

# Editorial

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The third and last issue of *Dutch Crossing: Journal for Low Countries Studies* for 2010 has a decidedly 20<sup>th</sup> century focus. On the brink of a new decade we want to look back at the previous century with its major catastrophes that affected the Low Countries like most of Europe and the world. World War I in many respects was the 'seminal catastrophe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century' as George Kennan put it, the end of the 'long' 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 'short' 20<sup>th</sup> century. As in other parts of Europe this certainly holds true for Belgium. While its northern neighbour, the Netherlands, by a combination of good fortune and careful political manoeuvring managed to avoid being dragged into the war, Belgium became its first and one of its main victims. The German occupation from 1914 to 1918 had not only devastated large parts of the country but also, for the first time, planted a seed of contention between parts of the Flemish movement and the Belgian nation state.

In this issue, Mary-Ann Middelkoop (Cambridge), deals with one less known aspect of diplomatic history that is frequently overlooked, the Belgian territorial claims on its neighbouring countries in the direct aftermath of the Great War. Motivated by feelings of entitlement to war retributions and using historical claims, the main thrust of Belgian annexionism strangely was not directed at the aggressor (although the German-speaking Eastern Cantons that were ceded from Germany to Belgium nine decades ago in 1920 in the end were the only outcome of it) but at the Netherlands who had remained neutral during the war, and at Luxembourg which had suffered the same fate as Belgium. Unsurprisingly the Belgian territorial claims sparked strong nationalistic reactions in the Netherlands, especially among the population of the two regions concerned, South Limburg around the cities of Maastricht and Venlo and Zeelandic Flanders, the southern bank of the river Scheldt. Middelkoop's essay looks into this episode from a grassroots perspective and investigates the connection between nationalistic expressions by the local population and the Dutch diplomatic campaign to counter the Belgian claims on the basis of the principle of self-determination. Her case study provides further insight into the interaction between international politics and its reception at grass-root level.

In 1940, 70 years ago, the Netherlands were not as lucky as in World War I. This time, the country suffered the same fate as Belgium, Luxembourg and France. Of all the aspects of the occupation history of World War II, the genocide on the European Jews stands out as the most horrific and traumatic series of

events and the *Achterhuis*, in which Anne Frank hid and wrote her famous diary before being deported, has come to symbolise this harrowing complex like few other *lieux de mémoire* in the Netherlands.

In this issue, Kim van Kaam (Utrecht) investigates the problem of traumatic representation in sites of the Holocaust, using the virtual museum of the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam which allows visitors to 'relive' the traumatic experiences of hiding in the *Achterhuis*, as an example. In her analysis of trauma as an inherently ownerless concept, a (re)presentation of trauma becomes available to any visitor by mass mediated prosthetic experiences in which not the reality of the experience, but the realness of it counts. The theory on prosthetic memory undermines authenticity and focuses on performativity, and, as this latter concept parallels the basic structure of trauma, can create better understandings of massive traumatic events like the Holocaust that are otherwise unavailable to representation.

Two articles deal with the intricated relationships between Belgium's linguistic communities after 1945. Ulrike Vogl and Matthias Hüning (Berlin) analyse the current linguistic situation in Belgium and provide a critical account of the role that language ideology and language policy played in its development from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. They question the frequently heard one-sidedly positive characterisation of Belgium as a role model for the linguistic future of Europe because of its success in peacefully solving a linguistic conflict while preserving political unity, and come to a more critical conclusion. In their assessment the 'territoriality principle' which is at the basis of Belgium's far-reaching federalisation process of the past five decades, is not just part of the solution but rather lies at the very heart of this longstanding innercommunitarian conflict which has led to the communicative 'isolation' of Belgium's two main language communities.

Jo Sterckx' (Poznań) investigation of the severe government crisis in Belgium of 2007/08 extends almost into current affairs. The political impasse after the election of 2007 left the country without a federal government for almost 200 days and resulted in the first politically asymmetrical federal government in its history. Placing this crisis, which at the time of writing had been the most recent one, in a series of post-war crises that have characterised Belgian political life since 1945, his article illustrates that intercommunitarian frictions have been a constant in Belgian political life and that the crisis of 2007/08 may not be perceived as a unique phenomenon, contrary to the perceptions and representations in parts of the domestic and international press.

In the literary field, Jane Fenoulhet (London) looks at the writings of two 20<sup>th</sup> century writers, Charles Edgar du Perron (1899–1940) who died during the German invasion, and Hella Haasse (1918–) whose lifespan encompasses the whole 'short' 20<sup>th</sup> ce and beyond to the present day. Focussing on two eighteenth-century scandals that du Perron and Haasse renarrated for a

twentieth-century audience, her attention is directed at the contribution of life writing, particularly biography, to public memory. By placing private lives in the public arena on the assumption that they are relevant to the concerns of a reading public, biographical writing is raising two questions: why are these particular stories worthy of interest and what power do they have to alter public memory?

Early modernists should not disappointedly put this issue aside as Dick Venemans (Wassenaar) has discovered an early English book on *Dutch Art in the English Language: The Beauties of the Dutch School; selected from interesting pictures of admired landscape painters*. Just at a time when seventeenth century Dutch paintings were becoming very popular with English collectors, this booklet was the result of an Anglo-Dutch collaboration, with the aim of making collectors more familiar with the now very popular paintings of the old Dutch masters. His examination of this book provides a unique insight into the appreciation of the paintings of the Dutch school in this period.

Like in most numbers of *Dutch Crossing* a review section rounds off the issue, with two reviews of an exciting new series on egodocuments and history. There is also further good news to report about the development of the journal. To the list of abstracting and indexing servers that cover *Dutch Crossing* (see inside cover) we can now add the *Bibliography of the History of Art* and the *International Bibliography of Art* (BHA/IBA) by the Getty Institute, one of the prime servers for the visual arts and history of art. Shortly before this issue went to press we also received confirmation that *Dutch Crossing* has been selected for coverage in Thompson-Reuters's *ISI Web of Knowledge*, without doubt the most prestigious set of abstracting, indexing and citation services in the world, including the *Arts and Humanities Citation Index* (A&HCI), the *Social Sciences Citation Index* (SSCI) and *Current Contents/Arts and Humanities*. Against the backdrop of 'bibliometrical' methods of research assessment and the 'impact' agenda we believe this will only add to the attractiveness of *Dutch Crossing* as a venue for high-quality interdisciplinary research on the Low Countries and related areas. Best wishes for good reading.