

Ryszard Żelichowski*

RENATA BIZEK-TATARA, MARC QUAGHEBEUR, JOANNA TEKLIK,
JUDYTA ZBIERSKA-MOŚCICKA

BELGIEM BYĆ.

*FIKCJA I TOŻSAMOŚĆ WE FRANCUSKOJĘZYCZNEJ LITERATURZE BELGII
(OD KOŃCA XIX DO POCZĄTKU XXI WIEKU)*

TO BE BELGIAN.

*FICTION AND IDENTITY IN FRENCH-LANGUAGE BELGIAN LITERATURE
(FROM LATE NINETEENTH TO EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY)*

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Scholarly works devoted to complicated Belgian reality rarely appear on the Polish publishing market. One of them is a newly published book entitled *Belgiem być. Fikcja i tożsamość we francuskojęzycznej literaturze Belgii (od końca XIX do początku XXI wieku [To be Belgian. Fiction and identity in French-language Belgian literature (from late nineteenth to early twenty-first century)]*, prepared by one Belgian and three Polish authors. Its title already promises an ambitious attempt at looking at the problem of the complex identity of citizens of the Kingdom of Belgium through the prism of literature, in this case French-language literature. I will try to answer in this review whether this attempt was successful or not. At first, however, I will present some basic data about the structure of the book. It consists of six substantive chapters and a foreword, a preface, an annex, a chronological table, a bibliography, notes about the authors and an index of names. Belgian author Marc Quaghebeur is the author of „Słowo wstępne” [‘Preface’] and the chapter „Język, historia, literatura, Belgijskie pas de deux” [‘Language, history, literature, Belgian pas de deux’], Renata Bizek-Tatara prepared the texts „Między Flandrią, Walonią, Brukselą i Francją. Wielokulturowość a literatura” [‘Between

* Ryszard Żelichowski – Full Professor, PhD, the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, rzeli@isppan.waw.pl.

Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels and France. Multiculturalism and literature’] and „Nieznane oblicza znanego. O literaturach niemimetycznych Belgii” [‘Unknown faces of the known. About Belgium’s non-mimetic literature’], Judyta Zbierska-Mościcka wrote the chapters „Literatura, społeczeństwo, tożsamość. Między wspólnotą a jednostką” [‘Literature, society, identity. Between community and individual’] and „Piórkiem i pędzlem, czyli związki literatury i malarstwa” [‘With a feather and a brush, that is, links between literature and painting’] and Joanna Teklik prepared the text „Historia Belgii i jej (nie)obecność w literaturze” [‘History of Belgium and its (non)existence in literature’] and wrote the annex entitled „Wokół belgijskiej tożsamości, czyli Belgowie sami o sobie, swoim języku i literaturze” [‘Around the Belgian identity, that is Belgians about themselves, their language and literature’]. It is worth mentioning that the publication was financed by the National Science Centre, the reviewer of the work was Professor Wiesław Malinowski.

The authors are basically literary scholars and represent various universities. Renata Bizek-Tatara works at the Department of Romance Literature of the Institute of Romance Philology at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Marc Quaghebeur is a literary historian and director of et Musée de la Littérature in Brussels, Joanna Teklik is a staff member of the Department of Literature Comparative Studies at the Institute of Romance Philology of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Judyta Zbierska-Mościcka is a staff member of the Institute of French Studies at the University of Warsaw. The authors represent three outstanding state universities with a great tradition of research in French-language literature. The reviewer would like to find in this book chapters written by representatives of the Institute of Romance Philology of the University of Wrocław or the Department of Romance Literature of the Institute of Romance Philology of the Jagiellonian University, because the book was published by the Society of Authors and Publishers of Scientific Studies *Uniwersitas* in Kraków. The preface does not contain an explanation for such a selection of authors and does not reveal as a result of what (a project, a grant?) this book was written. Due to the absence of a separate chapter summarising the work we do not have any insight to its broader context and the conclusions from its publication. This is not a complaint, but the curiosity about the reasons for such a selection of authors for this valuable work.

