaking mayor of Arlon and a local secondary school teacher, Wilmotte organized a "Congress of the French Language" in Arlon. Wilmotte specifically chose the rather sleepy town in the Ardennes as a symbolic move, as some in the German-speaking community referred to it as the "Capital of German-Speaking Belgium," a choice of words which Wilmotte found repugnant. Wilmotte invited guests from France, Swiss Romandy, French Indochina, and Québec to emphasize the "international" aspect of the French language. This 1908 Congress was sponsored by the Association Internationale pour la Culture et l'Extension de la Langue Française, an elite group of men of letters from various countries who wrote in French, founded by Wilmotte, whose membership numbered around one hundred.³⁹

Official Congress publications used rhetoric similar to that seen in other Walloon literature, stressing for example that Arlonnais did not speak "German" but "merely" a patois – an argument that mirrors Walloon denigration of Flemish as a group of mutually incomprehensible dialects with little relation to cultured Dutch. Instead, the language of culture and public life in this Germanic area was indeed French, paralleling the situation in Alsace and Lorraine before the unfortunate events of 1870. Wilmotte would consistently paint Kurth and the Deutscher Verein as a Trojan horse for pan-German overtures, but the solidly Catholic organization disliked the Protestantism of Prussian society and repeatedly spurned public overtures from pan-German organizations in the Wilhelmine Reich. French historian Marie-Thérèse Bitsch concurs with this conclusion, saying that while the press in both Francophone Belgium and in France may have devoted a few articles

³⁹ Jean-François Potelle, "Association Internationale pour la Culture et l'Extension de la Langue Française," *EMW*, notice no. 00149.

denouncing the "clericalism" and "pan-Germanism" of the German-speaking Belgians' demands for more rights, and that a comparably small number of articles in the German press expressed sympathy for the "plight" of the German-speaking Belgians, in the end, "generalized indifference seemed to carry the day."⁴⁰

Despite the potential for "anti-Belgian" or even annexationist ideas to emerge from these different forms of Francophilia, such discourse almost never developed outside of a few isolated individuals. Indeed, the focus on the superiority of French culture was more often than not couched in the language of Belgian patriotism, claiming that French served as a kind of national glue holding Flemings and Walloons together. It is to that Belgian patriotic ideal of the Walloon Movement which we now turn.

⁴⁰ Marie-Thérèse Bitsch, *La Belgique entre la France et l'Allemagne, 1905-1914* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1994), 336-338.

CHAPTER 5 BELGIAN PRIDE

A cursory glance at the language of the small Walloon Movement before World War I might lead one to believe that the Walloon Movement was apathetic or even antipathetic towards the Belgian state. With a few scattered exceptions such as the aforementioned *rattachistes*, however, this was certainly not the case. The rhetoric of Walloon intellectuals was more often than not couched in terms that showed a deep concern for Belgium – though perhaps not the same Belgium which more moderate Walloons and Flemings imagined.

Walloons were of course not alone in placing their regional activism in a Belgian context. As Jean Stengers and Éliane Gubin note, before World War I, excepting a tiny group of radicals, "the Flemish movement distinguished itself from other 'nationalist' movements in Europe by the fact that it expressed itself in the name of Belgian national sentiment and presented racial duality as a guarantee of Belgian independence."¹

This chapter will examine how Walloon rhetoric vis-à-vis the Flemish movement reflected a preoccupation with preserving the "Belgium of 1830," seen as a liberal, unitary, Francophone state: Indeed, these Walloon activists "spoke both in the name of their movement and in the name of their ideal image of Belgium."² As will become evident, the vision of Belgium was necessarily exclusionary towards the Flemings and predicated on several historical myths, such as the supposed predominance of Walloons in the Revolution of 1830 against the Dutch.³ Still, this Walloon discourse had a firm grounding in *Belgian* patriotism, a point which contemporary scholars often forget or elide, portraying Belgium as an ill-matched marriage, doomed to divorce from the start.

¹ Jean Stengers and Éliane Gubin, *Le grand siècle de la nationalité belge, de 1830 à 1918* (Brussels: Éditions Racine, 2002), 117.

² Astrid Von Busekist, *La Belgique: Politique des langues et construction de l'État, de 1780 à nos jours* (Paris: Duculot, 1998), 219.

³ Jean Stengers, "La Révolution de 1830," in *Les grands mythes de l'histoire de Belgique, de Flandre et de Wallonie*, ed. Anne Morelli (Brussels: Éditions Vie Ouvrière, 1995), 139-148.

Loyal Walloons

When in the early 1900s the assorted Walloon leagues were trying to decide on a Walloon flag to symbolize the "unity" of Wallonia – and counter the "*flamingants*" adoption of a Flemish flag – several members of the Walloon Movement criticized the decision to create a Walloon flag at all. While some thought that it would be too difficult to find a flag that would please the various regions of Wallonia, others argued that a Walloon flag would entail "the risk of passing for 'bad Belgians,' 'separatists.'" Those who agreed with the idea of a Walloon flag often couched their decision in terms of Belgian patriotism, such as Armand Libiouille, Socialist senator from Charleroi, who wished to add the Belgian colors (yellow, red, and black) to the Walloon flag, along with the dates 1830, for the Belgian Revolution, and 1912, for the creation of the Assemblée Wallonne.⁴

After the creation of a Walloon flag (a red rooster on a yellow background), the Walloon organizations repeatedly reminded their members that it was not a separatist symbol. Indeed, one of the first events in which the flag was publicly displayed was the "*Joyeuse entrée*" (a royal visit) of King Albert and Queen Elisabeth of the Belgians to Liège on 13 July 1913. On the same day, the Union des Femmes de Wallonie sent a silk and fish-scale fan with the Walloon cock on it to the household of the Queen, addressed "To their Sovereign, [her loyal] Walloons forever [*À leur Souveraine – Les Wallons toujours*]." Hector Chainaye hoped that Walloon flags would be raised for the *Joyeuse entrée* of the King and Queen to Mons later that year, accompanied by "Long live the King! Long live Wallonia!" An article in the small Walloon journal *La Lutte wallonne* claimed that the flying of the Belgian and Walloon flags together would "manifest [the Walloons'] enlightened patriotism... It is fitting that the Walloons declare loudly that they are, *more than anyone*, attached to Belgian nationality."⁵ The adoption of the Walloon flag was still uncommon before World War I, and even less frequent after the war, because of problems in making flags, popular ignorance of the flag, and

⁴ Yves Moreau, "La genèse du drapeau wallon," *Enquêtes du Musée de la Vie Wallonne* nos. 185-188 (1987), 131, 143-145.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 160-161, 163n144, 168n162, 172n182. Emphasis added.

probably most importantly, a feeling among many "average" Walloons that a separate Walloon flag was unnecessary or even harmful to their Belgian loyalties. Still, the language accompanying its deployment is markedly patriotic in respect to Belgium. Indeed, in some cases, the rhetoric surrounding the Walloon flag intimates that the Walloons are in fact *better* Belgians than "anyone else;" the reference is undoubtedly to the "*flamingants*."

One small but telling anecdote illustrates the extent to which Walloon identity was inextricable from Belgium before the First World War. In late 1909, King Leopold II died and was succeeded by his young nephew, Albert I. In early 1910, the "Intermédiaire wallon" section of the journal *Wallonia* – a forum for questions on various aspects of Walloon life – hosted a small discussion on the King's pronunciation of the constitutional oath (the first time in which the oath was taken in Dutch as well as French). In one issue, a contributor (signed "Légia") noted that while *La Meuse* (a Liberal Liégeois newspaper) confirmed that the new King took his oath "with somewhat Walloon intonations," *L'Indépendance Belge* (a Brussels newspaper) claimed that he took it with "a light Flemish accent." "Légia" hinted that it may be possible that different people were simply projecting what they want to hear into the mouth of the King. A few months later, a letter posted in the same section of *Wallonia* (signed "A witness [*un témoin*]") confirmed that, having had the honor to attend the King's swearing-in ceremony, "the King's Walloon accent struck [him] from the start." While at first the witness believed he was suffering from "quite unexpected chauvinist vanity," he noted that a friend of his from Brussels, son of a Fleming and a Walloon, also noted the King's Walloon accent.⁶

What can be gleaned from this small exchange, seemingly banal and bordering on the absurd? For one, it shows once again the elite nature of these Walloon journals and groups. The anonymous eyewitness of the swearing-in ceremony (evidently also a reader of *Wallonia*) must have occupied a rather prominent position in society, as he and his friend were both present at such a

⁶ *Wallonia* 18, no. 1 (1910), 24; *Wallonia* 18, nos. 3-4 (1910), 95-96.

high-level state occasion. This short exchange on the King's accent also shows the continuing reference to Belgium as an arbiter of pride for Walloons. In a political sphere which – according to these Walloon activists – was dominated by Flemings, would it not validate the Walloons to hear their accent coming out of the King's mouth?

Linguistic Liberty

One of the ways in which Walloon intellectuals' concern for Belgium becomes apparent is the concern, feigned or genuine, which they demonstrated for the intellectual life of the Flemish. A common argument found in Walloon writings of the time hinges on the usefulness of French language and culture in Flanders, both as a "cement of national unity" for all Belgians as well as a vehicle for obtaining scientific and philosophical knowledge that would be allegedly unavailable to monolingual Flemish-speakers.

Jules Destrée's "Lettre au Roi," which outlines a series of supposed outrages in which the Flemings "took" something from the Walloons, his first complaint is "they have taken Flanders from us." While conceding that "it is theirs [the Flemings]" he wistfully adds "it was also a little bit ours." Since the founding of the Belgian state, Walloons had been "confident in the Belgian illusion" and if their lives happened to take them to Flanders, "we found ourselves a little bit at home in Ghent or Antwerp." Since the numerous laws giving legal equality to Dutch in Belgium, though, things have changed. Destrée claims as of the time of his writing (after the victory of the Catholics over the Liberal-Socialist electoral pact in 1912), "we feel like foreigners in Flanders, at least as much as in The Hague or Amsterdam," because of the (allegedly) exclusively Dutch-language character which Flanders was developing. Even "Flemings who want to keep contact with French

civilization are looked down upon and scoffed at" and Destrée worries that this will lead to "the extinction of the last seat of French culture in Flanders, the University of Ghent."⁷

Maurice Wilmotte, the gallophile opponent of Godefroid Kurth and the "*flamingants*" as well as friend and associate of Jules Destrée esteemed that the latter had gone too far in writing his "Lettre au Roi." While Wilmotte admitted that the Letter astutely articulated a series of Walloon grievances, he also thought that administrative separation would entail "supplemental concerns" for which there was no need. Indeed, Wilmotte argued, "there is interest for French culture in the Flemish portion of the country. Separation would make those who enjoy it [French culture] conquered and captive, treated like Alsatians in Germany."⁸ Here again, we see the reference to "Alsace-Lorraine" and with it the allusion to "linguistic constraint."

Many other Walloons and Francophone Flemings, we must remember, wholly supported language rights for Flemish-speakers.⁹ Henri Pirenne, certainly no *flamingant*, saw Dutch as a necessity for those who would do academic work on Belgium. Célestin Demblon, the Walloon-language poet and Socialist parliamentary deputy was, as seen in Chapter 3, a steadfast proponent of Flemish language rights. Fulgence Masson of Mons in Hainaut, a Liberal parliamentary deputy, proposed in 1909 that Walloons should learn Flemish, causing the Ligue Wallonne du Brabant to have anti-Masson posters put up around Mons.¹⁰

However, many members of the Walloon Movement (which often included *fransquillons* in Flanders) viewed the legislative "imposition" of Flemish as unjustified state meddling in the lives of its citizens. Thus, as the Belgian Constitution in its Article 23 specified that the use of languages was a matter of personal choice, the predominance of French in a *laissez-faire* state meant that it was

⁷ Jules Destrée, "Lettre au Roi sur la séparation de la Wallonie et de la Flandre," *Revue de Belgique* (August 1912), 746-747.

⁸ Maurice Wilmotte, *La Culture Française en Belgique* (Paris: H. Champion, 1912), 131, 133.

⁹ For an example prior to the period studied here, see Yvette Stoops, "Een Waals verdediger van de Vlaamse taalstrijders: Victor Delecourt," *Taal en Tongvaal* 13 (1961), 127-134.

¹⁰ Paul Delforge, "Ligue Wallonne de Mons (1907)," *Encyclopédie du Mouvement Wallon* (CD-ROM) (Charleroi, Belgium: Institut Jules Destrée, 2003) (hereafter *EMW*), notice no. 04134.

"natural" that the language of Voltaire would continue to gain ground in relation to the "patois" of Flanders, as Flemings were obviously choosing it of their own free will. Indeed, some French-speakers felt that "Article 23 had been written mainly as a reaction against [Dutch King] William I's attempts to require Belgian civil servants to learn Dutch, and was therefore a sort of historic contract to use French."¹¹ In this perspective, the call for legal protection of Flemish was tantamount to breaking the "pact of 1830."

The Revolution of 1830

The lawyer, Walloon activist, and folklore enthusiast Edmond Schoonbroodt began his short "Historical Sketch of the Walloon Movement" by claiming that "one of the principal causes of the Revolution of 1830, during which our fathers spilled a generous amount of blood so that a certain number of Belgians of 1913 could call them bumbling fools [*fous maladroits*] was the obligation, for all citizens, to know Dutch."¹² This bitter passage, which sets the tone for the whole sixteen-page exposé, thus introduces a number of key elements in Walloon rhetoric. First and foremost is the Walloon identification with the Belgian Revolution of 1830. While the referent of "our" in "our fathers" is unclear in this passage, it would be reasonable to conclude from the rest of Schoonbroodt's work, as well as that of his fellow members of the Walloon Movement, that "our" refers to "Walloons." We also see the opposition of "Belgian" to "Dutch," both linguistically, in terms of the obligation to know Dutch, and politically, a theme Schoonbroodt returns to when he lists "combating the rapprochement advocated by the promoters of the Dutch-Belgian entente"¹³ as one of the goals of the Walloon Movement, referring to a proposal for trade and defense agreements

¹¹ Arthur Edward Curtis, "New Perspectives on the History of the Language Problem in Belgium" (PhD dissertation, University of Oregon, 1971), 243-244.

¹² Edmond Schoonbroodt, "Historique du Mouvement Wallon," *Moniteur officiel du Mouvement Wallon* (August-October 1913), 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 14.

with the Netherlands. Finally, Schoonbroodt makes the common argument of the Walloon Movement that "*flamingants*" are less patriotic, or even anti-patriotic in regards to Belgium than are the Walloons.¹⁴

Jeroen Janssens has recently examined the manner in which different groups within Belgium celebrated (or did not celebrate) the holidays commemorating the independence of Belgium: the "September Days" which recall the beginning of the Belgian Revolution in 1830, and the National Holiday of Belgium, 21 July, marking the anniversary of King Leopold I's oath of loyalty to the Belgian constitution in 1831. He claims that in the three decades preceding World War I, there evolved "Belgian, Walloon, Flemish, and socialist version[s]" of these holidays. The "Walloon" version, argues Janssens, was focused on Belgium as a Francophone state. In 1890, one of the first small Walloon groups to form in Brussels held a demonstration on the Place des Martyrs on the occasion of the National Holiday of 21 July: "The Walloon demonstration on the occasion of the July Holiday of 1890 undoubtedly took its meaning [*ontleende haar betekenis duidelijk*] in this context from the protection of the French language." Even though this "protest" saw marchers carry the Belgian and French tricolor flags side by side and invite Frenchmen as guests of honor, it was

solely a display for the protection of the French language and was not a "*réunioniste*" manifestation which desired union with France. The Walloon Movement would rarely furnish real criticism of the July Holiday before World War I, as it did not preclude the existence of a Belgian nationalism, and even encouraged it.¹⁵

During a parliamentary debate on 22 May 1913 concerning the use of languages in the Belgian army,¹⁶ Jules Destrée conceded that Flemings may have had some legitimate grievances against the preponderance of French in the early Belgian state, as the "friendship of France and the

¹⁴ Schoonbroodt does concede that "a number of *flamingants* are patriots and have the wish, parallel to ours, to remain Belgians," though many others are not patriotic. *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵ Jeroen Janssens, "Ieder zijn eigen verleden: De nationale feesten en de cultus van de Septemberdagen van 1830 (1830-1914)," *Volkskunde* 104, no. 1 (2003), 132, 137.

¹⁶ On linguistic legislation relative to the army during this period, see Richard Boijen, *De taalwetgeving in het Belgische leger (1830-1940)* (Brussels: Centre d'histoire militaire, 1992), 35-62.

cooperation of French troops" helped support the Belgian Revolution of 1830, "that surprising revolution which was in large part the work of Walloons..." Destrée quickly added that any recourse to which the Flemings were entitled did not extend to "the right... to oppress the other half of the country."¹⁷ Destrée's remarks present an excellent example of the process which Jean Stengers has labeled "The Belgian Revolution becom[ing] Walloon," reinforced both by the politicized use and abuse of history by Walloons to accuse "*flamingants*" of insufficient patriotism, as well as the perversely complementary efforts of a handful of Flemish radicals to downplay the role of Flemings in the Belgian Revolution.¹⁸

L'Âme wallonne often featured short poems in Walloon – often satirical of perceived "*flamingant*" excesses – as well as notices for Walloon art and literature contests. This same periodical also frequently published short death notices for veterans of the 1830.¹⁹ It also published pieces in Walloon dialect such as "*Li d'zîr d'on Combattant di 1830* [The Wish of a Veteran of 1830]," appearing in the issue of 24 June 1899, in which a dying veteran of the Revolution wishes to "defend our liberty" as in 1830, against the "*flamingands*." The poem ends by urging readers to "defend your patois!"²⁰ Here, Belgian and Walloon identities and loyalties are easily conflated – as are those of the Flemings and the Dutch. This piece also stresses a certain idea of "liberty," especially in regards to language, for which Walloons had sacrificed in 1830 and which Article 23 of the Belgian Constitution was construed to protect.

In his study of the stereotypes of the Fleming in Wallonia, Yves Quairiaux examines the trope of the "Walloon Revolution of 1830" by looking at portrayals of "Flemish ingratitude" in popular Walloon-language theatre. In one piece from 1892, an old, wounded veteran of 1830

¹⁷ Jules Destrée, *Discours parlementaires* (Brussels: Henri Lamertin, 1914), 649-650.

¹⁸ Stengers, "La Révolution de 1830," 141.

¹⁹ Cf. *L'Âme wallonne* (18 February 1899), col. 103 (2 notices); *Ibid.* (1 April 1899), col. 198 (2 notices); *Ibid.* (22 Apr 1899) col. 245; *Ibid.*, (16 September 1899), col. 587; *Ibid.*, (25 February 1900), col. 115.

²⁰ Alfred Bailly, "Li d'zîr d'on Combattant di 1830," *L'Âme wallonne* (24 June 1899), col. 397.

"declares himself ready to take up the fight against the new '*Wiâmes*!'" This reference to "new Willems" (ie. Willem I, King of the Netherlands in 1830) alludes to the "*flamingants*." Several other plays feature a Walloon character upbraiding a Fleming, arguing that while the Walloons were fighting against King Willem's troops, the Flemings stayed at home.²¹

When, in 1913, the newly-created Assemblée Wallonne, intended to be a shadow "Walloon Parliament" across political party lines – though its membership was heavily left-liberal and socialist – chose a Walloon "national" holiday, they decided on the end of September, to commemorate the Belgian Revolution of 1830. In *La Défense wallonne*, the official organ of the Assemblée, we read that this date is pertinent because the revolutionary spirit was "spontaneous, it was Walloon above all, it was general in Wallonia." The report goes on to insinuate that the "*flamingants*" have been less than patriotic: "It was not in Wallonia that one has seen the legitimacy of Belgium contested, the events of 1830 regretted... nor was it in Wallonia that one will see national patriotism weakened by regional patriotism." Thus, *Walloon* regional patriotism, unlike that of the Flemings, "reinforce[s] Belgian national patriotism."²²

The valorization of Walloon regionalism and the concomitant denigration of Flemish regionalism appear repeatedly in Walloon discourse. Destrée, in the previously mentioned debate on languages in the Belgian army, expressed this sentiment in no uncertain terms in the Chamber of Representatives. Contrasting what he portrayed as the Flemish insistence on territorialism in the use of languages with the Walloon (or more accurately, French-speaking) emphasis on personal choice, he remarked that "Flemish regionalism is a backwards regionalism, [a regionalism] of slavery; whereas mine is modern, [a regionalism] of liberty."²³

²¹ Yves Quairiaux, *L'image du Flamand en Wallonie (1830-1914): Essai d'analyse sociale et politique* (Brussels: Éditions Labor, 2006), 107-108.

²² "La fête de Wallonie," *La Défense wallonne* (1913), 455-456.

²³ Destrée, *Discours parlementaires*, 657.

The literary review *La Jeune Wallonie*, which often waded into political issues, reported on a Walloon demonstration of 19 February 1911 in Namur. Bands played *La Brabançonne* (the Belgian national anthem) as well as *Li Bia Boquet* (a song in the Namurois Walloon dialect). Pamphlets distributed to attendees read:

WALLOONS! STAND UP!

Our fathers made [the Revolution of] 1830 against King Willem and the Dutch, the *flamingants* of those days, who wanted to impose their language and to systematically keep them [the Walloons' fathers] out of public employment. Today's *flamingants* also want to impose their language on us, they take all the public employment; they will hinder your children's access to administrative careers; they will come to your home to tear you away from your [civil service] posts; they will starve you; they will make you the laughing stock of serious people abroad...²⁴

The tone is hyperbolic, to be sure; however this article nicely encapsulates the multilayered issues of pride at work in the Walloon circles of the time. The demonstration evoked pro-Belgian sentiments in connecting *La Brabançonne* with a Walloon folk song, as well as by identifying the Walloons' forefathers with the Belgian revolution. In addressing fears over public employment and bureaucratic careers, the pamphlet inadvertently conveyed the social status anxiety of ambitious sons of the bourgeoisie which fueled their engagement in Walloon causes. The pamphlet also spoke to the fear that the image of a Flemish Belgium would overshadow their appurtenance to French culture and subject them to ridicule when abroad.

The argument that the Revolution of 1830 was primarily a Walloon enterprise engendered a corollary argument that the "*flamingants*" of the turn of the century were the equivalent of the Dutch and the hated King Willem of 1830. As Chantal Kesteloot writes, "for the early Walloon Movement at the end of the nineteenth century, Belgium was a natural point of reference." This identification was greatly facilitated by a reading of history in which "the Walloons... had made Belgium." Indeed, this vision allowed for a "double strategy" which helped "support [the Walloon Movement's] right to

²⁴ "La défense wallonne," *La Jeune Wallonie* 6, no. 7 (February 1911), 1.

exist and undermine[d] that of their opponents." Thus, "the Flemish movement was nothing other than the vanguard of the earlier enemy, the 'Hollanders,' whom the Walloons had so bravely fought."²⁵ The figure of Charles Rogier, the Liégeois who played a leading role in the Revolution, would become "a prototype for Walloon freedom fighters" as the Walloon opposition to linguistic legislation became assimilated to the fight against the language policy of King Willem I of the Netherlands in 1830.²⁶

Unity

The Walloon Movement's reference to the Revolution of 1830 was not uniformly anti-Flemish, though. Almost all Walloon of the time would classify themselves as having no enmity whatsoever towards "the average Fleming," merely against the "*flamingants*." Walloons often used the Revolution of 1830 to hearken to a Golden Age of *Belgian* togetherness, reflecting what the French historian Raoul Girardet calls the myth of "this great and noble unity of the Fatherland."²⁷ A short notice in *L'Organe wallon*, one of several ephemeral Walloon journals which emerged in the aftermath of 1898 law on the equality of Flemish, looked back wistfully on the days of the Revolution when "we finally enjoyed the independence of which the old Belgians, *without distinction of language*, had so long dreamed." Indeed, there could be no "traces of disunion" found in the events of 1830, nor in other events in Belgian history prior to independence: "For fourteen centuries, Flemings and Walloons lived the same life, they experienced the same fortunes, gained the same liberties... in the middle of all of these events, one searches in vain for men from two races."²⁸

²⁵ Chantal Kesteloot, "Eerst Belg, dan Vlaming en Waal: De Vlaamse en de Waalse Beweging en de Revolutie van 1830," in *Broedertwist: België en Nederland en de erfenis van 1830*, ed. Peter Rietberge, Tom Verschaffel, and Jan de Hond (Zwolle, Netherlands: Waanders, 2005), 97.

²⁶ Janssens, 138. See also Philippe Carlier, "La Wallonie à la recherche d'une fête nationale: Un épisode du mouvement wallon à l'aube du XX^e siècle," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 68, no. 4 (1990), 902-921, esp. 917-918.

²⁷ Raoul Girardet, *Mythes et mythologies politiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 155. Girardet borrows the phrase from the famed nineteenth-century French historian Jules Michelet.

²⁸ "Voix d'outre-tombe," *L'Organe wallon* (20 February 1898), 2-3. Emphasis added.

Surrounded by other articles attacking "*flamingants*" and the perceived injustice of linguistic legislation, this piece called for Belgian unity in response to the supposedly divisive action of a handful of radicals, alien to the Belgian tradition.

In 1898 – fourteen years before the defeat of the Liberal-Socialist electoral alliance and his pleas for administrative separation – Jules Destrée voted for the "law of equality" as a sign of national solidarity, but not without heavy reservations. During parliamentary deliberations on the law, he invoked the case of France, alluding to a candidate for the French Parliament who "promised to speak Breton in the Chamber." If this trend continued, "Toulouse and Marseille would demand Provençal, the deputy from Bayonne would speak Basque, and the representatives from the colonies would trot out [*arboreront*] exotic speeches."²⁹ Destrée's evocation of a French Tower of Babel was clearly meant as a warning for Belgium. Indeed, were not the Flemings setting a dangerous precedent? Did not this "logic lead us to... the use of German in official [Belgian] publications" (alluding to the German-speakers of Luxembourg province)? Surely, Destrée added sarcastically, such a measure would require Gothic characters instead of "foreign" Roman type.³⁰ The underlying tone of Destrée's words leaves no doubt that Flemish "extravagances" are a danger not only for Wallonia (and for Walloon civil servants' chances for promotion), but for *Belgian* unity and concord as a whole.

The seventy-fifth anniversary of Belgian independence in 1905 gave another impetus for Walloons to stress their attachment to the Belgian state. Julien Delaite, one of the more active members of the Ligue Wallonne de Liège, stated at the Walloon Congress held in that city during 1905 that "we are Belgians, and we want to remain Belgians" while adding "but we also want to be Walloons above all." For Delaite, the best way to save Belgian unity, which has produced "our seventy-five years of peace, our flourishing material situation," would be "in the interest of all

²⁹ Destrée, *Discours parlementaires*, 642.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 639.

Belgians that there be but one official language, that there be but one common language, French." During the same year, Maurice Wilmotte also argued that Belgium was indeed a nation – and that the best way to heal "racial and linguistic conflicts" would be to assert the supremacy of French culture in Belgium. Thus, we can see that the Walloon Movement's Belgian patriotism often rested on "the defense of a unitary, homogeneously French-speaking Belgium" in the words of one researcher.³¹

The Walloon Movement's concern for Belgian unity vis-à-vis the use of Dutch in Belgium was extended to the Belgian motto itself. In English, the Belgian motto is "Union creates strength" – in French, "L'Union fait force" and in Dutch, "Eendracht maakt macht." While reminding readers that "the Walloon Movement is only defensive," the first number of the short-lived *Le Coq hardy*, an ephemeral journal of politics and culture, pontificated on the "irony" of having a bilingual motto promoting union, in a country founded in revolt from the Dutch.³² Walloon publications throughout this period belittled the Flemings' use of "Eendracht maakt macht," which they characterized as a cacophonous mockery of "L'Union fait force." This critique becomes more resonant when paired with the belief, common in the Walloon Movement, that a polity (Belgium) needs one common language as a source of unity. Indeed, many native French-speakers saw the imposition of Flemish as a step backwards because even the most devoted "*flamingants*" – who were all well-educated men – spoke and wrote French with great ease. For example, Francophone Liberal parliamentarian Jules Bara excoriated his Flemish colleague Edward Coremans for demanding the use of Flemish in official life, as the latter spoke French not only in Parliament but also in his legal practice. What, then, did Coremans have to complain about?³³

³¹ Quotations taken from Christian Eymael, "Le septante-cinquième anniversaire de la Belgique dans la perspective du nationalisme: Phénomène latent et idéologie en formation" (Licentiate thesis, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1995), 222.

³² Georges Durempart, "Wallons toujours," *Le Coq hardy: Revue du Mouvement Wallon* 1, no. 1 (1913), 2.

³³ See Curtis, 234-236.

This concern for national (Belgian) unity motivated even the Assemblée Wallonne, under the control of the devoted Walloon federalist Julien Delaite. During a debate on the petitions to transform the University of Ghent into a Dutch-language institution, some members conceded that a *new* Flemish-medium university (in Antwerp, for example) might be defensible, but that changing the linguistic regime of the university of Ghent was out of the question: "Suppose that our *flamingants* succeed: where would we be? One of the links which unites Belgians will have disappeared." While claiming that "all the Belgian bourgeoisie speaks French," the Assemblée envisioned a future in which the Belgian middle-class "will on one side only do it [speak French] with great difficulty, while on the other, no one will speak any Flemish." How then could Flemings and Walloons see themselves as the same people? "Germanizing [*sic*] the University of Ghent is working to make the two races, Walloon and Flemish, foreign [to one another]."³⁴ Even while peppering it with strong Francophone-chauvinistic overtones in relation to Flemish, the Assemblée Wallonne couched its argument against changing the University of Ghent in *Belgian* terms.

Administrative Separation³⁵

Given the rather unexpected and radical effects that the idea of administrative separation produced once "unleashed" by the Germans during World War I, it is not readily apparent that those Walloons who proposed administrative separation at one point or another, such as Albert Mockel in a footnote to a study of the "half-breed" Belgian author Camille Lemonnier in 1897,³⁶ Julien Delaite in a 1898 tract, Liberal Liégeois Senator Émile Dupont in a moment of frustration on

³⁴ *La Défense wallonne* (1913), 294.

³⁵ Rigo de Nolf, "De federalistische stroming in België in het begin van de XX^e eeuw (1900-1914)," *Res publica* 8, no.3 (1966), 304-320; Luc Mullier, "'Lettre au Roi' de Jules Destrée, août 1912: Étude du contenu et des réactions de l'opinion," (Licentiate thesis, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1977); Freddy Joris, *Les Wallons et la réforme de l'État: De l'État unitaire à l'État "communautaire et régional," 1890-1970* (Mont-sur-Marchienne, Belgium: Institut Jules Destrée, 1998); Paul Delforge, "Fédéralisme et Mouvement Wallon," *EMW*, notice no. 02361.

³⁶ Albert Mockel, "Camille Lemonnier et la Belgique," *Mercure de France* (April 1897), 101n1.

the Senate floor in 1910, and Jules Destrée in his 1912 "Lettre au Roi," all did so fully believing in the necessity of *preserving* Belgium.

Mockel, explaining the "racial" differences which lent different flavors to Walloon and Flemish artistic production, and how they interacted in the work of Lemonnier, portrayed Flemings and Walloons as intractably different, the former Catholic and ponderous, the latter free-thinking and impetuous. He claims that "Flanders, politically linked to Wallonia, is absolutely dissimilar to her administrative sister," and that there persists a mutual enmity between the two. "For Walloons," says Mockel, "Dutch seems as difficult as Chinese, and they revolt at being practically forced to learn it if they want to obtain employment." Still, there exists "a remedy: the complete administrative separation of Flanders and Wallonia, with a parliament for each, and the union of the two small states under a federal chamber of which each will elect half." This, continues Mockel, would lead to an "ultra-conservative and Catholic" Flanders and a "Liberal and Socialist" Wallonia, but it would also mean that "the constant conflicts of interest" between "north" and "south" in Belgium would disappear. Still, regrets Mockel, "no one in Belgium dares speak of it."³⁷ Mockel's discussion of administrative separation shows the concern over the Catholic government (seen as reliant on rural Flemish votes) which had been in power uninterrupted since 1884. Mockel was correct in that "no one in Belgium dared speak of" administrative separation, besides himself. However, in 1912 – fifteen years after Mockel's proposal and after the strengthening of the Catholic government in recent parliamentary elections – Jules Destrée would revisit these ideas.

Jules Destrée, in his "Lettre au Roi" which has in recent years become a touchstone for Walloon regionalists and proponents of federalism, couches his appeal in terms of the greater good of Belgium: "Would not a Belgium made of the union of two independent and free peoples, in agreement precisely because of this mutual independence, be an infinitely stronger state than a

³⁷ Mockel, "Camille Lemonnier et la Belgique," 100-101, 101n1.

Belgium wherein one half believes itself to be oppressed by the other half?"³⁸ Destrée, the socialist and gallophile, affirmed his (conditional) Belgian patriotism during a parliamentary elocution in 1913: "I love my country, gentlemen. I still love Belgium and even though [I am] a republican, I prefer to live under King Albert than under the presidency of my colleague [French president-elect Raymond] Poincaré. I love Belgium, but on the condition... of not seeing *my aspirations eternally thwarted* by an eternally dominating government."³⁹

Destrée's reference to "thwarted aspirations" is telling. His call for administrative separation can be seen as an attempt on his part to end what he perceived as the "blocked mobility" of monolingual Walloons in a unitary Belgian state. By creating a legally "French-only" Walloon space, Destrée could assure ambitious Walloons that there would be a milieu in which they could climb socially, without worrying about competition from (typically bilingual) educated Flemings as they would have to in a generally bilingual Belgium.

Destrée's audacious letter to the King was not universally accepted, or even appreciated, in Walloon circles. After the Congrès Wallon of Liège in July 1912 and the publication of Destrée's letter the next month, the Walloon Movement had considered – though certainly not embraced with any unanimity – a hitherto unthinkable idea, as "the will [of these certain Walloons] to be masters of their own house [*sic*] outweighed the concern of safeguarding the French language in Flanders."⁴⁰ A large part of the Walloon Movement, of course, remained indifferent to Destrée's call for a rearrangement of the state structure of Belgium. The Assemblée Wallonne was technically "apolitical" and admitted members of all ideological orientations, although in practice it was almost exclusively Liberal and Socialist. The Assemblée tried to present itself as a sort of shadow government for Wallonia, engaging a wide range of issues deemed important to Walloons. This

³⁸ Destrée, "Lettre au Roi sur la séparation de la Wallonie et de la Flandre," 757.

³⁹ Session of 5 February 1913, cited in Stengers and Gubin, 137. Emphasis added.

⁴⁰ Philippe Carlier and Micheline Libon, "Congrès Wallon de 1912," *EMW*, notice no. 01226.

