



## WRITING EUROPEAN LIVES

### Stefan Zweig as a Biographer of Verhaeren, Rolland and Erasmus

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#### ABSTRACT

The Jewish-Austrian writer Stefan Zweig (1881–1942) was a passionate biographer who wrote about the lives of many influential people in European literature and history. In some of these biographies the genre is consciously employed as a vehicle to express an idea of Europe and foster a sense of belonging to a common European culture. His life stories of Emile Verhaeren (1910), Romain Rolland (1921) and Erasmus (1934) illustrate particularly well how Zweig portrayed artists as emblematic Europeans. As a biographer, he mediated across cultures in order to highlight the transnational elements of their lives that link disparate cultures in Europe. As the practice of writing European lives affected Zweig's sense of belonging to Europe, the portraits of Verhaeren, Rolland and Erasmus anticipated some of the central themes of his self-narration in *Die Welt von Gestern. Erinnerungen eines Europäers* (1942).

#### SAMENVATTING

De Joods-Oostenrijkse schrijver Stefan Zweig (1881–1942) was een gepassioneerde biograaf die de levensverhalen schreef van een groot aantal invloedrijke figuren in de Europese literatuur en geschiedenis. In sommige biografieën is het genre heel nadrukkelijk ingezet om een bepaald idee van Europa uit te dragen en het gevoel van een gedeelde Europese cultuur te bevorderen. De portretten van Emile Verhaeren (1910), Romain Rolland (1921) en Erasmus (1934) laten goed zien hoe Zweig kunstenaars portretteert als exemplarische Europeanen. Als biograaf bemiddelt hij tussen culturen door te wijzen op de

transnationale elementen in hun levens die verschillende culturen in Europa met elkaar verbinden. Het schrijven van Europese levens heeft ingewerkt op Zweig's zelfbegrip als Europeaan en de portretten van Verhaeren, Rolland en Erasmus lopen dan ook vooruit op een aantal van de centrale thema's van zijn eigen levensverhaal in *Die Welt von Gestern. Erinnerungen eines Europäers* (1942).

## INTRODUCTION

Recent biography studies demonstrate a mounting interest in global and transnational subjects. Most notable is the work on lives of immigrants, exiles, expatriates and cosmopolitans who have crossed cultural boundaries and articulate identifications that go beyond the frame of the nation.<sup>1</sup> Less prominent, but equally relevant, are the studies that examine the practice of life writing as a form of transcultural transfer and mediation.<sup>2</sup> While Europe is surely well-represented within this field of research, the work that has been done on European (auto)biographies appears to have overlooked the way in which the genre has been consciously employed as a vehicle for constructing and disseminating an idea about Europe. This practice, and the history of it, has still to be adequately explored.

The case of the Austrian-Jewish writer and biographer Stefan Zweig (1881–1942) deserves notice, for it can provide valuable insights into the European or transnational approach to life writing in the early twentieth century. In a way, his memoir *Die Welt von Gestern. Erinnerungen eines Europäers* (1942) figures as a paradigmatic European autobiography.<sup>3</sup> Despite his multiple identities, which Zweig lists in the book as Austrian, Jew, writer, humanist and pacifist,<sup>4</sup> he presents himself above all as a European. Europe is central to the memoir and reflections on European identity appear throughout the narrative.

*Die Welt von Gestern* was the outcome of a longer self-examination centred around the concept of belonging to, or longing for, a unified Europe. Zweig seems to have pursued this identity-search largely through writing the life stories of other intellectuals who he perceived as Europeans. This article will focus on his portraits of Emile Verhaeren (1910), Romain Rolland (1921) and Erasmus (1934). In these biographies, common elements become apparent. First of all, the subjects are all literary writers who come from outside the borders of Austria and have, in one way or another, expressed a European outlook. Secondly, as biographer, Zweig is passionately engaged with his subjects: Verhaeren and Rolland were friends he admired as personal mentors, while he saw in Erasmus an intellectual role model from the past. Thirdly, Zweig's biographies are primarily designed to be popular stories that captivate the reader. Despite the

fact that he attempted to present truthful portraits, they are so subjective and so full of praise that they are not very reliable as historical sources nor as critical studies. However, it is precisely because of this subjectivity that these biographical works can provide insight into Zweig's own notion of Europe and his self-proclaimed European identity.

His biographies of Verhaeren, Rolland and Erasmus each represent a correlating episode in Zweig's own life. As he once stated, he had the sense of having lived 'three lives': one before the First World War, one after the war and a third one in exile, after the rise of Hitler.<sup>5</sup> Each portrait can be regarded as a reflection of his attempts to come to terms with his own European identity. Drawing on studies about Zweig's idea and discourse of Europe, this article will examine more closely how he fashioned his subjects into Europeans. Further, it will explore the evolvement of his practice of writing European lives in a way that sheds light on the fabric of his self-narration in *Die Welt von Gestern*.

#### EMILE VERHAEREN, THE POET OF EUROPE

*Emile Verhaeren* (1910) was one of Zweig's earliest biographical studies.<sup>6</sup> Ever since his schooldays, when Zweig discovered a collection of poems by Verhaeren, he was fascinated by the Belgian poet who was still fairly unknown in Austria at the time. As an 18-year-old student, he contacted the much older author, requesting permission to translate his verses into German. Verhaeren was pleased and replied affirmatively. After several letter exchanges, they met in person in Brussels in 1902 and soon became friends. Zweig did indeed translate many of Verhaeren's poems before he published his life story in 1910. Critics have objected that this book cannot be properly termed a biography, because it is not strictly biographical in character and rather a literary study than a scholarly work on the life of the poet.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, they usually refer to it as a 'biography', like Zweig himself. The book, moreover, reflects some distinct aspects of his biographical approach and it already shows a tendency to insert the idea of a European identity into the 'biographical' narrative.

As a biographer, Zweig acknowledges that Belgians regard Verhaeren primarily as a national poet, who proudly expressed his love for Flanders and the Belgian race. In a detailed account of his lyrical verses, Zweig suggests there is almost an organic connection between the poet and his native region (29). How much his analysis carries the imprint of Hippolyte Taine's theory of race, milieu, moment can be sampled from numerous passages where Verhaeren's poetry is explained by the elemental forces of race and land.<sup>8</sup> Verhaeren 'in himself represents all the contrasts, all the advantages of the Belgian race', as Zweig puts it (23). By

making use of clichés about the typical duality in Belgian culture, where mysticism coexists with ‘sensuality and pleasure in excess’, he pictures the poet as a healthy and joyful artist who is full of religious feeling and a lust for life (16–24).

Paradoxically, it is precisely because of his ancestral Belgian roots that Zweig sees in Verhaeren a European as much as a national poet. For, as he argues, the Belgian race is essentially made up of the contrasts of the neighbouring French and Germanic races and as such mirrors the ethnic and linguistic diversity of Europe. Verhaeren formed the perfect example of this blend: he was of Flemish descent, yet wrote in French. His dual nature is further highlighted by Zweig’s argument that he derived his ‘language and form’ from the French and he owed to the Germans his ‘instinctive seeking of God, his earnestness, his gravity, his need of metaphysics, and his impulse to pantheism’ (23–24). Zweig also uses the scheme of essential ambiguities to explain other traits of Verhaeren who used to habitually live one part of the year in the modern metropolis Paris but, by way of contrast, spent the rest of the year in a small cottage in the Belgian countryside.

In Zweig’s view, the predicament of being in-between two races manifests itself clearly in the poetry of Verhaeren who renewed French literature by introducing foreign elements in terms of language and race.<sup>9</sup> The biographer points out the ‘Belgian timbre’ in his poetry and, using studies of other critics, he lists the neologisms and new expressions Verhaeren presented. Zweig seems so fascinated by the idea that the poet was regarded as a foreigner by the French that he suggested that Verhaeren was more appreciated and understood in German-speaking countries than in France itself (155–159).<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, Zweig interprets his artistic development as a struggle with the inner contradiction of ‘two conceptions of the world, both inherited and in the blood’ (52). As he puts forward, Verhaeren ‘victoriously harmonised’ the divergent forces as a typical incarnation of the ‘Belgian race and of the European race too’ (23–24).

However, as other German critics before him, Zweig classes his subject foremost as part of the German culture.<sup>11</sup> More generally, he seems to present the whole of Belgium as predominantly, if not essentially, Flemish, equating it with Germany and stressing the difference with France. This German ‘annexation’ of Verhaeren, as it was critically termed in France,<sup>12</sup> reveals itself clearly in the argument that the poet’s ‘Teutonic undertone’ emerged with increasing clarity from ‘under the French varnish’ (159). After years of suffering and psychic crisis, Zweig narrates, Verhaeren receded from the French classical traditions in order to cope with his Teutonic temper and inalienable lust for life.<sup>13</sup> While evoking the

stereotypical image of a virile and barbaric German culture as opposed to the refined and feminine French, Zweig credits Verhaeren for his powerful, male poetry (159–160, 192).