The author of this review is not a literary scholar but a political scientist and a historian, for many years dealing with this region of Europe, which is currently the area of three states: the Kingdom of Belgium, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. In the preface the

authors make an important remark: 'Belgian French-language literature is one of relatively young literatures, as it appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is also Francophone literature, which means that it is in the French language, which is shared with other nations, primarily with France. This situation caused the formation of certain mechanisms and cultural attitudes in the nineteenth century, aimed at constructing a separate identity and defining own specificity' (p. 7). Specificity defined in this way has induced me read this book as I have been studying issues related to the Belgian identity from the Flemish and the Dutch language perspectives for years.

The Kingdom of Belgium is a federal state, where the dividing line is determined by belonging to one of three regions (the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region and the Brussels-Capital Region), one of three communities (the French Community, the Flemish Community and the German-speaking Community) and four linguistic regions (the French-speaking region, the Dutch-speaking region, the German-speaking region and the bilingual region of Brussels. French and Dutch are official languages in the latter region¹. The federal state consists of autonomous parts, but having a common (federal) government. Its essential feature is that in political and administrative terms it is not a unitary entity, it consists of territories of federated entities deprived of the right to participate in international relations. The constituent parts can have their own legal and judicial systems. There is dual citizenship and every citizen in most states is a citizen of the union and of the corresponding part of the federation. The Parliament is bicameral; the higher chamber represents the interests of the federation entities. The framework of the federal state was adopted in the Kingdom of Belgium as a result of six systemic reforms and a compromise between the societies inhabiting them. This is a necessary introduction to the further argument. Those interested in the details of the federal structure of Belgium may refer to numerous publications, including the text previously published in this periodical².

¹ Żelichowski, R. 2011. Crises in the Brussels-Capital-region. Will Belgium survive. In: Historical Regions in the Structures of European Union. *Region and Regionalism*, no. 10, vol. 2; Żelichowski, R. 2009. Co z tą Belgią. [What about Belgium?] In: Fiszer J.M. ed. *Polska w Unii Europejskiej. Aspekty polityczne, międzynarodowe, społeczno-gospodarcze i wojskowe.* [Poland in the European Union. Political, international, socio-economic and military aspects.] Warszawa: ISP PAN.

² Żelichowski, R. 2015. Flandria w XXI wieku. Region państwa federalnego, czy państwo konfederacji. [Flanders in the 21st century. A region of a federal state, or a state of a confederation.] In: *Mysł Ekonomiczna i Polityczna*, no. 4, p. 294, ff.

The Kingdom of Belgium covers the area of 30.5 thousand km² with the population of 11,267,910 people³. Wallonia with the area of 16.844 km² is inhabited by 3,602,216 people, Flanders with the area of 13.521 km²⁴ is inhabited by 6,477,804, Brussels with the area of 32.61 km² has 1,187,890 residents. The German-speaking population amounts to 75,222 people⁵ and lives on the area of 854 km². These figures may vary depending on the cited source. This short description of the Kingdom of Belgium shows us the demographic inequality of these three ethnic groups, two of which (French and Dutch-speaking) in fact decide about the present and future shape of the state they are citizens of. Véronique Philips and Peter Vermeersch wrote about an disproportionality feature of the Belgian federal system. The borders of the Regions do not overlap with the borders of the Communities or with the borders of the language regions. 'For example, the German-speaking Community lies in the Walloon Region, and its competences in the Brussels Region are realised by the French and Flemish Communities. Thus, the country is divided according to two different criteria: once in accordance with the territorial criterion that leads to "federalisation" based on three Regions ... this is in line with the demands of French-speaking inhabitants of the country), and next – according to the criterion of cultural affiliation leading to the creation of the two Communities, as the Dutch-speaking citizens wished. (The German-speaking population of only 70,000 people has no specific ambition in this respect.)' the quoted authors wrote⁶. Thus, over two thirds of the population of the Kingdom of Belgium are associated with Germanic culture and one third with Romance culture and the French language area. In this context, the question about the Belgian national identity reveals how difficult it is for researchers to try to define this specificity as a result of the triple identity – Francophone (due to the neighbourhood and spiritual and linguistic affinity with France), Dutch (as in the case above but in proximity to the Netherlands) and Belgian. The authors of the peer-reviewed book seek answers to this question from the perspective of French-language literature published in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands and then the Kingdom

³ As of 1 January 2016. Available at: https://www.belgium.be/nl/over_belgie/land/bevolking

⁴ Flemish Region 13.521 km², Flemish Community 13.684 km². Available at: <http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flanders>; www.vlaanderen.be [Accessed: 2 August 2017].

⁵ In 2010. https://www.belgium.be/nl/over_belgie/land/bevolking [Accessed: 2 August 2017].

⁶ Philips, V., Vermeersch, P. *Belgia: geneza i organizacja państwa federalnego*. [Belgium: origins and organisation of a federal state.] PDF document, p. 70.

of Belgium independent since 1830. In order to understand the processes taking place in the lands of the new kingdom, the authors refer to history.

Joanna Teklik focuses on this topic in the chapter „Historia Belgii i jej (nie)obecność w literaturze” [‘History of Belgium and its (non)existence in literature’] (p. 19–58). Especially two subsections have drawn my attention: „Podwaliny i powstanie niepodległego państwa” [‘The foundations and rise of an independent state’] (pp. 20–21) and „Meandry niepodległości: frankofoński kraj z flamandzka przeszłością w tle” [‘Meanders of independence: Francophone country with Flemish past in the background’] (p. 21, ff.). The author does not feel secure in historical literature, so she flashes with some lightness over this subject, writing about evolution, revolution, and uprising, referring to some thought of ‘state separateness’ sprouting in Belgium ‘much earlier, already in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’ (p. 20). Reaching for the basic works of Józef Łaptos would help the author avoid simple pitfalls⁷. It is surprising that works of this excellent expert on Belgian history were cited in the whole work only once and in the context of European integration (!)⁸. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the author writes about, are the period of the Southern Netherlands (also of the Habsburgs and then Austrians) and the period 1815–1830 is the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. The name Belgium has been established in the consciousness of the inhabitants of the Southern Netherlands since the end of the eighteenth century. During debates on the future shape of the new state in the historical lands of the (Southern and Northern) Netherlands, the anti-Napoleon allies used various forms of the name Belgium, mainly referring to the Southern Netherlands⁹. In publications of that period the Brabant revolution was called the Belgian revolution. ‘The period of the first revolutions of 1787/9–1792 strengthened the Belgian identity or that of the (southern) Netherlands, which concerned ten principals’ Lode Wils wrote¹⁰.

⁷ Łaptos, J. 2010. *Belgia*. [Belgium.] Warszawa: TRIO; Łaptos, J. 1995. *Historii Belgii*. [History of Belgium.] Wrocław: Ossolineum-Bellona, or to this period: Balicka, J., Bogucka, M. 1989. *Historia Holandii*. [History of the Netherlands.] Wrocław: Ossolineum.

⁸ See p. 57, footnote 61.

⁹ E.g. ‘Gallia Belgica’, ‘la Bourgogne de pardeça’, ‘Belgium dat is Nederlandt’, ‘de BelgischeNederlanden’ or ‘Pays-Bas belgiques’. Dubois, S. 2005. *L’invention de la Belgique. Genes du Etat-Nation 1648–1830*. [Belgian invention: genesis of the nation state 1648–1830.] Brussels: Racine, p. 437.

¹⁰ The author refers to ten of seventeen historic provinces (lands) of the Netherlands. Wils, L. 2007. Wanneer en hoe ontstond België? [When did Belgium come into being?]. In: 1830: van de Belgische protonatienaar de natiestaat. [1830: from the Belgian proto-nation to the nation state.] In: *Wetenschappelijketijdingen*, R. XVI, p. 200.

