



BRILL

Quaerendo 42 (2012) 1-10

Quaerendo
brill.com/qua

Hitler's European Publishing Ambitions: A Plea for an International Perspective

Hans Renders

Groningen University, the Netherlands

Abstract

The Second World War has been studied intensively as far as humanitarian, military, political and social consequences for Germany and the rest of Europe are concerned. It is striking though, that we do not know much about international relationships in the book trade at that time. Research into Nazi-publishing companies and their policy is often nationally oriented, although there are reasons enough to explore the institutional ties between the various countries and their book markets. Germany sent ideas and experts to occupied countries in order to reform the book business there, while at the same time Belgian, French and Dutch publishers tried to enter the German market.

Keywords

publishing, Second World War, internationalization, German Politics, Oceanus, Nazi culture

From 1940 onwards, a number of publishing houses were transformed, forcibly or otherwise, along national-socialist lines by the national authorities in the occupied European countries. But there were also Nazi-publishers in those countries that were administered directly from the German offices in Berlin. They often had a name that was German or in some sense international. This contribution is concerned with this last category of publishers.

This type of publishing house has been studied only infrequently. In a fragmentary way, it has been shown how the German publisher Europa-Verlag published the *Deutsche Zeitung in den Niederlanden* in the Netherlands during the occupation, from 5 June 1940 to 5 May 1945.¹

¹ C. Sauer, *Der Aufdringliche Text: Sprachpolitik und NS-Ideologie in der 'Deutschen Zeitung in den Niederlanden'* (Wiesbaden 1998).

This newspaper was the successor of the *Reichsdeutschen Nachrichten in den Niederlanden*, a newspaper which the Reichsdeutsche Gemeinschaft began publishing on 4 March 1939. The editorial offices were located in Amsterdam. The *DZN* was one of the 26 editions of the *Deutsche Zeitung* that were published throughout Europe. A fascinating study about the situation in Belgium shows how the *Brüsseler Zeitung* was developed and directed down to the smallest details from Berlin.² Andreas Laska's doctoral dissertation, *Presse et propagande allemandes en France occupée*, similarly provides some insight into the international ambitions of the *Deutsche Zeitung* in France.³

Such histories of publishing and the press, however, to the extent that they have been written at all, have a strictly national orientation. Studies of anti-fascist publishers in exile, operating internationally, are available.⁴ The national-socialist network for the distribution of books and the special war publications intended for the eastern front have also been the subjects of research.⁵ But the comparative study of satellite publishing houses in occupied areas, directed from Germany, has yet to be written.

There are good reasons for writing the history of book publishing during World War II in a broad European context. First of all, research could be done to determine the extent to which publishing policies in the various countries were directed from Berlin. Were differences in approach tolerated? Were there in other countries, besides the Netherlands, few if any newspapers that operated under preventive censorship (in the Netherlands, only the *Joods Weekblad*)? Was the publishing policy concerning books and newspapers in countries with *Civil Verwaltung* (civil administration) different from the ones with *Militair Verwaltung* (military administration)? Those questions formed the basis for an inclusive publication that, however, only dealt with the Netherlands and the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium, i.e. Flanders.⁶ Was the content of French and Polish newspapers published by the Nazis also initially

2 R. Falter, 'De Brüsseler Zeitung (1940-1944)', *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis van de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, 7 (1982), pp. 41-83.

3 A. Laska, *Presse et propagande allemandes en France occupée: des moniteurs officiels (1870-1871) à la Gazette des Ardennes (1914-1918) et à la Pariser Zeitung 1940-1944* (München 2003).

4 K. Schoor, *Verlagarbeit im Exil. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der deutschen Abteilung des Amsterdamer Allert de Lange 1933-1940* (Weesp 1989); H.-A. Walter, *Fritz H. Landshoff und der Querido Verlag 1933-1950* (Marbach 1997).

5 H.-E. Bühler & E. