Quaghebeur, Marc

(1947)

> Paul Aron sums up the background and academic path of Marc Quaghebeur – French-speaking Belgian writer, poet, critic, essayist, and one of the main mentors of "belgitude" (an identitarian and cultural reclamation movement which took place in Belgium at the beginning of the 1980s) with clarity: "(…) en mobilisant un savoir universitaire nourri par les leçons de Sartre et de la psychanalyse (…), il plaide pour que l'on inscrive les auteurs belges dans les réalités de l'histoire nationale y compris ceux qui, parmi eux, dénient toute efficace à cette inscription" (afterword to *Balises*, 412).

Indeed, beginning with his doctorate thesis *L'Œuvre nommée Rimbaud*, Marc Quaghebeur developed an acute sense of the demands of aesthetic modernity, of the linguistic implications for creation and literary imagination, as well as of the inevitable historical contextualization of French-language literary writing created outside of France.

These different points of focus, combined at the time of the publication of the "Une autre Belgique" manifesto in Paris in the magazine *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* (1976), led him to spontaneously consider the specificity of the French-language Belgian literary corpus from a peripheric perspective, outside of the hexagonal reading matrix, marked by a romantic and national outlook on literature and history.

Marc Quaghebeur developed these ideas and theoretical intuitions in two main essays: *Balises pour l'histoire des lettres belges* (1998) and *Lettres belges*. *Entre absence et magie* (1990), as well as on countless critical articles that serve as cornerstones of his approach to French-language Belgian literature, such as "Littérature et fonctionnement idéologique en Belgique francophone," published in 1980 in the memorable issue of the ULB magazine, *La Belgique malgré tout*.

Having married Portuguese university professor, researcher and translator Leonor Lourenço

de Abreu, who lived in Belgium, Marc Quaghebeur developed extremely intense cultural and affective ties to Portugal. His focus on the historical contextualization of literature – present also in his poetic writings, namely when he consigns the referential scope of his poems and novels to a time when the southern Netherlands and Portugal were both under the same imperial Castilian rule – subtly emphasises a certain affinity and points towards a thematic reading and comparative criticism.

An example of this is the long poem *La Nuit de Yuste* (1999), in which the narrator revisits, in an intimate tone, the final days of Charles V after his retirement to the Spanish monastery of Yuste, when he abdicated in favour of his son Philip II. Note that the emperor had married Isabella of Portugal: “Que de fois on y détourna mes ordonnances! Et c’est le Portugal qui tint les mailles des grandes eaux, lointain jamais fondé. C’est Lui qui emporta l’Orient. Gloires et déboires” (idem: 49).

In Marc Quaghebeur’s critical output – which has since been foundational for several doctoral theses on French-language Belgian literature in Portugal – an exhaustive and diachronic study of the thematic presence of Portugal in French-language Belgian literature, “Présences du Portugal dans les lettres belges de langue française” (2002), is particularly relevant.

It is also worthy of reference that Marc Quaghebeur, as head of the Archives et Musée de la Littérature (Brussels) and director of several edited collections, promoted the creation of countless centres for the study and diffusion French-language Belgian literature in Europe, namely the Centre for Belgian Studies of the University of Coimbra (CELBUC). It is also important to mention his countless participations as visiting lecturer in multiple scientific conferences in Portugal.

Travels

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Quotations

Since the 16th century, France has chosen to take the side of neither Rome nor the Reform, taking instead its own side. It became Gallican. Concurrently with the modern centralisation of the State, it (…) applied to the world an analytical, rational vision (…). This culminated in the Revolution. None of all this has touched the provinces that today make up Belgium. The mentalities that prevail there have other roots. (Quaghebeur, 1990: 18) (translated)

(…) the majority of French-speakers in Belgium do not possess any consciousness of a literary heritage of their own. (Quaghebeur, 1998: 9) (translated)

Within the corpus of French-language Belgian letters, the image of Portugal does not take on the same importance as those of Spain, Italy, France or Germany. Indeed, it never became a collective myth, comparable to the founding myth of Spain's Black Legend, which goes hand in hand with the myths of the Gueux and of the Land of Cockaigne (…) All this did not stop images of Portugal, or even Portugal itself, from taking on an extremely significant importance in certain authors. (Quaghebeur, 2002: 127) (translated)

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