At the time, Belgium was generally considered to be a country characterised by the fundamental divide between a northern, German, part and a southern French or Latin part. In the decades after the independence of the country in 1830, Belgian writers and intellectuals developed a sense of distinct national identity by concentrating on this typical blend of two neighbouring cultures.<sup>14</sup> Zweig only briefly mentions Verhaeren's affiliation with Edmond Picard, who celebrated the 'Belgian soul' in an influential article of 1897. In this article, in which Picard refers to Verhaeren as the 'archetype' of Belgian poets, he exposes the multi-ethnic and multilingual character of the nation. He further points out that Belgium is a 'crossroads' of Europe, penetrated by influences from all directions: Germany, France and England.<sup>15</sup> While Zweig explicitly replaces the word 'Belgian soul' by 'temper' in his study of Verhaeren (43), he evokes the same image of Belgium, as a border region in the 'heart of Europe', a place where 'the roads of Europe meet', symbolising 'a miniature but infinitely varied synthesis of the life of Europe' (13).

Rather than a mere geographical notion, Europe is a cultural concept here. There is much to support Stephan Resch's thesis that Zweig's writings before World War One attest to a primarily aesthetic idea of Europe, centring on French and German cultures.<sup>16</sup> This is particularly evident when Zweig argues that the cross-border exchange gave rise to a cosmopolitan spirit in the cultural life of Belgium. Verhaeren and other Belgian artists 'were gifted with a sense of the great complex European feeling'. As he explains: 'they did not in their idea of a native land stop at the boundaries of Belgium, but included all the neighbouring countries, because they were at the same time patriots and cosmopolitans' (22).

Zweig relates the particular geography of Belgium to the modernity of the 'new age' around 1900. Vitality reigned among the Belgian people: 'Contact with so many foreign cultures, the vicinity of such contradictory nations, has fertilised them' (15). Since 1880, Belgium not only received international esteem for its upcoming modern art scene, the nation was also respected for being the first in building and transporting railroads on the continent. In Verhaeren's later poetry, Zweig finds the vibrant atmosphere of the young, newborn state that made such rapid progress. After having shaken off the 'cold form of the Alexandrines' (74), he writes, the poet was finally able to surrender to the changing outer world and see the beauty of new exciting technologies: railways, machines, factories and music halls.

For Verhaeren, the new rhythm of modern life was most palpable in the modern cities. Longing for exultation, he started travelling: ‘He was in Germany, Berlin, in Vienna and in Prague; always a lonely wanderer; quite alone; ignorant of the language, and listening only to the voice of the town itself [...] to the surge of the European metropolises’ (91). In his poems, the cities are imagined as ‘melting-pots’ where people from all races and directions mix. While discussing the poems in *La Multiple Splendeur* (1906) Zweig recounts in his own words Verhaeren’s vision of the rise of a new man and a new community in the modern cities:

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Old communities lose their unity, new communities must arise. America is the first example: here, in a hundred years, one single great brotherhood, a new type, has been developed from the forces of a thousand peoples; and in our capitals, in Paris, Berlin, and London, people are already growing up who are not Frenchmen and not Germans, but in the first place only Parisians and Berliners, who have a different accent, a different way of thinking, whose native land is the great city, the multitude [...] Independently of the frontiers of countries, on a broad-based foundation, the European is in process of formation. Here desire and reality are near touching. Verhaeren sees Europe already united by one great common energy (113–114).

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As Zweig had already claimed in the introduction to his book, Verhaeren was the first to voice ‘the sensations of a New European’ (9). In the closing chapter, devoted to the European importance of his work, he sums up the aspects that make Verhaeren the poet of Europe. His verses perfectly captivate the atmosphere of Europe at the turn of the century, as Zweig states: ‘The whole of Europe speaks through his voice’ (256). Moreover, as he rightly points out, Verhaeren’s readership was not confined to Belgium; his utopian poetry received prominence and made its impact in diverse countries, from France and Germany to Scandinavia and Russia.

While the analysis concentrates on the literary representation of Europe in Verhaeren’s works, Zweig touches upon the ethical dimension too. As he suggests, ‘a new system of ethics [...] will be required by the European’ (115). Community, brotherhood and democracy are themes mentioned in this context, but the related morality remains rather general and imprecise. Most concrete is the international appeal ‘Admirez-vous les uns les autres’, the motto of *La Multiple Splendeur*, which Zweig reads as ‘the monumental expression’ of Verhaeren’s ‘new moral idea’ for Europe (224). The fact that Verhaeren celebrated Europe as a symbol of colonial power in his odes to ‘La Conquête’ and ‘L’Europe, maîtresse du monde’ is not obscured by Zweig, but not criticised either (199–201).<sup>17</sup>

Zweig compares Verhaeren’s ‘yearning for the European’ with Walt Whitman’s ‘hailing of the American’ (115). Although the Belgian artist

developed his ideas independently from the American poet, the biographer argues, it cannot be ignored that there is a similarity in their prophetic vision and lyrical art. The comparison was not new.<sup>18</sup> It is worth mentioning here that Zweig belonged to a group of Whitman enthusiasts, who knew each other well.<sup>19</sup> Johannes Schlaf and Léon Bazalgette, for example, had published translations and biographies on both Whitman and Verhaeren several years before Zweig. Many aspects of his study correspond to their work, but the European frame figures most prominently in Zweig's biography.

In his attempt to establish Verhaeren's position among the greatest minds of the epoch, Zweig also points to the closeness to Nietzsche. Echoing Schlaf and other biographers, he uses several themes from Nietzsche to explicate his outlook on life (*Weltanschauung*).<sup>20</sup> For instance, he reminds the reader of the philosopher's motto 'amor fati' when he brings into focus the life-affirming vitalism of Verhaeren, who overcame his psychic ailment and fashioned a 'new pathos' (128–141). Most relevant are the similarities with Nietzsche's prophecies. Without presenting a full discussion of the utopia of a new Europe, as Nietzsche expressed it in a number of writings,<sup>21</sup> Zweig argues that Verhaeren shaped in verse a similar vision of a unified Europe and a pan-European race, that would emerge from the modern traffic and trade, expanding beyond national borders.

It is a well-known biographical fact that Zweig was fascinated by Nietzschean philosophy all his life,<sup>22</sup> and one cannot avoid the impression that his portrait of the Flemish poet is a vehicle to promote a European feeling in the spirit of Verhaeren and Nietzsche, as he read them.<sup>23</sup> As Jacob Golomb and other critics have shown, Zweig was particularly attracted to the Nietzschean ideal of the 'Good European'; a free spirit and a supra-national type of individual who communicated across cultures with the purpose of bringing the nations in Europe closer. Since Nietzsche assigned this role to German intellectuals, and to Jewish intellectuals in particular, it enabled Zweig to find a cultural mission in Europe that was suitable with his background. Like other assimilated or 'marginal' Jews, who did not feel wholly accepted in German culture, he thus found a way to adhere to a German 'ancestor' and attain 'a creative and authentic life' in the spiritual homeland of Europe.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, Nietzsche's ideal can be considered part of a German intellectual tradition. It is known that the philosopher saw a 'Good European' in Goethe, to whom Zweig was indebted too.<sup>25</sup> Earlier in the nineteenth century Goethe had also expressed the conviction that the nations in Europe would come closer and that the Germans could play a worthy role in translating and disseminating foreign literature across Europe.<sup>26</sup>

Comparable ideas can be found in an early autobiographical sketch of Zweig, written in 1908. Here he says he finds his own literary attempts less important than his translations of ‘the great Belgian Emile Verhaeren’.<sup>27</sup> Two years later, in a letter to Verhaeren’s wife, he spoke of his ‘duty’ to translate and propagate the works of her husband.<sup>28</sup> Even if he does not use the specific term ‘good European’ here, as he would do later in his life, Zweig gives evidence of the ideal to look beyond national borders and take up the task of serving European artists by mediation at the cultural level. He did not serve Verhaeren because he appreciated the Belgian literature so much, Zweig said in a letter of 1911, he loved the man’s poetry for he considered it to be ‘European literature’.<sup>29</sup>

Zweig’s study of Verhaeren plainly reveals his personal projection and identification with his subject. Given the biographical fact that Zweig grew up in a polyglot and multi-ethnic environment in Vienna, he probably had an elementary cosmopolitan orientation from an early age which made him receptive to a Belgian poet like Verhaeren in the first place. It is likely though, that Zweig gained insight and further elaborated his idea of what it means to be European through the articulation of Verhaeren’s life story. At least, it is remarkable that he does not use the term ‘European’ at all in an earlier article on Verhaeren in 1904. Zweig does point out his ‘foreign’ Flemish influence on French literature and he esteemed his poetical works on modern cities to be part of ‘World literature’, yet he does not explicate the European quality of the poet until six years later with the publication of his biography.<sup>30</sup>

Zweig’s involvement with the Flemish poet manifests itself clearly on the level of self-narration in *Die Welt von Gestern*: not only in his self-comprehension as a cultural mediator, but also in his conception of the environment he grew up in. It has often been noted that Zweig displays the nostalgic Habsburg myth in his picture of pre-war Vienna as a cosmopolitan centre, leaving out unpleasant or problematic aspects in society.<sup>31</sup> Less attention has been paid however to the close correspondences between the depictions of his native town and Verhaeren’s Belgium around 1900. Even if the Austrian-Hungarian Empire is presented as an old state in contrast to Belgium as a young nation, both cases show spaces of ethnic diversity and linguistic plurality where one can find a ‘synthesis’ of contrasting cultures. ‘Nowhere was it easier to be a European’, said Zweig, speaking of Vienna in 1942.<sup>32</sup>

The image of Verhaeren as ‘the poet of Europe’ was severely challenged by the outbreak of the First World War, when the biographer had to face the fact that his friend had turned into a fervent patriot who wrote hateful, anti-German poems. Zweig could comprehend the loyalty to one’s own country. He conceals it in his memoir, but he had

himself supported the German army in patriotic writings in the earliest phase of war.<sup>33</sup> What he could not understand, however, was the sudden hatred of his friend. The case illustrates how much Zweig liked to believe that Verhaeren was the ‘European poet’ he imagined him to be. His portrait was not altogether inaccurate though. It has been documented that Verhaeren’s national devotion completely took over his Europeanism, after the invasion of Belgium in 1914.<sup>34</sup> The German culture he once held high, became a target of anger and contempt in wartime. Nevertheless, Zweig remained loyal to Verhaeren until his death in a train accident in 1916. In his kind ‘Erinnerungen an Verhaeren’ of 1917 he insisted – not without foundation – that the Flemish poet had already let go of his hatred before the fatal accident and had found again his ‘old voice’.<sup>35</sup>

As Zweig writes, he felt so closely related to Verhaeren that he could hardly avoid narrating his own life story while writing his memoir of the poet.<sup>36</sup> Large parts of this text do indeed recur in *Die Welt von Gestern*, where Zweig devotes numerous pages to his friendship with the Belgian poet. Once more he recites his lyrical ‘hymn for the peoples of Europe’, presenting it as the poetic expression of ‘the Europe [...] we dreamed of then’.<sup>37</sup> However, he leaves out the painful episode of World War One, perhaps to not disturb the memory of his beloved friendship and the ideal of Europe that is so central to the book. In the chapters that cover the war years Zweig foregrounds Romain Rolland instead, in whom he found a new personal mentor who could replace Verhaeren.

### ROMAIN ROLLAND, THE CONSCIENCE OF EUROPE

Zweig’s initial interest in Rolland was awakened by his ten volume novel *Jean-Christophe* (1904–1912), which expressed an overt appeal for European brotherhood. When he first contacted Rolland in 1910 by letter, he enclosed a copy of the Verhaeren study he had just published. Rolland appreciated the gift and answered that he too valued the Belgian poet and that he recognized in Zweig a European like himself.<sup>38</sup> It was the beginning of a friendship which extended over thirty years. Zweig’s respect for Rolland increased in the First World War, when his friend was one of few intellectuals who protested against the war from the very beginning. Living in self-imposed exile in Switzerland, he addressed intellectuals in the whole of Europe – including Zweig – to stay ‘above the battle’.<sup>39</sup>

From the time Zweig met Rolland on Swiss ground in 1917 he planned to write his biography.<sup>40</sup> The book he completed three years later bears

many resemblances to the study of Verhaeren. It essentially serves the same purpose of advancing the reputation of his friend and introducing him to a wider readership. More specifically, as a biographer, Zweig idolised Rolland as a great European as much as Verhaeren. He runs short of labels that express admiration for his hero, who is ‘the embodiment of the European spirit’ (52), the ‘advocate’ (290), the ‘conscience’ of Europe (257) and ‘the most impressive moral phenomenon of our age’ (6).<sup>41</sup> These terms already reveal that Zweig is far more concerned with ethics than aesthetics in this life-narrative.

It has been documented that the First World War made Zweig more aware of the need for active engagement for peace and unity in Europe. Karl Müller considers the article ‘Der Turm zu Babel’ (1916) a key text in Zweig’s oeuvre, marking his ultimate ‘European awakening’ and an ‘act of birth’.<sup>42</sup> By using the biblical image of the Tower of Babel, symbolically representing the utopia of a spiritually united Europe, Zweig campaigned for human effort to contribute to the building process of a European community. It is certain that he re-orientated in the war and there is no doubt that he turned away from the German patriotism he adhered to in the first stage of the conflict. As he formulated it in his memoir of 1942: ‘Since the war I felt the moral duty to create in one direction only: that one which would help our time to progress’.<sup>43</sup> However, ‘Der Turm zu Babel’ seems to be an elaboration of ideas he developed earlier, prior to the war. Apparently, Zweig’s involvement with the life stories of both Verhaeren and Rolland played a part in this.

The image of the Tower of Babel already appears in Zweig’s biography of Verhaeren, albeit merely in the quote ‘les babels enfin réalisés’ from *Le Port*, a poem that evokes the melting pot of modern cities (105). A few years later, in a different context, Zweig must have ran across the image in the first biography of Rolland, published by Paul Seippel in 1913. In the preface of the book, Seippel calls to all ‘the friends of Jean-Christophe’ who were coming from different parts in the world, speaking different languages and having different beliefs, to ‘build a Tower of Babel’.<sup>44</sup> The appeal may have resonated in the mind of Zweig, who read Seippel’s work shortly after its appearance<sup>45</sup> and refers to it in his own study of Rolland in 1921. This biography can in any case be understood as Zweig’s own contribution to the construction of the tower he called for in 1916. Akin to the form of Seippel’s biography, it takes the shape of an explicit moral appeal that reaches out to the intellectual elite of Europe.

Anyhow, it cannot be questioned that Zweig is influenced by Rolland’s own biographical practice. In the preface of *Romain Rolland. Der Mann und das Werk* he admits that he ‘modelled’ the book upon Rolland’s *Vies des hommes illustres*. With the purpose of revitalising the ‘old Europe’ by

spreading fresh inspiration, the French writer had published a series of heroic lives of European artists he admired: *Vie de Beethoven* (1903), *Vie de Michelangelo* (1906) and *Vie de Tolstoy* (1911). It was his intention to stir and console readers and enable them to experience art and moral values in a direct, engaging way. 'Teach by example', was the device and method Rolland derived from Plutarch's *Lives*. Although he abandoned the project in 1911, his wartime correspondence with Zweig reveals the wish to continue the publication of popular life stories that people can understand and identify with.<sup>46</sup> Following in this tradition, Zweig pays tribute to Rolland and employs his biography as an instrument to visualize a European life with a didactic aim.<sup>47</sup> In the preface, he dedicates the book 'to those few who [...] remained faithful to Romain Rolland and to our beloved home of Europe'.

By drawing attention to the fact that *Vies des hommes illustres* was an important source of inspiration for his biography, Zweig brings to light the transnational character of his biographical venture. He did a similar thing in his biography of Verhaeren, which he provided with a motto from the biographical portrait Verhaeren made of Rembrandt in 1904.<sup>48</sup> Relating to the biographical practice, the motto expressed the idea that one should look for the unity of the artist's 'temper, character, and life'. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine in more detail the closely-knit relation and cross-references between these artists' biographies, but they certainly deserve a thorough investigation from the perspective of transnational life writing.

The letter-exchange with Rolland reveals that *Jean-Christophe* equally inspired Zweig in writing the life-narrative of his friend.<sup>49</sup> This fictive biography of the German composer Jean-Christophe who visits Paris around 1900, shows how the main character overcomes nationalist prejudices and acquires a European sense of self by making acquaintances with Frenchmen and Italians. Quoting Jean-Christophe, who cries out that 'the Europe of today no longer possesses a common book', Zweig echoes the novel's obvious goal to spread the message of fraternity by displaying the life of an individual that does not belong to one nation, but all nations and peoples. Writing the book was not merely a work of art, but 'a work of life' and 'an ethical act', he commented (181).

