

A Portrait of Hugo Claus as a Young Artist: The Critical Review on the Sorrow of Belgium

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Introduction

Hugo Claus is considered to be one of the greatest authors in Belgian literature, and *The Sorrow of Belgium* is considered to be one of his finest works. *The Sorrow of Belgium* is a thrilling, perplexing, emotional, and vibrant novel. The design of the building is intriguing. *The Sorrow* is the title of the first half of the book, which is separated into named chapters that are presented in chronological order. This covers the time period leading up to the outbreak of World War II in Belgium. The second part, titled *Of Belgium*, is comprised of a single chapter that is hundreds of pages in length. Some paragraphs are separated by a double line break. Aside from that, there is no way to discriminate between one set and another. It is not in chronological sequence, and it contains several vignettes that provide insight into life in Belgium during World War II. *Of Belgium* Louis easily transitions between straightforward narrative and daydream, making it difficult for the reader to tell the difference between the two.

This is all really intriguing structural material to learn about. Does the book hold up as a piece of literature? Claus has done something very remarkable, in my opinion. I've got a couple of more Belgian books in the works, but I suspect they'll be nothing compared to this. Did I like it while I was reading it? It was difficult, intriguing, meaty, and thrilling. I enjoyed it. I didn't like it, though; it seemed a little too lengthy to me, which may have been a failure on my part more than a failing on the part of the book. Claus does not provide the reader with any solutions or resolutions. Many WWII works portray the "war is terrible" viewpoint; however, I believe Claus goes a step further by depicting everyday people altering and acting monstrously throughout the war. Claus's world is one in which war is not terrible and humans are hell.

Sometimes, when it comes to literature, it is the diversions that lead to the most interesting and startling discoveries.

Historically, as stated by Moretti, the traditional coming-of-age novel, which established a harmonious and successful relationship between an individual and the outside world, did not survive the horrific collective trauma of the First World War and, after 1914, was to die out and become not little more than a relic of times and ideals long since dead and forgotten² As a result, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which was completed by Joyce in the same year that World War I began, should be considered one of those late and anomalous Bildungsromane in which the protagonist's achievements owe more to his individualism and mistakes than to a sociopolitical picture in which the adults' experience proves to be useless and the institutions, rather than assisting the youth, oppress and deny them the right to a free development

There is little doubt, however, that the Bildungsroman as a narrative of an individual's development will continue to exist for as long as humanity does, both because there will always be a demand for a chronicle of the (failed) hero's journey and because the genre itself is particularly prone to mutation.

Due to the fact that Joyce's novel is considered to be one of the first illustrious examples of a bizarre coming-of-age story, there is a good chance that Flemish writer Hugo Claus used it as a model, however unconsciously, when writing his monumental novel *The Sorrow of Belgium* (1983) (*Het verdriet van België*), which remains his best-known book outside of Belgium to this day. This complicated and encyclopaedic work has been described as a «mer à boire», in which getting lost is very simple due to the text's extensiveness and breadth. However, while acknowledging that *The Sorrow's* many quirks and peculiarities may be compared to a variety of hypertexts, I will restrict myself to discussing just those essential subjects and concerns addressed in Claus's masterwork that are also addressed in Joyce's book for this essay. Of order to further describe the people and events in *The Sorrow*, a storyline synopsis will be presented in the following paragraph.

The Sorrow of Louis Seynaeve

His days are spent at the Institute Saint Joseph in Haarbeke with his group of chosen friends, the Apostles, with whom he collects books that have been placed on the Church's Index of Books, as well as the rest of the students, whom he refers to as "Hottentots" (meaning "Hottentots" in the Dutch language). During an unexpected, if brief, visit from his father, Staf, Louis is informed