"officialization" – some might say "immobilization" – though, may have led the Assemblée to lose "a good part of its combativeness" and skirt controversial issues such as federalism. This seems likely, given that in 1913 the Assemblée counted 49 parliamentarians among its membership, who, unlike their colleague Destrée, were unlikely to endanger their political fortunes by espousing a radical idea such as splitting the country.⁴¹

Other members of the Walloon Movement went beyond indifference to Destrée's proposal to opposition. As seen earlier, Destrée's friend Maurice Wilmotte thought that the "Lettre au Roi" was a heartfelt, though inopportune, reaction to "extravagant" Flemish demands and would cause more trouble than it would be worth. Several months after it published the Letter, the Liberal *Revue de Belgique* opened its pages to one of the few Catholic members of the Walloon Movement, Maurice de Miomandre, a lawyer and member of the Ligue Wallonne du Brabant, to furnish a riposte to the Socialist deputy from Charleroi.⁴² De Miomandre's *bona fides* in many of the central tenets of the Walloon Movement was unquestionable: he was opposed to the transformation of the University of Ghent into a Flemish-language institution; he opposed most linguistic legislation which he saw as "*flamingant*;" he supported "maintaining the primacy of the French language in Belgium."⁴³

De Miomandre, however, could not countenance administrative separation. Walloon "separatism," he argued, was not born of linguistic grievances but instead a purely political affair: "The question of languages is but secondary. [Destrée *et al.*] speak above all about the Walloon ideal, Walloon consciousness, Walloon rationalism, lay education, the suppression of the plural vote..." Those Walloons such as Destrée who called for administrative separation are disappointed Liberals and Socialists who were showing their "political impotence" in the face of twenty-eight uninterrupted years of Catholic governments. De Miomandre argued that linguistic divisions are

⁴¹ Lothe, 202-204.

⁴² Maurice de Miomandre, "Contre la séparation administrative," *Revue de Belgique* (November 1912), 967-990.

⁴³ Paul Delforge, "Maurice de Miomandre," *EMW*, notice no. 01783.

much less important than ideological ones in Belgian public life, despite Destrée's arguments to the contrary. As de Miomandre observed, in the 1912 parliamentary elections, 40% of votes in Wallonia went to the Catholic party, while the Liberal-Socialist electoral alliance gained 34% of the votes in Flemish districts. De Miomandre went on to say that people from the same ideological camp who happen to speak different languages are still natural allies: "A Walloon Liberal is closer to a Flemish Liberal than to a Walloon Catholic."⁴⁴

The separation of Wallonia and Flanders "would destroy" any sense of equilibrium in Belgian politics, leading to "the degrading battle of regional and local passions, with their limited horizons and their lowness." Unknowingly hinting at a development that *did* come to pass after World War II, de Miomandre sarcastically suggests that one might as well split the three political parties (Socialist, Liberal, and Catholic) into Francophone and Flemish sections. De Miomandre concluded his argument against administrative separation with a renewed call for Belgian (Francophone) unity. Separation would entail allowing Flanders to become monolingually Dutch, abandoning the almost one million French-speakers living there, and "Flanders must not become another Holland." Should separation occur, de Miomandre argued that Walloons would be *forced* to learn Dutch to do business in Flanders, as French would be banned from public life in Flanders: "Would it not be regrettable to see our young men obliged... to spend years studying the Flemish language to be admitted as engineers in Ghent, Antwerp, or Hasselt?" Thus, Belgian unity must be maintained to spare Walloons from "the obligation of having to learn an inferior language."⁴⁵

De Miomandre's rebuttal to Destrée urged for Belgian unity while using the rhetoric developed by the Walloon Movement. Dutch was dismissed as a language of little utility which Walloons must not be "forced" to learn, while French was portrayed as the language of national unity. This complex use of arguments which could be described as "particular" to Walloon

⁴⁴ De Miomandre, "Contre la séparation administrative," *passim*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

regionalism in the context of a plea for national unity reminds us that Walloon regionalism is perhaps best understood, at least before World War I, not as a coherent political "movement" but instead as a "discourse," a way of discussing Belgian national identity which provides a rhetorical arsenal for use in political arguments.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS

Anthropologist and political scientist James C. Scott has argued that in the years following the events of late 1917, Lenin and other Soviet officials were able to construct a coherent historical narrative which "stress[ed] the agency, purpose, and genius of the revolutionary leadership and minimize[d] contingency." This was possible "because things *do* turn out in a certain way after all, with certain patterns or causes that are clear in retrospect, [so] it is not surprising that the outcome should sometimes seem inevitable. Everyone forgets that it might have turned out quite differently." Thus, the Bolshevik Revolution was "naturalized," erasing the Bolsheviks' myriad difficulties in guiding events as well as denying the possibilities of alternative forms of revolution, such as those of the Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, and others, which in the decades before the fall of the Tsar had been as plausible as that which happened to prevail. People who had participated in "The Russian Revolution," Scott adds, might not have seen themselves as being part of a coherent, discrete, and nameable historical event until some time after the events, their memories thereby conforming to a master narrative. Scott thus cautions us that "social and historical analyses have, almost inevitably, the effect of diminishing the contingency of human affairs."¹ To put it bluntly, historical hindsight is rarely 20/20.

In sharp contrast with the Russian Revolution, conflicts over language and "communitarian" issues in Belgium have never, despite their occasionally extravagant rhetoric, led to physical violence. Still, Scott's warning is equally salient for scholars of both phenomena. A great deal of historical research regarding the Belgian language situation undertaken in the last thirty or so years has been imbued with a kind of communitarian finalism: Wallonia and Flanders, in 2008 well-defined juridical and geographical entities, were fated to exist, "awakening" from slumber in an uncomfortable

¹ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 158-161, 344.

Belgian bed. Ironically, this vision is in many ways a mirror image of the so-called "Belgian finalism" on the part of historians such as Henri Pirenne which these "communitarian" scholars have repeatedly critiqued.

This vision of history has at times led to poorly-chosen or unfruitful research questions, looking for the "origins" of Belgian devolution in the stirrings of exclusively local identities and contestations of the Belgian state's right to exist. When a historical "Walloon" activist individual or group does not evince such tendencies, then they are labeled as somehow deficient, "inept at creating a Walloon consciousness." This kind of teleological analysis, reading Belgian history "backwards" in a sense, often obscures the complexity of communitarian sentiment and rhetoric as they developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Indeed, as this thesis has demonstrated, Walloon regionalism in Belle Époque Belgium was for the most part not a focused political movement, but instead a form of discourse employed in "Belgo-Belgian" arguments.