These words echo Zweig's description of his Rolland biography. In letters to his French friend, with whom he discussed the project, he explained that Rolland's life story was supposed to be different from the monograph on Verhaeren, in both form and content: 'Emile Verhaeren was a work on literature. This should be a book on life'. As Zweig asserted, he wanted to portray Rolland as 'a living intellectual' who disseminated 'ideas created out of life itself'.<sup>50</sup> Unlike the 'rather difficult and complicated' essay

on the life and works of the Belgian poet, this work should also be more accessible for a large reading public.<sup>51</sup>

Zweig's description of Rolland's pacifist stance in World War One emphasises the unity of life and ideas. The following line is telling: 'We saw his life and personality taking the form of an actual living conviction' (258). Further, the biographer remarks that 'truth cannot be taught, it must be lived [...] Rolland [...] has shown the world how a man makes an idea live' (323). These phrases give an idea of the importance he attached to life stories as a genre that can help people understand otherness, Zweig's most cherished desire.<sup>52</sup> This becomes even more obvious in his perception of *Jean-Christophe*, as he formulated it in a letter to Rolland: 'I have the feeling that this book did more to bring France and Germany closer than all diplomats, banquets and associations have. The best way ever to understand the most valuable in a country is through a human being'.<sup>53</sup>

It is telling that the motto of Zweig's biography as a whole is a quote from Goethe's autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, saying that one has to select certain facts and events in order to tell a coherent life story and form a work of art. Significantly, the opening chapter carries the maxim 'A Life...: A Work of Art'.<sup>54</sup> Zweig had meant to write a truthful portrait, but he was perfectly aware of the fact that he nearly moulded Rolland's life story into a European work of art which was almost, or partially fictitious. In this regard, it resembled *Jean-Christophe*, that was 'created out of truth and fiction', as Zweig puts it (153).

Apart from the fact that his biography of Rolland comes close to the general idea of *Jean-Christophe*, there is also a correspondence on the level of narration. Unlike the narrative on Verhaeren, whose Europeanism was largely determined by his racial descent, this is the story of a European apprenticeship.<sup>55</sup> After briefly evoking Rolland's native town Clamecy, Zweig goes on to describe the environment in which the writer grew up. While he discusses Rolland's ancestral roots in terms of blood, he chooses to describe inherited mentalities rather than racial or biological characteristics. For example, when it is noted that 'in the blood of the parents existed contrasts deriving from earlier days of French history', Zweig points out that Rolland's father represented the revolutionary tradition, whereas his mother represented the tradition of religion (3).

In a chronological way, Zweig depicts his friend's childhood, youth and adult life and discusses his literary work in between the chapters. Central to the narrative are the major themes that figure in *Jean-Christophe*: education, travel and intercultural encounters. From the very beginning, the setting of the story is framed by the perspective of international relations. Typically, Zweig captures the tense atmosphere of the epoch in

which Rolland grew up by briefly mentioning a historical event: 'Romain Rolland was born on 29 January in the fateful year of 1866, the year of Sadowa'. The reference to the battle of Sadowa serves to insert Rolland's story within the historical panorama of the emerging German nationalism and the rivalry with France that would lead to the Franco-Prussian war in 1870. Growing up in the shadow of defeat in a revanchist anti-German France, Zweig narrates, Rolland searched for new values and ideals to uphold.

Rolland, as he features in Zweig's biography, developed an international taste in art from an early age. Of great influence were the piano lessons he received from his mother, teaching him to appreciate the music of Wagner and Beethoven. Zweig further brings into focus his love for literature from across the borders of France: 'the other saint of his childhood, Shakespeare, likewise belonged to a foreign land. With his first loves, all unaware, the lad had already overstridden the confines of nationality' (5). Rolland was indeed passionately interested in Beethoven and Shakespeare, but Zweig tends to ignore his attachment to French writers such as Corneille, Chateaubriand and Jules Verne.<sup>56</sup>

While describing his formative years at the *École Normale Supérieure*, he amply narrates Rolland's particular affiliation to the Russian author Tolstoy. As a young student, Rolland had written a letter to the famous writer to discuss with him his ideas on modern art and morality. The thirty-eight page letter he received in response was a revelation that influenced him once and for all, said Zweig. Not only because Tolstoy convinced him that 'the precondition of every true calling must be, not love for art, but love for mankind'. Most of all, Rolland was touched by his 'kindly deed' and he would always cherish the fact that he received help 'from a foreign thinker', to use Zweig's words (20–21).

His biography reinforces the European scope of Rolland's life and thoughts by constantly bringing out resemblances with artists from outside of France, mostly from Germany. The fact that the French writer was influenced by Goethe and Nietzsche is greatly exploited by Zweig, who applies numerous quotes from their work to elucidate Rolland's creations. More generally, *Jean-Christophe* is described as a novel of apprenticeship in the style of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*.<sup>57</sup> Further emphasising that the work is distant from the French literary tradition, Zweig notes that Rolland 'does not write a classical French' (177). At a different level, the biographer firmly grounds his subject in a European cultural tradition by providing the chapters with mottos from Goethe, Hölderlin, Schiller, Plutarch, Nietzsche and Tolstoy. This transnational framework clearly exposes the entwinement of national cultures and literatures in the life of a singular artist.

Within the narrative of becoming European, as Zweig presents it, Rolland further developed a sense of belonging to Europe through his experience of traveling and living abroad. In the chapter called 'The Consecration', the biography describes how Rolland's education took him to Rome in 1890 where he became acquainted with several foreign intellectuals. Of particular importance is his encounter with the German Malwida von Meysenbug, who had been an intimate friend of Wagner, Nietzsche and Mazzini. 'For this free spirit the barriers of language and nationality did not exist', Zweig comments (26). The essential lesson of travel and intercultural encounter in Rolland's life is emphasised in the remark that the company of Malwida affected his outlook: 'Once and for all, Rolland had acquired the European spirit' (31). According to Zweig, his stay in Italy marked the conception of *Jean Christophe*. Symbolically, he notes, this novel was created in various parts of Europe (165).

It is hard not to see that the biographer exposes his own ideas in the Rolland book, most notably in the lengthy chapter on *Jean-Christophe*. In the earlier mentioned autobiographical sketch of 1908, Zweig already stated that his travels abroad had a formative influence on his 'feeling of cosmopolitanism'.<sup>58</sup> However, in his reading of *Jean Christophe*, he elaborates more thoroughly the transformative effect of travel as part of a European education. The German protagonist discovers 'the conscience of a different race', he says, through his friendship with the French Olivier. In Zweig's words, he pursues 'the path by which the nationalist becomes a citizen of the world and acquires a European soul'. It is not so much the knowledge of a different country that matters, but the ability to see one's 'own country from the outside and a foreign country from within' (207). The idea resonates in *Die Welt von Gestern* where Zweig comments on his intellectual companionship with Bazalgette, Rolland and other French intellectuals by saying: 'you can never know a nation or a city in all its most secret details through books [...] It is intellectual friendship with its people that gives you insight into the real connections between them and their land; outside observations convey a misleading and over-hasty image'.<sup>59</sup>

Another interesting aspect of Zweig's discussion of *Jean-Christophe* in the Rolland book is the part where he discusses the Jewish characters in the novel. The story of Christophe who feels hostility and repulsion towards the Jews he encounters, contains several stereotypes that play a central role in modern antisemitism. Yet, Zweig approvingly recounts that the Jews, who are 'without a country' and 'undermine tradition', are attributed a positive value. Echoing Nietzsche's words, he notes that they can help the 'campaign against nationalism' as 'the best assistants of the *good Europeans* of the future' (225–227). The Jewish motif fits in the

broader narrative of Christophe's formation. Through the explanations of his friend Olivier, he finally comes to an understanding and accepts the Jews into 'his dream of the New Europe' (228).

Throughout his biography of Rolland, Zweig holds on to the trajectory of an artist who becomes a European, stage by stage. His interpretation of *Colas Breugnon* is characteristic. In this novel, written in 1913 and published in 1919, Rolland pictures life in his native region Burgundy. Zweig interprets it as a 'French Intermezzo in the European symphony' (243). Tellingly, he notes: 'The Frenchman, who had so vigorously and passionately transformed into a European [...] was seized with a desire to be, for a creative hour, wholly French, wholly Burgundian, wholly Nivernais' (242).

The European importance of Rolland's life becomes particularly manifest in the chapter on the war years. The fact that his pacifist position was misunderstood and severely attacked on both sides on the front, makes him stand out all the more heroic to Zweig. When he tells how Rolland preached reason and tolerance amidst the insanity of war, he shifts from an impersonal to a personal perspective in order to reveal how much it meant for him personally and for others to meet Rolland in Switzerland, in 1917: 'In his company we were stronger, freer, more genuine, more unprejudiced [...] we were but a couple of dozen who thus came together in Switzerland: Frenchmen, Germans, Russians, Austrians, Italians [...] we felt ourselves in the heart of true Europe (315–6).