that his mother Constance has fallen down the stairs, a deception that Louis accepts without challenging it. While the nuns at the boarding school laugh at his gullibility, one of them eventually discloses to him that his mother is in excellent health despite the fact that she is nine months pregnant. Because everyone, including his friends and the nuns, has gotten used to dishonesty, Louis starts to believe that lying and disguising his true thoughts behind a mask, «Toujours sourire» (Always Smile), is the only way to make it through life. High in imagination and storytelling ability, Louis intertwines the monotonous and dreary reality of the boarding school with complex brainchildren such as the invisible little devils' Sizzlers, which are a source of amusement for the other students. The narrative is thus constantly manipulated: the logger Holst, a family friend, is transformed into a guardian angel tasked with delivering messages from Louis's absent mother; death transforms a cow named Mary into a saint, resulting in the creation of Mizzlers; and while the novel is extraordinarily elaborate in terms of plot and number of characters, Leyman asserts that the novel's complexity lies primarily in its multi-layered structure, which includes numerous intertextual references as Jean Weisberger's "Het verdriet van Belgi" of het gemaskerde bal in "De Gids" describes the discovery of sexuality as "divine retribution" and includes a number of literary allusions and citations. Although Louis was born and reared in a strict Catholic and traditional household, the holy and profane are inextricably intertwined in his reveries in a desecrating manner. When the child returns to his hometown of Walle for the Easter vacation, he finds himself in a highly pro-German environment. With the ultimate goal of understanding a perpetually confused world, Louis is always on the lookout for new words or hidden meanings, and as such, he pays close attention to both his relatives' casual chat and the nationalists' lectures at the Café Groening. Returning to the Institute, he plots and executes with the Apostles an invasion into the chamber of the unconscious Sister St. Gerolphe, from whom he takes a golden knucklebone.

During this time, Vlieghe has become more irritated by Louis's fabrications and extravagant professions of devotion. Having spent the summer vacations at his grandmother Meerke's house in Bastegem, Louis plans to get vengeance on Vlieghe by pinioning him into a yellow basket with the assistance of the other Apostles and inserting his knucklebone into his anus. However, at the conclusion of the first section of the book, The Sorrow, Vlieghe informs him that he has been forgiven and presents him with an ivory penholder as a token of his gratitude.

Beginning with Part Two, Of Belgium, the Germans invade Belgium and Louis's father is forced to leave to France because he is accused of cooperating with the Germans, which leads to the conclusion of the novel. He returns to Flanders three weeks later, when the situation has stabilised a little bit more in the country. Since then, Louis has enrolled in the Sint-Amandscollege with the goal of becoming a writer. After his father and his instructor and mentor 'The Rock' both object, Louis decides to join the National Socialist Youth of Flanders, which he would eventually abandon after being jeered at by his comrades while showering. While staying with a host family in Mecklenburg as part of the German child evacuation programme Kinderlandverschickung, Louis is reprimanded for his idleness and is forced to do nothing more than write in his diary and read issues of the satirical magazine *Simplicissimus*. In a later episode, Louis takes some money from his aunt Violet's handbag, prompting his grandmother to refer to him as "the sadness of Belgium," which translates as "a pain in the neck" or "the final nail in the coffin." Louis gets the opportunity, according to Holst, to peruse an astonishing collection of Nazi-banned literature in Madame Laura's residence in Brussels, which is courtesy of Holst. Following his discovery of American music and literature, Louis comes to the conclusion that the Germans are headed to loss and resolves to switch sides. With his short work *The Sorrow*, he enters a short story contest organised by the publication *Het Laatste Nieuws* on the topic of World War II. He manages to get his typewritten text approved despite the fact that he submits it after the deadline has passed by claiming that his Jewish brother's work was killed in a concentration camp. Upon learning that his buddy had committed himself as a result of a sexual sickness, Louis receives a letter from Vlieghe's father in which the latter admits that he has loved Louis since the beginning of time. Louis's short tale gets published in the publication *Mercurius*, despite the fact that it was rejected by *Het Laatste Nieuws*.

When the journey is finally completed with success, Louis remarks to himself, as if he is questioning the significance of the accomplished aim, «We'll see. We'll see what happens. Anyhow».