When it turned out that two parts of the Netherlands were to be under one sceptre, a synonym for the name of the new state was sought to connect their inhabitants. Apart from the French name *Pays-Bas*, also the terms *Néerlande* and *Néerlandais* were used. In the biography of Willem I Jeroen Koch wrote that the terms Belgian and Netherlander meant the same for the rulers of the state. In the coronation speech delivered in Brussels on 21 September 1815 the king used the phrase ‘Monarchy of the Netherlands’ (in Dutch: *Monarchie der Nederlanden*) and in the French version the Belgian Monarchy (*Monarchie des Belges*)¹¹. In the latter case there were fears and hot protests that this name only concerned Belgians and was not associated with Hollanders (*Hollanders*). In 1815–1818 Pierre François Van Meenen¹² from Leuven campaigned against using this name in the influential liberal daily ‘*Observateur*’. It should be remembered that although the King Willem I wanted to unify the country in terms of the language, he himself spoke French with officials in Brussels and Flemish and Dutch elites.

It is worth adding that the concept Belgian used by the sixteenth and seventeenth century scholars using Latin was broad and encompassed all inhabitants of the Burgundian Netherlands. Due to more than two hundred years of division of these lands, the inhabitants of the Southern Netherlands were called Belgians and of Republic – Netherlanders (*Nederlanders*, less often *Hollanders*). Making Belgians and Netherlanders equal in the period of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815–1830) had a deep political meaning. The point was to heal historical divisions and merge lands into one state under the sceptre of one monarch.

King Willem I refused to acknowledge the Belgian state until 1839, when he had to give up under the pressure of superpowers and in (another) Treaty of London recognised the independence of the Kingdom of Belgium. Parts of the historic lands of Flanders remained in neighbouring countries. Thus, the western part of Flanders remained a part of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais departments, while the eastern part remained in Zeeland Flanders (the Netherlands). In this context, we should talk about the struggle for the unification of all political forces around the king in the fight for the recognition of the so-called ‘Belgian fact’ by the contemporary world and

¹¹ Koch, J. 2013. *Koning Willem I 1743–1843*. [*King Willem I 1743–1843*.] Amsterdam: Boom, pp. 411–412.

¹² Pierre-François Van Meenen, (1772–1858), Belgian lawyer, philosopher, member of the National Congress (*Nationaal Congres*) in 1830 forming the legislative framework of independent Belgium and then its first Parliament. In the years 1852–1857 he was the chairman of the Court of Appeal.

politicians and therefore for the acceptance of Belgium as a permanent subject of international relations.

On the margin of these remarks I would like to add that in the Polish literature of the twentieth century the incorrect names of the state as the Kingdom of Holland and the language as Hollandic were used. This name was also used in national official documents until 1997, in which, as a result of the efforts of philologists and diplomats, the proper name – the Kingdom of the Netherlands – was restored¹³. Attempts to start using the term ‘niderlandzki’ language (Dutch) were made slightly earlier in Poland¹⁴. The author of this review has postulated for years to researchers to refer the name of the Kingdom of Holland and its resident Dutch only to the historical description of this state closing in 1814–1996¹⁵. Fortunately, however, there is no doubt that the Flemish people live in Flanders and Walloons in Wallonia.

The term ‘francophone country with Flemish past in the background’, which the author perfectly describes on the example of Charles De Coster¹⁶, is intuitively accurate (pp. 25–26). An example of this ‘tangled identity’ is the national epic *Przygody Dyla Sowizdrzała* [*The Glorious Adventures of Tyl Ulenspiegel*] by Charles De Coster, half Fleming, half Walloon, the author of the first French-language work in Belgian literature, whose hero was Flemish, and his adventures were described in Belgian French. As Jerzy Falicki rightly points out, the need to emphasise the historical tradition of the state created

¹³ From Netherlander Koninkrijk der Nederlanden, in short Nederlanden. For proper name of the state see Orłowski, T. 2005. *Protokół dyplomatyczny. Ceremoniał & etykieta*. [*Diplomatic protocol. Ceremonial & etiquette*.] Warszawa: Akademia Dyplomatyczna MSZ, p. 149.

¹⁴ Majewicz, A.F. 1989. *Języki świata i ich klasyfikowanie*. [*World languages and their classification*.] Warszawa: PWN, p. 34.

¹⁵ See Żelichowski, R. 2014. *Stosunki polsko-holenderskie w Europie pojaltańskiej*. [*Dutch-Polish relations in post-Yalta Europe*.] Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk.