From the viewpoint of regionalism a form of discourse, the supposedly primordial Walloon and Flemish identities which some see as *fueling* these internecine arguments are instead the *products* of these arguments. As Aristide Zolberg argues,

It was not as a result of the activities of the *Flamingants* alone, however, but as a consequence of the interactions between defenders and opponents of the *status quo* that the linguistic question in Belgium, which had been for the most part a matter of debate over specific policies concerning public services, was transformed into a profound ideological debate over nationality. That such debates had been common in Europe for most of the previous century... does not make "nationalism" a cause of the transformation that occurred in Belgium. Rather, the categories of discourse which "nationalism" spawned provided a generally available mold within which the Belgians could argue amongst themselves over issues stemming from their own changing situation.²

My work has shown that, far from being the expression of a primordial identity, Walloon regionalist sentiments were a form of political discourse whose development was intimately connected with the

² Aristide R. Zolberg, "The Making of Flemings and Walloons: Belgium, 1830-1914," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5, no. 2 (1974), 227-228.

social and political developments in Belgium during the three decades before World War I. Because the growth of Walloon regionalism was fueled by concerns over a government seen as clerical, "Flemish," and hostile to the ambitious of young, educated, monolingual French-speakers, it resonated little with poor, illiterate, and Catholic Walloons, and many "progressive" Walloons such as Henri Pirenne and Célestin Demblon, as shown above, had no truck with a Walloon Movement they saw as chauvinistic and obstinate. The Walloon Movement before World War I was thus the preserve of a class of intellectuals and writers, people who made their living off of the written word.

If the Walloon Movement before World War I was so limited in its scope, why should historians study it? There are several reasons. First, the actions of the prewar Walloon Movement have become a "*mythomoteur*" for the Walloon Movement of the present day. Destrée's "Lettre au Roi," for example, has become a key point of reference for many Walloons politically engaged *qua* Walloons; Destrée himself has given his name to a historical and cultural organization dedicated to Wallonia, the Institut Jules Destrée in Charleroi.³ Thus, the regionalist rhetoric developed by the Walloon Movement before 1914 has been revived by the Walloon Movement of the present.

Secondly, the ideas born in the milieu of the Walloon Movement before the First World War *did* have consequences, even if we cannot draw a straight line from the founding of the Société Liégeoise de Littérature Wallonne in 1856 to the constitutional reforms of the twenty-first century. The first "real" attempt to introduce administrative separation to Belgium occurred during the First World War, when the German occupiers created regional governments based in Brussels, for Flanders, and Namur, for Wallonia. Political scientist Rigo De Nolf argues that until the very eve of World War I, administrative separation was solely a Walloon idea, one that at first met with repudiation from most Flemings (and most Walloons as well). Many of the Flemings who, often

³ For a critical reading of the Walloon Movement's memory of Destrée, notably the silence on his anti-Semitism, see Jean-Philippe Schreiber, "Jules Destrée, entre séparatisme et nationalisme," in *Les grands mythes de l'histoire de Belgique, de Flandre et de Wallonie*, ed. Anne Morelli (Brussels: Éditions Vie Ouvrière, 1995), 243-255.

citing Destrée, began to advocate administrative separation in the spring and early summer of 1914, went on to collaborate with the German scheme of splitting the country during World War I.⁴

Indeed, as early as 1922, Belgian Catholic scholar Théophile Simar placed the blame for Flemish collaboration with the tribune of Wallonia himself, Jules Destrée! "They [the collaborators] based themselves principally upon the famous letter written to the King in 1912 by Jules Destrée [who] believed to have found that there was no Belgian soul, but [only] two peoples of... quasi-exclusive characters."⁵ Of course, such analyses are themselves rather simplistic and diminish the important role of the Germans' racist worldview in promoting "administrative separation," but they do help us consider the role of unintended consequences in history, as Destrée as well as most other Belgians of all linguistic and political stripes were appalled by the collaborationist attempt at "regionalization."

The final and perhaps most important contribution of this study is a warning against teleological history. Because the Belgium of today *is* regionalized – some might even say compartmentalized – it is easy for the historian to line up a series of events from the present reaching back to some "beginning" of federalization. This sort of analysis, while tempting, ignores the role of contingency in historical developments on which James Scott has rightfully placed emphasis. It ignores developments which do not "fit" the narrative, such as the appropriation of the discourse of Belgian duality and administrative separation by Flemish collaborators during World War I. It also ignores developments which might have been if not for chance.

What might have been? Belgium today labors under the weight of communitarian tensions, as evinced by the nine-month delay in creating a government after the elections of June 2007. One of the main points of contention between Flemish and French-speaking parties has been the issue of

⁴ Rigo de Nolf, "De federalistische stroming in België in het begin van de XX^e eeuw (1900-1914)," *Res publica* 8, no. 3 (1966), 304-320.

⁵ Théophile Simar, *Étude critique sur la formation de la doctrine des races au XVIII^e siècle et son expansion au XIX^e siècle* (Brussels: Maurice Lamertin, 1922), 315-319.

Francophones in the suburbs of Brussels – an area which belongs to the Flemish region – demanding access to government services in French. The French-speakers often do not make any attempt to learn Dutch, going so far as to ask for special French-language schools for their children. Many Flemings, meanwhile, resist concessions to French-speakers as "attacks" on the "purity" and "integrity" of Flanders. Thus, two monolithic, monolingual blocs continue to engage in bitter and fruitless political negotiation.

One wonders what might have happened if more educated Walloons had taken up the challenge which Godefroid Kurth posed to them in 1911, cited at the beginning of this thesis. Kurth proposed that stubborn monolingualism was inherently a provincial attitude, above all in a bilingual state like Belgium, and that a political movement based on such obstinacy would become "resistance without an agenda, already fated to sterility." Sadly, events seem to have proven Kurth's prediction to be correct.

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