A Flemish Dedalus

grotesque: strangely and curiously distorted in some way. It refers to anything that, due to its clumsiness, paradoxicality, and unnaturalness, causes people to chuckle without making them feel better.

If one pays close attention to both *The Sorrow* and *A Portrait*, one will be surprised at how similar the two heroes' trajectories are, despite their apparent contrasts in appearance. For one thing, however far apart in terms of time and space, Flanders on the eve of World War Two and Ireland at the start of the twentieth century share at least three characteristics: the almost obsessive ubiquity of Catholicism, a long-standing conflict between two peoples, one of whom is in a state of real or perceived subjection to the other, and an eternal linguistic tension due to the concurrence of an autochthonous language which is split into different racial

As a matter of fact, Ireland seems to be treated with a considerable amount of sympathy in *The Sorrow*. When Louis points out that Grandpa's suit is from «Ireland, country of missionaries and martyrs» (p. 507), he says with his characteristic caustic sarcasm that the English's rituals include «drinking tea while [...] machine-gunning our coreligionists in Ireland» (p. 507). (p. 167). According to Louis's mentor 'The Rock,' there are only three honourable vocations in nations where religion is so prevalent: priest, soldier, and poet (p. 311). These vocations may even intersect at times in countries where religion is so prevalent. Louis, like Dedalus, first aspires to pursue the road of religion and become a missionary, similar to how Dedalus refuses to adopt the habit of being a poet. However, a few years later, he declares that he "intend[s] to be a writer like Cyriel Verschaeve and Guido Gezelle" (p. 267), completely overlooking the fact that both were also Catholic priests.

It will be required to consult the original edition in any situations where a specific word or phrase is not translated, or when a more literal translation is advised in order to grasp the various implications of a term. Originally published in Dutch, *Het verdriet van België* was published by De Bezige Bij in Amsterdam in 1983, with an English translation by Arnold J. Pomerans. The English version is *The Sorrow of Belgium*, Penguin Books (London-New York 1991), with a translation by Arnold J. Pomerans. If the passage in question pertains to the original edition, the book title and page number will be supplied along with the excerpt in question.

There are, nevertheless, some substantial discrepancies in their views that may be detected. The morals of Catholicism are so untrustworthy in Dedalus' eyes that he refuses to accept the Sacrament of Reconciliation (pp. 187-188). As a result of his hundredth altercation with Vlieghe, Louis begins to question that Jesus Christ is contained inside the wafer, and since God does not intervene to chastise him, he believes that God does not exist (pp. 212-213). «Only yesterday I spit the Host out into my palm, rolled it into a ball, and stomped on it,» he admits one year later, with a blasphemous complacency unfamiliar to Dedalus (p. 271).

The religious influence on both characters' idiolects is also a result of the widespread infiltration of religion. Despite his opposition to the Church, Dedalus utilises and reinterprets religious ideas and analogies in his poetry (p. 172), which is not unlike to what Louis does in his poems. Nonetheless, even in this regard, Louis seems to be Dedalus's humorous and irreverent counterpart in terms of humour and irreverence. In contrast to mother Constance, who is described as "fortunate among women" (p. 231), and the river Leie, who is described as "the Jordan of my heart" (Davison, 2015), Grandpa is described as "the greatest Pharisee of them all" (p. 45). If the gardener Baekelandt had ever been a soldier, it must have been in the guise of one of the mocking mercenaries who rolled dice on Golgotha for Christ's clothing, according to the author (p. 26), but the nazi military chief Herman Göring is described as "a plump peasant lady" (p. 27). (T. Crossing, 2017).

'I picture his funeral to be grim and serious,' Dedalus imagines (pp., 16-17). A hilarious funeral procession is conjured up by Louis, complete with drunken nuns and frantic mourners, all marching to a rousing rendition of Dies Irae as they are taken to the grave (L. Crossing, 2002).

Considering these factors, it is especially suitable that Claus selected the picture *Muziek in de Vlaanderenstraat* by James Ensor, a major figure in the Flemish grotesque, as the cover for his book, as if to emphasise his goal to fit into this style of art. To put it another way, Louis looks to be the Flemish Dedalus, who transforms everything into a sad comedy.

The (Parodic) Issue of the Language

All of the characters in the Portrait series speak Hiberno-English, which is the variant of English spoken in Ireland, to a greater or lesser extent. When Dedalus declines to study Irish Gaelic, the

language of his forefathers, he finds refuge in the purported purity of Elizabethan English and makes fun of his buddy Davin's accent and extensive use of regional particularism. A dialogue with the university dean, a British expatriate who does not comprehend the term *tundish* (funnel) (p. 146), leads him to the realisation that the political idiom of the British political hegemony will always be a second language for an Irishman, as he explains in the book. Dedalus, on the other hand, will discover towards the conclusion of the book that *tundish* is an old British term that is considerably more prevalent in Hiberno-English than it is in English. As shown by Conde-Parrilla, in the Portrait, Joyce successfully depicts the sociolinguistic reality of his native land, thereby separating himself from the concept of a homogenised English literature in the process.

As soon as the Southern provinces of the Netherlands, which included the Flemish-speaking area of current Belgium, were separated from their northern counterparts in 1585, the French language consolidated its position as the language of administration and culture, to the detriment of the Flemish language, which was decried as a "horrible jargon" by the newly frenchified bourgeoisie. The emergence and development of the 'Flemish Movement,' which is essentially an abstract phrase referring to the combined efforts of authors, philosophers, and activists battling for the preservation of Flemish, may be traced back to Romanticism and the desire to re-discover one's origins, respectively. The duty to issue laws in both French and Dutch was established by law in 1898, after a series of legislations on the use of Flemish in criminal courts, national agencies, and schools. This was the first step toward achieving the second aim. During the First World War, the German invaders took advantage of the Flemish desire for greater linguistic autonomy and used it to coerce the active side of the Flemish Movement into participation with their cause. It was largely to German assistance that the Ghent University, which had hitherto been a French-speaking institution, was able to offer its first Dutch-language courses in 1916. Collaborationism was even more prevalent among Flemish nationalists during the years of the Second World War. It seemed to provide the possibility of establishing the groundwork for the establishment of an independent Flemish state. It should be noted, however, that in Belgium, between the 1950s and the 1980s, two unique myths, each tied to two apparently distinct historical and cultural identities, developed and propagated across the country. While the French-speaking Walloons attempted to persuade themselves that everyone had taken part in the Resistance, from a Flemish perspective, collaborationists, whose only sin had been to be too

naive and believe the Nazis' promises, had fought for their people, who had been oppressed by the other half of the country since the beginning of time. Several passages in *The Sorrow* attest to the existence of such ideological beliefs. Staf observes that «when the time comes, our wonderful Belgian state will not hesitate to exterminate us Flemings» (p. 254), while Raspe laments that «the Germans have taken us for a ride» (p. 255). They couldn't give a fig about our idealistic zeal. We were a Flemish legion, to be sure, but we were also under the direction of Prussians and Bavarians [...]» (V. Crossing, 2010).

With regard to the Flemish language, this lengthy and torturous procedure has two ramifications: As a result of this borrowing and adaptation, the language has become very similar to French. In addition to this, unlike the variety of Dutch spoken in the Northern Low Countries, Flemish is not recognised as an official language until the 1930s, making it less standardised than other varieties of Dutch. Important themes in *The Sorrow* include the image of Flemish nationalism as corrupted by collaborationism, as well as the fixation with linguistic purity that characterises it. After all, as Staf points out, it is always «a question of language» when it comes to communication (p. 103). Clearly, the desire to replace each gallicism with a purism, sometimes deliberately contrived, and always talk in «good Flemish» (p. 10) has become so widespread and extreme as to be laughable. Even when urging both Louis (p. 1) and Staf (10), to use the Flemish phrase for «thumbtacks» instead of punaises, Grandpa himself commits a no less serious fault by saying «il y a la manière», resulting in Staf's indignant response (Musschoot, 1993). At the Café Groeninghe, Louis also makes a huge gaffe when he toasts Mr Leevaert by calling out «Santé» instead of the proper phrase (Lee, 2002). While at the same time, specific French terms and expressions appear to have become so deeply ingrained in spoken language that even when bidding farewell to the right-wing Flemish National League, the artist Geerten Gallens can't help but use both French and Flemish: «Allee, friends, au revoir, and Houzee!» (Page 319.) When Staf threatens his wife by saying, «Ik ga u arrangeren» ('I'm going to fix you,') Constance responds with a guffawing laugh, «Als ge dat een keer kon doen, mij arrangeren» ('If it can be done once, it can be done again,'). The Flemish verb *arrangeren* is used in the sense of 'having sexual intercourse,' as the French verb *arranger* is

Because Flemish is a language that is continually developing, another key aspect to consider is the distinction between unambiguous standard language and dialect. He creates an inadvertently

humorous impact by invoking his own dialect: «It sounded roughly like Ostend, and he had transformed himself from the shepherd of souls into a fisher [...] of whiting, fritted herrings and pickled skate.» «Louis's mouth was watering» (p. 425). Even Herman Teirlinck, a great of Flemish literature, sometimes resorts to dialect while speaking to his wife: «Ere, me ol' sweetheart, come and' ave a glass. These gentlemen are graduates of the Free Schools. But before, please give us a kiss» (p. 18). Because «the messengers delivering the tactical rescue plans are youngsters from Limburg who do not speak a word of West Flemish, who always get lost, and who wind up roaming about in the countryside nibbling salami, the war is lost as well» (Brems, 2006).

Louis is uncertain about whether to write his short tales in his native Flemish or in the Dutch spoken in the Northern Netherlands when he begins writing them. In this regard, it should be highlighted that, albeit in a larger sense, this is the same difficulty that Claus is confronted with, namely, how to convey spoken language while also ensuring that it is understood by the greatest number of people possible. As a result, the author invents a hypothetical language in which «barbarisms, archaisms, provincialisms, and other rarities» may be found alongside their standard counterparts. However, this approach results in what Stéphanie Vanasten refers to as a «grotesque distortion,» which causes the reader to get disoriented. Vlieghe accuses Louis of being a *kwiestebiebel*, which he denies (Claus, 2007)

In addition to presenting an introduction of the many meanings and types of 'grotesque,' Vanasten goes on to examine Claus's various approaches for creating an impression that is grotesque. Additionally, she recognises free association, often occurring polysyndetons in lengthy phrases, oxymorons, rhymes, alliterations, and hyperboles and platitudes because the unique word appears in a scenario where common words are the majority of the words used, among other things. When Louis confesses to himself using the West-Flemish term for 'slice,' *schelle*, the impact is both perplexing and humorous (Gilleman, 2010). In addition to being hideous, Louis's effort to recap Doctor Bühlen's lecture by turning to a weird mishmash of German, Dutch, and German terms that have been converted to Dutch orthography is also grotesque (Vermeulen, 2010)

As similar as Claus's ambition is to Joyce's, which is to be accepted into the canon of Dutch literature while retaining regional particularism, the issue of language takes a parodic turn in *The Sorrow*, where the (non)epiphanic Image and the perturbing dream the grotesque: an attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world take a parodic turn.

Liffey Dedalus gets a vision of his more renowned Greek ancestor swooping across the sky like a hawk while sitting on the riverbanks (p. 130). Following that encounter with the girl on the beach, he imagines that she is either a sea-bird or an angel, and she advises him to give up spiritual love in exchange for sexual love (Terrenato, 2011). In the moment he realises that the birds flying above are swallows, he is flooded with vivid thoughts of seas, sunsets, and vowels splashing like waves as he stands on the library staircase (Brockman, 2015).