¹⁶ Charles De Coster, full name Charles-Théodore-Henri de Coster (1827–1879), a son of a Walloon mother and a Flemish father, Belgian novelist, writing in French. His works contributed to stimulating Belgian national consciousness and are considered the beginnings of Belgian literature. His most important work is (in French) *Légende et les aventures héroïques, joyeuses, et glorieuses d’Ulenspiegel et de Lamme Goedzak au pays de Flandres et ailleurs*. Polish edition: Karol de Coster, *Legenda jako też bohaterskie, wesole i sławne przygody Dyla Sowizdrzała i Jagnuszka Poczwicwa w krajach flamandzkich i gdzie indziej*. [*The legend of the glorious adventures of Tyl Ulenspiegel in the land of Flanders and elsewhere*.] 1st edition in 1914, re-edition, among others, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy Biblioteka Arcydziel: Najślawniejsze Powieści Świata. 1978, pp. 496.

in 1830 resulted in the formation of works containing the nouns ‘chronicle’ or ‘history’, which were intended to give them the character of historical monographs, though in reality they were rather novels¹⁷.

Renata Bizek-Tatara writes about it in an interesting way in the chapter „Między Flandrią, Walonią, Brukselą i Francją. Wielokulturowość a literatura” [‘Between Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels and France. Multiculturalism and literature’] (subsection „Stworzenie mitu nordyckiego” [‘Creation of the Nordic myth’], pp. 69–74). The literature is embedded in local realities, ‘draws on old Flemish and German legends by the handful (...) as well as from the customs, traditions and folklore of the Flemish’ (p. 71). In the early 1880s a group of French-speaking Belgian writers was formed. Most of them were born in the north of the country, wrote on Flemish subjects in the language that diverged from standard French. Émile Verhaeren¹⁸ was their national bard. Much attention was devoted to this writer in the book. French-speaking Belgian writers contributed greatly to Belgium’s legitimisation.

The polarisation of the Belgium society initially consolidated around a king and a unitary state in the second half of the nineteenth century was caused by several phenomena – the creation of the Flemish Movement, the so-called language question and the birth of the trade union movement and political parties. The universal suffrage Act of 1893 gave every person over the age of 25 the right to vote in Parliament elections¹⁹. The effects of the rivalry of new political forces came quickly. The adoption of the universal suffrage Act of 1893 struck a mortal blow to the unitary Belgian state and gave it the dynamics that directed Flanders and Wallonia to different development paths²⁰.

Renata Bizek-Tatara refers quite enigmatically to the Flemish Movement in the subsection „Upadek mitu nordyckiego i emancypacja Flandrii” [‘The fall of the Nordic myth and the emancipation of Flanders’] (pp. 80–84). She calls this dynamically increasing in power Movement ‘nationalist “policy of

¹⁷ Falicki, J. *Historia francuskojęzycznej literatury...* [History of French-language literature...], pp. 122–123.

¹⁸ Verhaeren, Émile Adolphe Gustave (1855–1916), a Belgian poet writing in French.

¹⁹ Głowacki, A. 1997. *System konstytucyjny Belgii*. [Belgium’s constitutional system.] Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, p. 7.

²⁰ Van Velthoven, H. 2011. De barst in België. [Start of the explosion.] In: *Waarheen met België?: van taalstrijd tot communautaire conflicten: een selectie uit 35 jaar wetenschappelijk onderzoek*. [From language battles to community conflicts, Selection from 35 years of scientific research.] Brussels: ASP (Academic and Scientific Publishers) NV, p. 129.

small steps” which led to ‘changes in many laws deepening the break-up of unitary Belgium’ (p. 81). It is a too far-reaching simplification. The Flemish Movement (in Dutch: *Vlaams Beweging*) played a great role in shaping Flemish national consciousness²¹. Its aim was to protect, support and develop Flemish culture. At first it developed mainly in the bourgeois environment and avoided accentuating political problems. It is worth emphasising here that the Flemish Movement at that time was still extremely moderate in its demands. It respected Belgian institutions, tried not to criticise the new state. It based its activity on peaceful measures and used petitions, brochures and leaflets to draw attention to existing problems and ‘politely requested interventions’, Els Witte wrote²². When Francophones reacted negatively to this activity, more radical participants of the movement made their voice heard. It was clear that the language issue had the potential to cause a serious political conflict.