While the metaphor of 'the heart of Europe' referred to Belgium in Verhaeren's biography, this time it relates to the city of Geneva, the settlement of numerous exiles from across Europe. Since Zweig's encounter with Rolland in 1917, in Switzerland, was of crucial significance to him, it is not altogether surprising that he devotes a full chapter to it in *Die Welt von Gestern*, calling it 'In the Heart of Europe'. Neutral Switzerland is presented in both writings as a supranational place and a symbol of the grand ideal of fraternity, peace and tolerance. The remark that Rolland 'lived in the realm of the ideal, in the invisible Europe' (324–325) surely reflects Zweig's own personal engagement with Europe as a spiritual homeland.

The biography of Rolland ends in June 1919, at the time of the peace settlements. As Zweig remarks, the attempts to reconcile the nations were already so dominated by emotions of revenge and power that the intellectual reunification of Europe seemed far away. Rolland's efforts had been futile, he resumes: 'Not one of his ideals, not one of his wishes, not one of his dreams has been realised'. But he was 'magnificent in defeat', the biographer comments, and Rolland managed at least to preserve the European faith and fellowship (355). As critics have observed, the 'moral superiority of the vanquished' Zweig exhibits here, is a recurrent theme in his biographical writings.<sup>60</sup>

Even if he rightly detects the figure of the ‘vanquished victor’ in Rolland’s literary creations too (81), Zweig was personally more inclined to embrace defeatism as an honourable intellectual position than Rolland. Disagreements clearly surface in their correspondence of the war years. Unlike his Austrian friend and biographer, Rolland accentuated time and again that he refused to wait passively in defeat. Act was his device. None of this emerges in Zweig’s biography. The fact that Rolland was drawn to more radical politics and aroused sympathy among socialists by the time of 1919 was also left aside.<sup>61</sup>

### ERASMUS, THE FIRST CONSCIOUS EUROPEAN

In the course of the 1920s and 1930s there was increased evidence of dissension between Zweig and Rolland. While Rolland sympathised with communism, Zweig refused to get involved in politics. Despite encouragement to act out the role of spokesmen for the Jewish community after Hitler’s seizure of power, he still refrained from the public debate. By 1934, when his works were banned in Germany and Nazi policies reached Austria, Zweig left his home country and went into exile. Through the writing of Erasmus’ life story that he started in 1933, he reconsidered his self-understanding as a European man of letters. As he acknowledged, *Triumph und Tragik. Erasmus von Rotterdam* (1934) was his most personal book that comes close to a self-portrait.<sup>62</sup>

As in Zweig’s book on Rolland, this biography also brings the European scope overtly to the fore. Its primary theme is concerned with the thought that Erasmus paved the way for a culturally united Europe by building a Republic of Letters, held together by the shared humanistic ideal and the use of Latin, the unifying ‘supra-national tongue’ (11).<sup>63</sup> Erasmus did not use the term ‘European’ in this way and he never propagated a ‘United States of Europe’, yet the biography justly states that the humanist considered himself a ‘world citizen’ who committed himself to peace among the nations in Europe. In the similar rhetoric of exemplarity he used for Rolland, Zweig hails the humanist as ‘the first conscious European, the first to fight on behalf of peace, the ablest champion of the humanities and of a spiritual ideal’ (4). As he ascribed the title ‘first European’ to Nietzsche in earlier writings, this description of Erasmus may be considered a sign of Zweig’s evolved historical awareness.<sup>64</sup> In any case, the Erasmus biography attests to an amplified historical understanding of Europe as a yearning that predates the age of modern nationalism. According to Müller, the book encapsulates Zweig’s essential reflections on European culture and history and

is – together with a later study on Castellio and Calvin – ‘the semantic concentration of his discourse on Europe’.<sup>65</sup>

Zweig’s portrayal of Erasmus as an independent, tolerant and moderate thinker, weary of fanaticism, seems to be greatly inspired by Johan Huizinga’s biography of 1924.<sup>66</sup> An obvious difference, however, is that Zweig discusses the life and thought of Erasmus more explicitly from a European perspective. The opening chapter, presenting a ‘glance at the epoch’ gives an overview of developments in fifteenth century Europe at large, instead of the Netherlands, as Huizinga. Moreover, Erasmus’s life and works are interpreted from a cultural European frame of reference. For example, his conciliatory nature is compared to Goethe’s character more than once and his satirical writings are presented as prefigurations of the works of Swift, Voltaire and Heine.

Zweig makes much of the fact that Erasmus was an illegitimate child who preferred not to talk about his ancestral roots. The humanist, as he presents him, showed hardly any affection for his native country and abandoned the Dutch vernacular at an early age to write in Latin.<sup>67</sup> While Huizinga and other biographers also mention that Erasmus became estranged from his native country early in life, they discuss his ambivalence towards his ancestral roots and point out that ‘national identity’ was anyway a complex and confusing issue in Erasmus’ day.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, Zweig casts Erasmus as the icon of supranationalism: ‘A remarkable symbol for a man who was to become a supranational [...] was that Erasmus had no mother country, no home. In a certain sense, he was born in void space’ (32).

As in his book on Rolland, here Zweig also structures the narrative of becoming European along thematic lines. Education, travel and intercultural encounters are central to the story. He describes how Erasmus began to discover Europe as a young scholar, when he traveled to Paris to acquire a doctorate in theology. Most influential, however, was his stay in England, where he met prominent scholars and became friends with Thomas More. Erasmus, who had been living in isolation till then, ‘almost imprisoned’, Zweig says, liberated himself from narrow-mindedness and learned to think freely and independently. As a result, he returned to the continent as ‘a cosmopolitan, and man of the world’ (44–48). After years of extensive travel Erasmus settled for a longer period in Basle, Switzerland. Parallel to the narrative of Rolland, the site is presented here as ‘the heart of Europe’, symbolising ‘the perennial asylum of every independent spirit’. Basle became the center of a network of intellectuals evolving throughout Europe, attracting numerous ‘pilgrims’ from France, Germany and Italy who wanted to visit the famous humanist (177–179).

The European perspective is equally prominent in Zweig's portrait of the age in which Erasmus's life story unfolds. The transition from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century is presented as an era of radical and rapid change, marked by the discovery of new continents and revolutionary progresses in science and technology. One can find echoes of the book on Verhaeren in the observation that the mobility and change in vital rhythms brought about a sense of European unity: 'Europe had for a short space found one heart, one soul, one will, and one desire' (29–30). The analogies between Erasmus' age and the biographer's own time are explicitly pointed out, when he remarks: 'The only other epoch comparable with this turn of the century is our own, with its sudden diminution of space and time by means of the telephone, wireless, automobiles, and aircraft, through its abrupt change in the rhythm of life by discoveries and inventions' (25). This passage can be regarded as an anticipation of *Die Welt von Gestern*, where Zweig reiterates the thought that the scientific and technological developments profoundly changed the rhythm of life and brought forth 'a European sense of community'.<sup>69</sup>

The analogy to the time of writing the book becomes even more manifest when Zweig describes how the European unity in Erasmus' day was destroyed by the Reformation that divided the continent between Catholics and Protestants. The 'fateful' epoch, full of terrible religious conflicts and wars is 'comparable only with the times we live in' (23), the biographer observed. In the presentation of Erasmus' age he repeats the central idea from the lecture he held in Florence in 1932 on *Die europäische Gedanke in seiner historischen Entwicklung*. The desire for an ever higher spiritual unity, a European unity, he argues, manifests itself time and again through the ages. Reiterating the symbolic image of the Tower of Babel, he contends that every time a union becomes manifest, nationalist forces emerge to destroy it. Anticipating his biography of 1934, Zweig refers to Erasmus as one of the prominent humanists of the Renaissance who restored the lost unity of the Roman Empire by building a Republic of Letters, soon shattered by the Reformation.<sup>70</sup>

The terms and images Zweig uses to depict the forces in history that shaped Erasmus' life, bear resemblances to the discourse in this lecture of 1932. Most of the time, Zweig uses metaphors of natural force, like 'the torrent of unreason', 'a hurricane' and 'thunderstorms'. These sort of metaphors occur in Zweig's biography of Rolland too, but this time, the forces of history are more systematically brought to the fore within a comprehensive historical perspective. Whenever nationalist passions awaken and get mixed up with 'religious ecstasy', Zweig writes, primal forces explode. Moral regression is the result, as Erasmus realised: 'war spelled for him a step backward in the progress of civilisation, a lapse

into the barbarism of epochs long since outlived' (159). Zweig also uses rhythmic metaphors of ebb and flow, in order to present such events as part of broader historical processes, eternally moving between polarities of progression and regression, rise and decline, reason and insanity.<sup>71</sup>