The other Dedalus, the one who is walking down the Leie, is just as committed to daydreaming, but his thoughts are far from idealistic and beautiful in their content. Because a cow, like Louis's mother, is endowed with the ability to procreate and bear in its womb an entity whose origin Louis cannot explain, the animal soon gains significance as a symbol of the unknown and the uncanny: as a result of this, Louis imagines the cow giving birth to «a red lump of flesh [...], a battered and blood-spattered babyface [...]», and later concludes that he has witnessed none other than «the queen of the Mizzlers Having been unsuccessful in locating her at home, Louis concludes that the composer, now appearing in the form of a «giant death angel», has come to her and has a vision of the deceased girl's teeth rolling on the floor like the peas that she was shelling at the time (Germanici, 2016). Astonished by the death of his sibling, the youngster sees in his mind's eye a "infant, fat and all wrinkled," and imagines himself holding his breath "till his porcelain eyes exploded and bled" (B. Mertens & Davison, 2017). "Bugs or bits of dust" are how the Mizzlers are described in one of their many manifestations: "snorting, ripping apart, dispersing terror and despair, bursting their way right through Dondeyne's diseased ear and into his brain." Because the pullover of the diseased Vlieghe is "teeming with Mizzlers, writhing, unseen, insatiable bacilli," Louis disposes of it quickly by tossing it into a gutter. T'Sjoen (2017) describes the younger Seynaeve as being terrified of the possibility that, while running barefoot on the grass, "tiny creepy-crawlies" may "get stuck between your toes and multiply there, hatch little eggs there, and then forge a passage through your flesh before settling in your spinal cord." As a result, the younger Seynaeve rushes home and carefully dries his feet.

Bats, according to Dedalus, are both the girl who rejects him (on page 170) and the lady who attempts to seduce his companion Davin (on page 141). Sister Chilly is described as a "beanpole with a long, leaden face, not unlike that of the Black Eagle, world bicycle racing champion Marcel Kint," who is "pressed with folded back wings against the wall beside the confessional" (B. 2020). The Institute nuns are compared to "giant bats plastered against the chapel wall" (D. Mertens, 2017), whereas Sister Louis is described as a "beanpole with a long, leaden face, not unlike that Louis's reveries are diametrically opposed to Dedalus's grandiose epiphanies; they are disquieting, angst-provoking, and even even grandguignolesque in nature. Similarly, in the oneiric world, Louis's dark and unsettling nightmares replace Dedalus's calming visions of chocolate cream-filled trains transporting him home or monuments of forgotten monarchs imploring him to build in his soul a fresh national consciousness, respectively (p. 193). As a result of Louis' refusal to assist the gardener Baekelandt with a pregnant cow called Mary, the animal succumbs, and Louis' sorrow is triggered, resulting in the following nightmare:

A bloated, fatty white cow raced towards Louis as the sun rose in the sky. However, the barbed wire refused to give way and he was forced to abandon his pursuit. Her accusatory, bloodshot eyes were wreathed in white lashes as she bowed her head and leaped weightlessly into the air before landing on Louis's stomach with hooves of marble and iron (Vermeulen, 2010).

In another dream, the truculent picture of a dead rabbit, an animal that in the book also represents corrupted purity, combines eros with thanatos in an unexpected way:

In the novel's major topic, according to Peeters, is the degradation of innocence, which is symbolised by the image of the rabbit. Louis feels obliged to lie when he is surrounded by individuals who act immorally, and he resorts to the same strategies that his opponents have used against him.

Despite the fact that she had been replaced with a featureless pumicelike tumour, he recognised her peasant bosom and the smell of manure that emanated from her. It was Sister Imelda who was sitting in Louis's room, because despite the fact that a featureless pumicelike tumour had replaced her face, he recognised her peasant bosom and the smell of manure that emanated from her. The skinned rabbit was delicately retrieved from between the black billows of smoke by her wide legs [...] Her pupils were round, like small pink pills, as she touched the bare, blood-

spattered corpse on which a tuft of fur still clung; they were not slit-shaped, but rather round, like little pink pills (McMartin & Gentile, 2020).