The author is right when she writes that ‘the emancipation of Flanders is perceived by Wallonia as a threat’ (p. 81). Also the national consciousness of Walloons was born in the nineteenth century. The first groups that engaged politically in Walloon matters were created in Brussels in the 1880s, to a lesser extent in the French-speaking ‘pockets’ in Flanders, and finally in Wallonia. This is understandable because Brussels was historically a Flemish city and as a capital it attracted political, economic and cultural elites from all over Belgium and these elites were French-speaking, at least in public life. Meetings at so-called congresses between 1890 and 1893 were limited to protecting government careers for single-language (French-speaking) citizens and propagating the abrogation of certain language regulations. Apart from Brussels, the main centre of Walloon activity was the industrial city of Liège. The Walloon League (in French: *Ligue Wallonne de Liège*, 1897–1919), created there, was a co-organiser of two major Walloon Congresses in 1905 and 1912. Also Jules Destrée’s famous letter to king Albert I of 1912 saying: ‘Sire, there are no Belgians, but Walloons and Flemings’²³ was a part of this trend although he did not really mean complete break-up of Belgium, but the differences and belonging to different cultures (Latin and Germanic),

²¹ See more on this topic in Rajman, B. 1992. *Język i polityka językowa we Flandrii. Historia i terażniejszość*. [Language and language policy in Flanders. History and the present.] Wrocław: Uniwersytet Wrocławski, Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis, no. 1165. Germanica Wratislaviensia, pp. 105–107.

²² Witte, E. 2009. Freedom of Language, Gallicisation and the Resistance of Language Lovers. In: Witte, E., Craeybeckx, J., Meynen, A. eds. *Political history of Belgium from 1830 onwards*. Brussels: ASP, pp. 58–59.

²³ Translation: Łaptos, J. 1995. *Historii Belgii*. [History of Belgium.], p. 193.

which would function better in a federal state under distinct authorities. Józef Łaptos accurately sums up the actions of Walloon organisations: ‘When analysing the programmes of the societies as well as subsequent publications such as Walloon Catechism by Albert du Bois, it is difficult to escape from a ambivalent feeling, accompanying the Walloon movement for a long time, that the revindication of autonomy or federalism (...) were merely a camouflage for the main pursuit of maintaining at all costs the supremacy of the French language in the unitary Belgian state’²⁴.

In the chapter „Kres myśli narodowej: pierwszy konflikt światowy” [‘End of national thought: the first world conflict’] (p. 37–40) Renata Bizek-Tatara also refers to a difficult problem of the cohesion of the state during the First World War, called Great at that time. So-called Flemish policy (*Flamenpolitik*) pursued by Germans led to a rupture within the Flemish Movement, the emergence of the movement of activists who supported the rapid implementation of the programme of the movement. During the war they were induced to cooperate with the occupier, who met some of the demands of the Flemish. The creation of the Flemish Council, the proclamation of Free Flanders in January 1918, and other activists’ actions badly influenced the Flanders-Wallonia relations in post-war Belgium for many years. They triggered a wave of hatred for the Flemish Movement. The most significant result of the activity of the ‘activists’ was, however, the collaboration of Flemish nationalists during the Second World War.

Young Léon Degrelle, with his movement colloquially called rexism, excited a great furore in Brussels and Wallonia. The name of the movement came from the Catholic student club ‘Rex’ (*ChristusRex*) centred around the periodical ‘20th Century’ (*XX Siècle*). The Catholic, clearly anti-establishment character of the movement, opposed to corruption and the financial and political elites, and above all, the promise of ‘cleaning the stables of Augyan’ brought it an electoral success and twenty-one seats in the Parliament in 1936²⁵.

In the 1930s, the influences of the Communist Party (in French: *Parti Communiste de Belgique, PCB*), became stronger in Belgian society, and in 1936 won nine seats in the Parliament. The accession of the PCB to the Comintern and the slogan of the world revolution in cooperation with the Soviet Union constituted a greater threat for the ruling elite than the fascist

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 192–193.

