

ABSTRACT

Title: *Les écrivains flamands et le champ littéraire en Belgique francophone*

English title: *Flemish Writers and the Literary Field in Francophone Belgium*

Author: Ann-Mari Gunnesson

University/Department/Year: Göteborg University (Sweden)/Department of Romance Languages: French & Italian Section/2000

The boundary line which, in medieval times, separated the Germanic from the Romance languages runs right through present-day Belgium, where it now divides the areas where Netherlandic is the official language from those which have French as their official language. In 1963 this boundary was ratified in Belgian law. Its character of a political border was subsequently reinforced by a process lasting some 25 years which resulted, in May 1993, in a constitutional change whereby Belgium became a federal state. This process has altered not only the country's political but also its literary map. The scope for francophone literature has been reduced, and any mutual exchange between the two major literatures of Belgium, in French and in Netherlandic (Flemish), scarcely exists any longer. (The country's German-speaking minority is not dealt with here.) There are many who consider that Flemish literature in French is now a matter of history.

This dissertation is largely descriptive, and follows the tracks left by Flemish writers, primarily novelists, in Belgium's francophone literature from 1830, when the Kingdom of Belgium was formed, through the end of the millennium.

Certain key concepts from Pierre Bourdieu have been employed as a theoretical framework for the presentation, especially the concept of cultural field. The dissertation describes the francophone literary field in Belgium and the changes consequent on the loss of the French-speaking Flemish writers. Special attention is paid to the contact points between the Netherlandic and French languages, between Flemish and French culture. The demarcation of the field with respect to France on the one hand, and the Netherlandic field on the other, is important in this perspective.

In Belgium, particularly in Flanders, there have been individuals who, because of their bilingual and bicultural backgrounds, have been able to be active in several literary fields, both within the country and outside. They have been able to function as couriers and agents of influence between the fields. In this dissertation they are sometimes called « *dépasseurs de champs* ».

A more extensive account is given in the dissertation of some contemporary examples of such « *dépasseurs de champs* »: Guy Vaes, Françoise Mallet-Joris, Jacques De Decker and the magazine *Septentrion*. It would seem to be premature to claim that there are no longer any Flemish authors who write in French. They do exist, although they may be few in number. However, they no longer function as reference points for Belgium's francophone literary field. The 'exodus' of the Flemish writers from this field may be described as a loss, but not all perceive it as such. There are those who consider that the language laws, federalisation and the establishment of boundaries between the French-speaking and Netherlandic-speaking areas have been to the advantage of the francophone literary field.

Key words: Belgium, francophone literature, Flemish authors, French, Netherlandic, Pierre Bourdieu, literary field, literary institution.

Göteborg University (Sweden)
Department of Romance Languages: French & Italian Section
2000