Erasmus' life story, as Zweig proposes it, captures the essence of this view by picturing a 'golden age' of cultural unity in Europe which is destroyed by brutal nationalist forces. In such 'apocalyptic hours of human folly', he writes, 'is the demon of war let loose to gallop madly' (15). Within this structure Zweig focuses on the tragic destiny of Erasmus, who got caught up in historical events beyond his control. As a witness to the religious hysteria that turned into a bloody conflict, he realized that he had failed in his attempt to preserve European unity with the 'pen as his only weapon' (22). As critics have taken note, *Die Welt von Gestern* repeats this global narrative structure.<sup>72</sup> Zweig equally replicates the words and images of his Erasmus book, as for example, in the frequently quoted passage from the preface, where he recounts – resuming the history of two subsequent World Wars – that he experienced several 'volcanic shocks' and 'earthquakes' in one lifetime: 'All the pale horses of the apocalypse have stormed through my life [...] I have been a defenceless, helpless witness of the unimaginable relapse of mankind into what was believed to be long-forgotten barbarism.'<sup>73</sup>

The final chapter of Zweig's memoir, in which he documents his darkest hour in wartime, comes close to his description of Erasmus' defeat, when 'the days of supranational community [were gone]; even Latin, the language of a united Europe, the language of Erasmus' heart, was dead' (234–235). Zweig, for his part, was aware that he had not been able to preserve European unity, which he regarded as the most essential task of his life.<sup>74</sup> He almost echoes the story of Erasmus when he tells how he was left disheartened, suffering from the feeling of futility and loneliness. *Die Welt von Gestern* records a sense of loss, much like Zweig expressed in his farewell letter of 1942, written shortly before he committed suicide: 'the world of my own language has been lost and my spiritual homeland, Europe, has destroyed itself'.<sup>75</sup>

Although 'destiny' and 'fateful hour' are frequently used terms in his Erasmus book, Zweig does not completely abandon human agency. The story of the humanist, which is the most dramatised account of the three biographies discussed here, is structured as a conflict between two individuals: Erasmus meets Luther, his 'Titanic Adversary' (130–173). The two men are presented as absolute opposites: Erasmus is the European and cosmopolitan, the mediator and moderate man in the middle; while Luther is the man of action, the fanatic and representative of Germany and German national interests. It is not difficult to recognise Hitler in

the picture of Luther as ‘an emanation of the dark, daemonic forces of the Germanic peoples’ (16).

Erasmus, as he features in Zweig’s biography, could not compete with the brutal force of Luther. In vain he attempted to stick to partial moderation in the conflict between Rome and the Reformation. Erasmus was no fighter, the biographer observes, and he was cautious, rather than courageous. Zweig’s personal experiences seem mirrored in the remark that Erasmus was regarded as a coward by contemporaries because he refused to take sides. The claim that the humanist avoided conflict is, however, not entirely accurate. Erasmus was actually a fervent polemicist who every so often took up the pen to publicly dispute and attack his opponents. As critics have observed, controversy with Luther is not so representative in this regard.<sup>76</sup> Zweig, however, puts most emphasis on Erasmus’ honourable attempt to remain independent and ‘save the universal heritage of culture and civilisation [...], remaining as a mediator in the middle of the fray, the most dangerous of positions’ (17).

Apparently, Zweig has amplified his insights on the distinctive role of mediator. Mediation is related not only to cross-cultural communication here, but also to the position of an independent man of moderation who works for European unity while refusing a position that is somehow political. This, of course, recalls the life story of Rolland. Yet, Zweig never referred to him as a ‘mediator’ in his biography of 1921. Now he uses the Rollandian term ‘above the battle’ to explicate Erasmus’ position (18), although it is likely that his French friend did not fully agree with this interpretation of his words in the circumstances of the 1930s. Alongside the a-political character of mediation that is highlighted, the concept has also gained historical depth by the example of Erasmus who mediates across generations by carrying over Europe’s cultural heritage. Zweig mentioned this aspect in Rolland’s biography as well, but he places it in the very centre of his Erasmus study. This is most evident in the final chapter of the biography that is devoted to ‘the legacy of Erasmus’.

This legacy contains a ‘promise’ for the future (247). Zweig does not pretend that Erasmus is the answer to the fascism of his day, he rather inspects the humanist tradition critically. He notes, for example, that the early humanists lived in an ivory tower and deliberately ignored the masses. A more fundamental weakness, however, was ‘the tragical error’ that they believed that the whole of mankind, could be raised to a higher level of civilization by means of cultural education (9). As Zweig observes, these humanists underestimated the primal, irrational forces in history that cannot be controlled. The humanistic ideal remained an utopia, but, at least, it survived. Erasmus, he notes, ‘brought it safely out of the

terrible storm of hate' and inspired numerous intellectuals in later centuries (19). Zweig presents a line of filiation from Erasmus to Spinoza, Diderot, Voltaire, Lessing, Schiller, Kant, Tolstoy, Gandhi, Rolland and all "the good Europeans" who drew on aspects of Erasmian humanism in their own diverging ways (19, 245–246).

According to Rüdiger Görner, Zweig's study of Erasmus shows 'a utopian paradox': the Erasmian humanism will always remain an ideal, but it can have real effects when it incites people to concrete efforts that can bring about a higher moral unity in Europe.<sup>77</sup> It is thus left largely implicit if the Erasmic dream will ever materialize in the future. Zweig's biography serves anyway to illustrate the thought that the humanist ideal of a culturally united Europe always returns and eternally renews itself, for it can continue to inspire coming generations. Written in the spirit of Erasmus, it pursues the didactic aim to spread the humanist legacy from one generation to the next.

Zweig's Erasmus book can be regarded as a showcase of the new, transnational approaches to history he proposed in articles and lectures of the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>78</sup> In contrast to the sentiments of pessimism he recorded in private writings, Zweig publicly uttered the belief that it could be possible to teach a new generation to look beyond the national perspective. In his study of Erasmus he almost explains his own motivation for writing life stories to this particular end, when he argues that the masses are moved by images of real people, rather than by programs and abstract ideas.<sup>79</sup> Although Zweig himself is often perceived as an elitist writer who showed no sign of being a democrat, he realised that it was urgently necessary to find media with the potential to engage people affectively and prepare the ground for a belief in the unity of Europe and humanity at large. The social outreach of the book can of course be disputed, but it is a fact that it was the most popular book on Erasmus in the era and translated in numerous languages.<sup>80</sup>

For Zweig, writing the biography of Erasmus was instrumental in confirming and expanding his thoughts on the mission of the European intellectual as a mediator across cultures and generations. As critics have noted, this portrait – together with the ones of Castellio (1936) and Montaigne (1942) – mirror the European that he wanted to be.<sup>81</sup> Europe is an ideal, but Zweig tries to make it real by singling out the particular life of Erasmus and transforming it into a compelling story that can inspire people. It was his way of dealing with the sense of being utterly powerless against the brutal forces in history. Very much in line with his life-narrative of the humanist, *Die Welt von Gestern* can be regarded as an attempt to captivate the ideal of a united, humanist Europe and carry the memory of it in times of war.

## CONCLUSIONS

From Zweig's very first writings, his life stories were a practice of cultural mediation which aimed to foster cultural exchange and understanding. He consistently used the biographical genre as a means to express and construct an idea of Europe that centered on ethnic diversity and linguistic plurality. In this spirit, Verhaeren, Rolland and Erasmus were presented as icons of a cosmopolitan European culture in such a way as to give shape to Europe as he conceived it. By highlighting specific biographical elements and ignoring or down-playing others, Zweig appropriated their life-narratives for European cultural interest, as he also did, in a programmatic way, for his own life.

Narrating the life stories of men of letters from different nations and language areas had a formative part on Zweig's self-comprehension. Through the idealized lives of Verhaeren, Rolland and Erasmus he partly developed the form and method of constructing his own life story that could act as a symbol of Europe. Each of the three portraits illustrates particular aspects of this biographical practice and each one of them represents a distinct phase in his life in which Zweig defined and redefined his sense of self. These biographies anticipate *Die Welt von Gestern*, as far as they reveal a narrative structure and some major themes and topics that reappear in Zweig's memoir.

The early book on Verhaeren, written before the First World War, illustrates Zweig's tendency to focus on urban centres of gravity at particular moments in time, when a new world and a new rhythm of life come into being. Large modern cities, such as Vienna, Brussels, Geneva, Paris, are presented as European spaces where cultures mix and interact. The exemplary metaphor of 'the heart of Europe' portrays Europe as a crossroads of cultures and returns in Zweig's later biographical writings. Like the lives of his subjects, he understands his own life as affected and shaped by the turbulence of modern times which intensified cross-cultural encounters and interactions.

Whereas the life-narrative of Verhaeren looks particularly at the aesthetic imagination of a Europe to come, Rolland's biography reveals the extent to which Zweig became increasingly concerned with the ethical values of contemporary Europe. Drawing partly on the biographical modes of his subject, he presented his readers an exemplary life that expressed universal human values of peace, tolerance and fraternity. Different from the Verhaeren study, which centers on the racial descent of his subject, Zweig exposes Europe as a lived experience and an adopted mindset. He molded the life of Rolland into the narrative of a European education, structured along the lines of artistic instruction, travel and intercultural

encounter. Friendship with artists and intellectuals of nationalities differing from one's own is a key element in this storyline that was to be repeated in later life-narratives.