²⁵ *Lexicongeschiedenis van Nederland en België*. [Lexicon of the history of the Netherlands and Belgium.] 1994. Utrecht-Antwerpen: Kosmos Z&K Uitgeverij, p. 288.

movement²⁶. The conclusion of the Russian-German Non-Aggression Pact resulted in a situation in which communists were considered the greatest enemy of the country, not reixists or Flemish nationalists.

There is also a difference in perception of French and Dutch-speaking collaborators. ‘The former – as Helen Grevers wrote – considered themselves good patriots. In their opinion, they meant only the good of the country. The matter looked different in the case of Flemish nationalists; they never perceived themselves in this role. They did not recognise this homeland. Unlike Dutch and French-speaking Belgians they saw an alternative for the nation-state, namely the creation of an independent state – Flanders (...)’²⁷.

The repressions that the collaborators were subjected to after the war again divided Belgians deeply. Both sides of the barricade felt guilty for collaborating.

In a subsection entitled „Trudny powrót do belgijskości” [‘Difficult return to being Belgian’] Renata Bizek-Tatara writes that ‘After fifty years of assimilation with France, blurring in universalism and the erosion of the Belgian pedigree the time comes when Belgians realise the absurdity of renouncing their origin and the blind pursuit of integration with France. (...) They feel a profound change in their attitude to their home country, to themselves and their identity (...) The revolutionary belgitude movement, initiated in the second half of the 70s (...) becomes an expression and a tool of great discussion on the problematic cultural affiliation of Belgian writers, their attitude to their homeland and “the difficulty of being Belgian”’ (pp. 98–99).

At a time when this theory was developing, Wallonia was experiencing a true renaissance of culture. In 1983 Walloon intellectuals published the ‘Manifesto [on] Walloon culture’ (in French: *Manifest pour la culture wallonne*). They placed the blame mainly on the French Community of Belgium (*Communauté Française de Belgique*), which, in their opinion, negated the values contributed by Wallonia (except for the language). The author discusses these problems in an interesting way in the aptly titled subsections „Emancypacja Walonii” [‘Emancipation of Wallonia’], „Od kłopotliwej belgitude do pogodnej belgité”

²⁶ de Wilde, M. 1985. *België in de Tweede Wereld Oorlog. De Kolaboratie, part 5.* [Belgium during the Second World War. Collaboration.] Kapellen: Uitgeverij de Nederlandsche Boekhandel, p. 8.

²⁷ Grevers, H. 2012. Voorbij Bijtjesdag? Recente werken over de bestraffing van collaboratie na beide wereldoorlogen in de Lage Landen. [Is the hour of vengeance gone? Current work on the settlement of collaboration in the Low Countries after both world wars.] In: *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review*, no. 127/1, p. 326.

['From troublesome belgitude to serene belgité'], „Rehabilitacja belgijskości” [‘Rehabilitation of being Belgian’] and „Ku niefrasobliwej wielokulturowości i tożsamości à la carte” [‘Towards laid-back multiculturalism and identity à la carte’] (pp. 104–111).

In the chapter entitled „Literatura, społeczeństwo, tożsamość. Między wspólnotą a jednostką” [‘Literature, society, identity. Between community and individual’] Judyta Zbierska-Mościcka notes that ‘since the beginning of the nineteenth century the Belgian identity has been shaped in accordance with two tendencies: a tendency to community and a tendency to individualisation’ (p. 115). Although this is not a typical Belgian phenomenon, however, the author notes that it took place in a short, precipitous time, from 1830 until the turn of the 1970s-1980s and shifted from a unitary ideology serving to consolidate the nation to federalism, and thus to individualism. The author writes that ‘we should not forget that Belgium is not a homogeneous country and soon, because precisely in the interwar period, this coveted inner cohesion will turn out to be fragile because the Germanic element of the “Belgian soul”, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgian society, has been marginalised since the beginning of the sovereign state. The dominance of the French-speaking ruling elite, also widespread in science, education and culture, with the majority of the Flemish people, opens space for the ongoing conflict’ (p. 116).