Having struggled with an unresolved Oedipus complex and a barely concealed homosexuality, Louis inserts feminine traits and Marian iconographies into the pluri-decorated body of Nazi marshall Hermann Göring, resulting in pictures that are both disturbing and ridicules at the same time:

He snuck back into his bed and almost immediately found himself seated on the squeaky white Institute merry-go-round, which started to revolve with a shrieking sound [...] Instead of the Institute merry-go-round, however, it was a toy that had been multiplied one hundred times and was composed of brightly lacquered miniature tin aircraft [...]– As soon as he let go of the bulging, creaking crate, his parachute opened and transformed into a bellying bright bed that he sank into without ever having touched ground, and, as he descended, he heard: Komm, right in front of his nose one fold of the parachute began to billow, turning into a breast with amber-colored makeup, the breast bulged inside a tunic of the same colour whose buttons burst off but continued to The phrase "Komm, ündensklave Mensch" means "Come, sinner's slave" (Brems, 2006)..

As much as dreams are comparable to genuine objectives in that they make use of and alter components of real life in an arbitrary and disorganised manner, in The Sorrow dreams are different.

The male characters in the storey lack the required fortitude to do the right thing because he is infatuated with'mother figures' and is unable to be truly autonomous. As a result of this, Louis decides to study to become a writer in order to threaten the female characters in the book and exercise his masculine authority over them via his writing. See also Paul Claes, Hugo Claus, and Hugo Claus. In the Lexicon of Literary Works, the word "Belgi" is translated as "Belgian." Anthology of Nederlandstalige Literary Works, 1900-heden, Woolters-Noordhoff, Groningen 1989. Anthology of Nederlandstalige Literary Works, 1900-heden, Woolters-Noordhoff, Groningen 1989. Claims that Louis's neurotic characteristics such as castration fear, tranvestitism, and hallucinations are the result of the Oedipus complex in his life. They are usually tinged with a feeling of foreboding, in some way or another. Several characters appear in

the following dream: Michèle, Louis's short-term lover, the American soldier of Jewish origin Jay-Dee, American movies, Uncle Omer's stammer, and the English word 'congeners' which has been shifted to the French false equivalent congénère, all of whom come together to form an unusual picture. Because the French word congénère is often attached to animals or plants, a chain of connection is set in motion, and the corpse of a congénère ends up symbolising the elimination of the Jews, who are Jay-congeners, Dee's as a result of this linkage. In support of this idea, the fact that the duck is consumed by the gluttonous germanophile Staf seems to be persuasive.

Louis and Michèle exchanged vows that evening. Their wedding guests gathered around them as they sat at a table draped with snow-white linen under the shade of an apple tree. They were surrounded by smiles and laughter. An ornate gold platter with a gold-roasted duck was placed in front of Papa. He looked at it with a smug expression. Jay-dark Dee's form rode slowly past on a grey horse, and I couldn't see him. When he had vanished to the left of the screen, Michèle said, her voice stammering with excitement like Uncle Omer, «Le con, le con, le congénère» (the con, the con, the congénère). Suddenly, Louis was startled; he felt his wife looked ordinary in her white hat, and he turned away from her to reveal that a duck corpse had been found on the shining dish; papa gazed at it with goggling eyes and a lipless, wide mouth, as if he were gloating (Buelens, 2003).

Consequently, this dream seems to express a suppressed feeling of shame against the Jewish people. In the midst of Louis' mother's consternation over how to dispose of the various shells of the crabs Staf is about to devour, Louis ruminates: «Smash them up, crush them up like human bones after an overly hasty cremation, after which the ashes are strewn like fertiliser over the fields around the toy factories» (Meens, 2021).