The Erasmus biography reflects the narrative structure of a golden age and the downfall of a humanistic Europe, which Zweig portrayed in his memoir too. Building on earlier insights, he redefines the role of the mediator as a humanist man of moderation who remains outside of politics at any time and attempts to preserve Europe's cultural heritage for the whole of mankind. Since Erasmus is powerless in turbulent times, Zweig endows the man of letters with the sense of tragedy he expressed in earlier works. Although pessimism permeates the story, the legacy that is passed over to future generations gives a reason for hope. Zweig, who considered himself a heir to Erasmus's spirit, eventually wrote his own life story to promote his legacy.

Zweig's memoir continues to be of interest today as a subjective account of a Europe as he imagined and loved. Instead of explaining European unity as an abstraction or political program, he aimed to make it 'tangible to the senses'<sup>82</sup> by presenting it from the perspective of an individual. The book is equally interesting for its form; the fact that Zweig drew large parts of his own life story out of his writings on others, in an apparent need of vehicles to express his own ideas, has been explained by critics as a lack of self-confidence and a weak identity, typical of an assimilated and 'marginal Jew'.<sup>83</sup> Even if that was true, Zweig's biographical approach, showing admiration for writers outside of Austria and Germany, is also a conscious effort to enact a transnational practice across borders and generations, that artists can relate to and engage with. It is precisely this enactment that can help us better understand his consistent employment of the biographical genre as a space where Europeanness is conceptualised and conveyed to others.

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## NOTES

- 1 See for example: H. Schweiger, 'Global Subjects; the Transnationalisation of Biography', in: *Life Writing* vol. 9: 3, 2012, 249–258; A. Hornung, 'Transcultural Life Writing' in: C.A. Howells & E.M. Kröller eds., *The Cambridge History of Canadian literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010, 536–555. A. Lehman, *Transnational Lives in China. Expatriates in a Globalizing City*, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2014; R.C. Smith, *Mexican New York. Transnational Lives of New Immigrants*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press 2006; T. Keller, 'Transkulturelle Biographik und Kulturgeschichte. Deutsch-Französische Lebensgeschichten', in: *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der Deutschen Literatur* 2013; 38 (1), 121–171.
- 2 H. Schweiger and D. Holmes, 'Nationale Grenzen und ihr biographischen Überschreitungen', in: *Die Biographie – Zur Grundlegung ihrer Theorie*, Berlin, New York: W. De Gruyter 2009, 385–419; H. Schweiger, 'Abgrenzung und Aneignung. Deutsch-britische Transferprozesse in der Biographik des langen 19. Jahrhunderts', *Ibid.*, 419–439; D. Holmes, 'Internationaler Nationalismus. Überlegungen zur deutsch-italienischen Biographik im 19. Jahrhundert', *Ibid.*, 441–469.
- 3 Critics often use both the terms memoir and autobiography when they refer to *Die Welt von Gestern*.
- 4 S. Zweig, Foreword to *The World of Yesterday. Memoirs of a European*, London: Pushkin Press, 2014 [Translation from *Die Welt von Gestern* 1942], 17.
- 5 Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 17–18; Zweig had considered 'My Three Lives' as the title of his autobiography, but, ultimately he opted for *The World of Yesterday* (*Die Welt von Gestern*) which indicated that it less a personal story than a portrait of the age he lived in. Zweig's initial title now reappears in Oliver Matuschek 's biographical work *Three Lives. A Biography of Stefan Zweig*. London: Pushkin Press 2013 [English transl.]. See especially page 12.
- 6 S. Zweig, *Émile Verhaeren*, London: Constable and Company 1915. Translation of *Emile Verhaeren*, Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1910. The page numbers in this article refer to the English edition.
- 7 J. Marx, *Verhaeren. Biographie d'une œuvre*, Bruxelles: Académie Royale de Langue et de Littérature Françaises 1996, 459.
- 8 Zweig devoted a doctoral dissertation to Taine at the University of Vienna in 1904. In See N. Weschenbach, *Stefan Zweig und Hippolyte Taine. Stefan Zweigs Dissertation über 'Die Philosophie des Hippolyte Taine' Wien 1904*, Amsterdam –Atlanta: Rodopi, 1992, 112–122. Even if Zweig pays attention to the personal traits of the artist too, the general approach of the book can be attributed to the influence of Taine.
- 9 The terms language and race are closely connected in Zweig's writings on Verhaeren. See J. Robaey, 'Verhaeren et l'Allemagne. La correspondance with Stefan Zweig', in: A. Laserra ed. *Histoire, mémoire, identité dans la littérature non fictionnelle. L'exemple belge*, Bruxelles: Peter Lang 2005, 248–229.

- 10 Zweig's view, which he stated repeatedly in articles and letters, was influenced by German critics who argued that Verhaeren belonged to German culture, an idea that would become a widely accepted myth. See F. Van de Kerckhove, Introduction in: Emile and Marthe Verhaeren - Stefan Zweig, *Correspondance Générale 1900–1926. éd. établie, présentée et annotée par Fabrice van de Kerckhove*, Bruxelles: Labor 1996, 19, 31–32, 56–57.
- 11 Van de Kerckhove, *op. cit.*, 31–32.
- 12 Van de Kerckhove, *op. cit.*, 55; Marx, *op.cit.*, 74.
- 13 Zweig adds, though 'To-day, perhaps, a return to classicism is perceptible in his poetry', 160.
- 14 T. Verschaffel, 'Belgians' in: M. Beller & J. Leerssen, *Imagology. The cultural construction and literary representation of national characters. A critical survey*, Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi 2007, 108–113.
- 15 Edmond Picard, 'L'âme belge' in *Revue encyclopédique*, 24 July 1897.
- 16 S. Resch, 'Differenz des Einklangs: Stefan Zweig und Richard Graf Coudenhove-Kalergi', in: M. Gelber and A. Ludewig (eds.) *Stefan Zweig und Europa*, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: 2011, 57.
- 17 Critics differ in their readings of the (supposed) elements of cultural imperialism and colonialism in Zweig's discourse on Europe. See K. Müller, 'Aspekte des europäischen Erbes und die 'Vereinigten Staaten Europas'', in M. Gelber and A. Ludewig (eds.), *op. cit.*, 40–42.
- 18 Marx, *op. cit.*, 400.
- 19 W. Grünzweig, 'Collaborators in the Great Cause of Liberty and Fellowship': Whitmania as an Intercultural Phenomenon', Whitmania as an Intercultural Phenomenon', in: *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 5 (Spring 1988), 16–26.
- 20 See Van de Kerckhove, *op. cit.*, 16–17.
- 21 P.M. Lützelzer, *Die Schriftsteller und Europa. Von der Romantik bis zur Gegenwart*, Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft 1998 [1992], 190–204.
- 22 J. Golomb, "Stefan Zweig: the Jewish Tragedy of a Nietzschean "Free Spirit"", in: J. Golomb (ed.), *Nietzsche and the Austrian culture*, Wien: Facultas Universitätsverlag 2004, 110. J. Golomb, 'Nietzsche and the Marginal Jews' in: Golomb, J. (ed.), *Nietzsche and Jewish Culture*, London and New York: Routledge 1997, 166.
- 23 Zweig ignored particular aspects of Nietzsche's thought, like his bellicose attitude and his reservations towards an 'extreme cosmopolitan attitude'. See J. Golomb, 'Stefan Zweig: the Jewish Tragedy', 96, 109. See also Van de Kerckhove, *op. cit.*, 47.
- 24 J. Golomb, 'Stefan Zweig: the Jewish Tragedy', 109–110; J. Golomb, 'Nietzsche and the Marginal Jews' in: Golomb, J. (ed.), *Nietzsche and Jewish Culture*, London and New York: Routledge 1997, 166. See also: N. Unger, 'Two 'Good Europeans': Nietzschean Innovation in the late Habsburg thought of Hermann Bahr and Stefan Zweig', in: *Trans: Internet-Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften*, nr. 16, Mai 2006. N. Unger, 'The influence of Emile Verhaeren and Walt Whitman in Stefan Zweig's pre-194 conception of cultural modernism', in: *Trans: Internet-Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften*, nr. 17, Mai 2008.
- 25 Zweig's study of Verhaeren contains numerous references to Goethe.
- 26 T. D'Haen, *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature*, London and New York: Routledge 2012, 6.
- 27 S. Zweig, *An Early Autobiographical Sketch* (1908) in: M. Gelber, *Modern Austrian Literature*, 1992, Vol. 25 Issue 1, 15–18.
- 28 S. Zweig, Letter to Marte Verhaeren, 13 October 1910.
- 29 S. Zweig, Letter to Emile Verhaeren, 4 May 1911.
- 30 S. Zweig, 'Emile Verhaeren', in: *Das literarische Echo*, 15 April 1904. This article is reprinted in S. Zweig, *Émile Verhaeren*, Frankfurt am Main 1984. The references to world literature are to be found on pages 15, 28.
- 31 See for example R. Wistrich, 'Stefan Zweig and the "World of Yesterday"', in: Gelber, M. (ed.) *Stefan Zweig Reconsidered. New Perspectives on his Literary and Biographical Writings*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2007, 59–77.

- 32 Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 45.
- 33 B. Paur, 'Ich bin ja ganz Zwiespalt jetzt...' Die Feuilletons von Stefan Zweig im Ersten Weltkrieg mit Fokus auf die Neue Freie Presse' in: K. Müller ed., *Stefan Zweig: Neue Forschung*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2012, 27–49.
- 34 P. Servaes, P. *Emile Verhaeren. Vlaams dichter voor Europa*, Berchem: Uitgeverij Epo 2013 [2012]; R. Hemmerijckx, 'Emile Verhaeren, een dichter in de Groote oorlog', in: *Zacht Lawijd*, 2014, 13.3, 169–190. For Verhaeren's Europeanism, see also D. Gullentops, 'Introduction', in: *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, tome 77 fasc. 3, 1999, 689–694.
- 35 Zweig refers to Verhaeren's postcard – sent to the publisher of *Le Carmel* – saying he agreed with Zweig's message of 'Der Turm zu Babel' of 1916. However, this card appears to have been lost and Zweig vainly requested to see it. S. Zweig, 'Erinnerungen an Emile Verhaeren' in : S. Zweig, *Emile Verhaeren* : Frankfurt am Main : Fischer Verlag, 1984, pp. 251–317. See also : P. Servaes, *op. cit.*, 905.
- 36 Zweig, 'Erinnerungen an Emile Verhaeren', 254.
- 37 Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 142.
- 38 R. Rolland, Letter to Stefan Zweig, 1 May 1910, in: Romain Rolland, Stefan Zweig, *Briefwechsel 1910–1940*, Berlin: Rütten & Loening 1987.
- 39 R. Rolland, *Au-dessus de la mêlée*, Paris: Paul Ollendorf 1915.
- 40 K. Renoldner, 'Instanz über Leben und Werk. Zur Entstehung von Stefan Zweigs Rolland-Biographie', in: « *Ich liebte Frankreich wie eine zweite Heimat* ». *Neue Studien zu Stefan Zweig*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2011, 185–195.
- 41 The page numbers refer to the English edition S. Zweig, *Romain Rolland. The Man and his Work*, New York: Thomas Seltzer 1921. Translated from the German *Romain Rolland. Der Mann und das Werk*, Frankfurt am Main: Rütten and Loening, 1920. The book appeared at the end of 1920 with the indication of the year 1921.
- 42 Müller, art. cit., 35.
- 43 S. Zweig, 'Stefan Zweig', in: Georges Schreiber [Hrsg.], *Portraits and Self-Portraits*: New York-Boston: 1937, 175. As cited in: CF. Weschenbach, 13.
- 44 P. Scippel, *Romain Rolland. L'homme et l'œuvre*, Paris: Ollendorf 1913, 5.
- 45 S. Zweig, Letter to Rolland 28 June 1913, *op. cit.*
- 46 See for example R. Rolland, Letter to Stefan Zweig 12 November 1914, *op. cit.*
- 47 I have written elsewhere about the affinity between the biographical practice of Zweig and Rolland: M. Rensen, 'Exemplary Europeans. Romain Rolland and Stefan Zweig', in: *European Studies. An Interdisciplinary Series in European Culture, History and Politics. Nr 32: European Encounters. Intellectual Exchange and the Rethinking of Europe 1914–1945* (2014), 173–189. For Rolland's biographical method see also M. Rensen, 'Romain Rolland et son Beethoven', in: J.M. Whittman ed., *Biographie et roman. Actes du Colloque international de Metz 2010*, Metz: Université Paul Verlaine-Metz 2012, 277–297.
- 48 E. Verhaeren, *Rembrandt*, Paris: Henri Laurens 1904. The book was translated by Zweig.
- 49 S. Zweig, Letter to Romain Rolland 26 September 1918, *op. cit.*
- 50 S. Zweig, Letter to Romain Rolland 5 May 1920, *op. cit.*
- 51 S. Zweig, Letter to Romain Rolland 24 February 1920, *op. cit.*
- 52 Müller, art. cit., 30.
- 53 S. Zweig, *Letter to Rolland*, 22 December 1912, *op. cit.*
- 54 Somewhat surprisingly, this maxim is left out in the English edition.
- 55 See J. Le Rider, 'Un Européen fervent'. In *Le Magazine Littéraire*, Mai 2013, dossier Stefan Zweig, 70–71.
- 56 D.J. Fisher, *Romain Rolland and the Politics of Intellectual Engagement*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1986, 14.
- 57 It is almost a 'German novel', Zweig wrote in a letter to Rolland from 22 December 1912.

- 58 S. Zweig, 'An Early Autobiographical Sketch' (1908), p. 17. When Zweig mentions in this text that he has friends in Brussels and other cities in Europe he doubtlessly thinks of Verhaeren, but he does not explicate the transformative impact of these friendships.
- 59 Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 156.
- 60 See for example Wistrich, art. cit., 67. See also S. Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 191.
- 61 Renoldner, art. cit., 193.
- 62 Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, p. 406; See also J. Golomb, 'Erasmus: Stefan Zweig's Alter-Ego'.
- 63 Page numbers refer to the English edition S. Zweig, *Erasmus of Rotterdam*, New York: The Viking Press 1965. Translated from *Triumph und Tragik. Erasmus von Rotterdam*, Wien: Herbert Reichner 1934.
- 64 In a letter to Rolland from 4 May 1925, Zweig writes that Nietzsche was 'the first European, our ancestor'.
- 65 Müller, art. cit., 33.
- 66 Zweig read Huizinga in 1932. E. Rabbie, *Erasmus in crisistijd. Stefan Zweig en zijn 'Triumph und Tragik des Erasmus von Rotterdam'*, Amersfoort : Florribalics, 2014, p.10; B. Mansfield, *Erasmus in the Twentieth Century : Interpretations c. 1920–2000*, Toronto : University of Toronto Press 2003, 8.
- 67 Zweig mentions that Erasmus suddenly showed affection for his native country in the final stage of his life.
- 68 I. Bejczy, 'Erasmus becomes a Netherlander', in: *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 28. no.2 (Summer 1997), 387–399.
- 69 Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 218–219.
- 70 S. Zweig, *Die europäische Gedanke in seiner historischen Entwicklung*, in: S. Zweig, *Die schlaflose Welt. Aufsätze und Vorträge aus den Jahren 1909–1941*, Frankfurt am Main Fischer Verlag 1983, 193.
- 71 *Ibid.*, 195.
- 72 Barbancho Galdós, I. 'The Self as the "Mittelpunkt", the World as the "Hauptperson"'. The 'Super-Personal' Autobiography of Stefan Zweig', in: *Neophilologus* (2011) 95, 117–118.
- 73 Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 20.
- 74 As Zweig puts it: 'the personal cause to which I had lent the force of my convictions for forty years, the peaceful union of Europe, had been wrecked', *The World of Yesterday*, p. 461.
- 75 Cited by J. Golomb, 'Erasmus: Stefan Zweig's Alter-Ego', 16.
- 76 Rabbie, *op. cit.*, 15.
- 77 R. Görner, 'Erasmisches Bewusstsein: über einen Empfindungs – und Denkmodus bei Stefan Zweig', in: M. Gelber and A. Ludewig (eds.), *op. cit.*, 11–30.
- 78 Instead of looking at national histories, Zweig recommended a focus on the shared history and heritage of the nations in Europe. See for example *Die Geschichtsschreibung von morgen* (1939), in: S. Zweig, *Zeit und Welt. Gesammelte Aufsätze und Vorträge 1904–1940*, Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer Verlag 1943, 297–322.
- 79 When Zweig explains that Erasmus became the symbol of the spiritual longings in his day, he writes: 'New feelings and new thoughts are understood only by a limited circle of the élite; the broad masses of the people are incapable of grasping them in their abstract form; they must have them rendered tangible to the senses and anthropomorphized' (103).
- 80 Mansfield, *op. cit.*, 8.
- 81 Müller, art. cit., 52–53.
- 82 See note 73.
- 83 See for example L. Botstein, 'Stefan Zweig and the Illusion of the Jewish European', in : M. Sonnenfeld (ed.), *Stefan Zweig. The World of Yesterday's Humanist Today. Proceedings of the Stefan Zweig Symposium*, Albany » State University of New York Press 1983, 85–86.