In the sixth chapter entitled „Język, historia, literatura, Belgijskie pas de deux” [‘Language, history, literature, Belgian pas de deux’] (p. 259) Marc Quaghebeur discusses the problem of the linguistic identity of Belgians. The subsections „Narodowe imaginarium wobec dylematu: Paryż czy emancypacja?” [‘National imagination towards the dilemma: Paris or emancipation?’], „Trzy postawy wobec norm francuskich” [‘Three attitudes towards French standards’], „Różnica trwała, ale trudna do utrzymania” [‘Durable difference, but difficult to maintain’], „Model francuski a różnorodność” [‘French model and diversity’] and „Umocnienie pozycji i autonomizacja literatury” [‘Strengthening of the position and autonomy of literature’] (pp. 260–269) introduce the reader to the detailed problems of the language and Belgian literature in today’s reality of French-language literature. Let these words of Marc Quaghebeur serve as a punch line: ‘Everything thus indicates that the native language of Belgians, and especially ways of expressing it are no longer a taboo. The French language descended from the monument and, given that the Belgian super-ego resides within reasonable limits, one can simply enjoy the language’ (p. 316).

The book *Belgiem być. Fikcja i tożsamość we francuskojęzycznej literaturze Belgii (od końca XIX do początku XXI wieku [To be Belgian. Fiction and identity in French-language Belgian literature (from late nineteenth to early twenty-first century)]* is very important not only for Francophones or people dealing with the area of French-language culture. For national identity literature is a mirror that perfectly reflects the 'state of mind' of the Belgian population from the beginning of the establishment of the independent, unitary state to the federal state. The most important achievement of the authors is that they showed the dynamics of the process of searching for their own identity by French-speaking Belgians against the overwhelming influence of culture and language of neighbouring France. Showing the existing differences, and especially the context in which they have arisen, will have a great cognitive value for many readers. Today the Kingdom of Belgium and its capital Brussels are the heart of the European Union and a place where Poles travel on business or privately. They also work there. The book helps to understand why Belgians have a 'tangled' identity. Many of them are educated in French and Dutch, live in bilingual families, work in federal offices.

The authors rightly point out the lack of publications on this subject. They are, however, in a privileged situation. French is a world language and a language of elites in other countries. In the case of a historical, social and even psychological analysis of the 'Belgian soul', it can be a burden. More than two-thirds of the population of the Kingdom of Belgium are related to Germanic culture and speak Dutch. The creation of the federal state in which Flemings, after many years of striving for language equal rights, are 'at home' and Flanders is its constituent state (in Dutch: *Deelstaat*), does not facilitate the understanding of the processes that occur there. The creation of a confederation is in the programme of the party New Flemish Alliance, which has great electoral successes. Not revolutionarily, but as it is in this country, evolutionarily (a decades-long battle of Flemings for their language caused no casualties!). Will it be possible to think about the common identity of Belgium in a different from a historical sense in the case of a confederation (a loose union of states), without the monarchy bonding the whole? Will we notice when it has happened? The first part of the title of the reviewed book – *Belgiem być [To be Belgian.]* – says a lot about the disproportionate knowledge of the processes taking place in the Kingdom of Belgium. It is impossible to understand the complex identity of Belgians without similar publications from the perspective of the Dutch language. Of course, hundreds of discussions on this topic have been published in this language, but they are

not the subject of this review. Also, this is not an objection to the authors of this book.

As a political scientist and historian I have not been able to refrain from referring to certain contexts that were only superficially treated in the published texts. Since most authors refer to similar conceptual shortcuts, I have concentrated on those who first used them. This may give the impression that just these authors have become the subject of my special inquisitiveness. It has not been my intention. I have thought that perhaps these remarks will be important for the reader who will take the peer reviewed book and will refer to wider literature on this subject that also takes into account the Flemish point of view, reflected, for instance in the texts by Józef Laptos cited here. Simplifications necessary for the narration of the individual chapters may irritate the non-Francophone, but they do not change the validity of the theses contained therein. Hence, I would like to emphasise that the book is very important, contains many interesting analyses, and the authors try to avoid risky, simplified valuations with respect to non-French-speaking Belgians. This publication is worth recommending to readers who want to broaden their knowledge of European literature written in the language of Honorius Balzac.