Another nightmare seems to represent sentiments of remorse that are similar to the first. Ceusters and De Coene, two of his classmates, are deported because they are reportedly of Jewish descent; the younger Seynaeve is unable to prevent them from being sent to a life of slavery or death (Meens, 2021). After spending the previous night scanning through novels that had been banned by the Nazis, some of which were written by Jewish writers, he returns home and promptly falls

asleep. The paintings of *Le règne animal* are intertwined with the executions of Ceusters and De Coene, as well as the oppressive presence of his mother:

Ceusters and De Coeneem were chewing gum on the wooden scaffold that had been erected beneath the Belfry in Walle, and they were wearing their Boy Scout belts with the fleur-de-lys buckles. Louis dreamed of two pastel-colored armadillos rooting among paradisiacal bushes and then awkwardly mounting the wooden scaffold that had been erected beneath the Belfry in Walle, a wobbling platform with flags and wreaths on which Drums sounded slowly in the background. It's a prelude. As he expressed his desire to assist them since they were gazing at him with pleading expressions, Mama told him, «Right, off you go; you are welcome to assist them; but, you must first comb your hair; come, let me do it». Louis couldn't help but put his head in her lap, as if he were chopping meat on a chopping block. The red-hot curling tongs were hidden behind her peacock-eye dress, which she dragged out from beneath the outfit. «Mama, I'm going to be late. Pay attention, the drums are becoming more loud! Please! Allow me to go!» She, on the other hand, continued to curl his hair. The hair oil began to sizzle (Meens, 2021).

Another dream depicts the American military and cultural triumph over the Germans, both in actual life and in Louis's imagination, via the use of Walt Disney cartoons, comic strips, and satire cartoons, among other mediums. Even the military positions and levels of the Nazis are altered as a result of the Allied victory: Hermann Göring, Rudolf Hess, and Joseph Goebbels are referred to as Field Marshal, traitor, and Head of the Ministry, respectively, in English. During the change of an amorphous mass into Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the description seems to be a spoof of a Marvel superhero's transformation caption. While serving as a recruit for the National Socialist Youth of Flanders, Louis was forced to participate in gymnastic exercises that were absurd and pointless.

Conclusion

Three small manikins, one big, one skinny, and one short, were dancing within the thick black lines that outlined their outlines, much as Mickey and Minnie in the animated cartoons played at the Youth Fellowship Hall in Haarbeke would move jerkily around in star-shaped explosions. A storm-tossed wood, Snow White's twisting, lashing kingdom of twigs and branches, was the

setting for their skipping. (...) playing tag, Goebbels was the most agile, and colour flowed into the drawing as the rotund field marshal, his medals in hand, the rake-thin traitor Rudolf Hess with a smear of hoe polish for eyebrows, and the Head of the Ministry, the skeletal little dwarf with arms reaching down to his ankles, were all running, running, running, [...] (by David Low, the collection of cartoons that had startled Louis in the Avenue Louise book cellar). [...] Something was happening on the Flandria's tennis court, something was pouring out of the changing rooms, [...] and there was none other than Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his wheelchair, complete with jawbone, white-toothed grin, cigarette holder, and everything else he needed. A rabbi sat on the rabbi's wide back. Goebbels overtook the ponderous, toiling Hess, and Göring sheltered in a windowless basement full of kindling as the three fled in terror. To long last, Goebbels [...] arrived at the Chancellery and was taken aback when he saw his Führer lying lifeless on the floor. [...] The Führer's clothing were filled with phosphorescent vapour that was light green in colour, like new oats. «Who are thou, Mein Führer, Christ, or John?» Goebbels said in hushed tones. No response came from Goebbels, who instead laid down and stretched his long arms behind his shoulders, as if doing a gymnastics practise, before pulling his legs up [...] L. Crossing (2002, 2002a).

In *The Sorrow*, the dream serves as an outlet for cravings, obsessions, and more or less conscious regrets, which are expressed via the dream. It is Louis's oneiric visions that are both elaborate and startling, as they completely emphasised unconfessed torments and suppressed tensions by using the hideous picture, bringing psychological depth to the character.

Based on what has been said, one way to look at such an intricate work as *The Sorrow of Belgium* is to regard it as an all-embracing and ferocious Bildungsroman which cannibalizes *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and transforms it into a disquieting comedy.

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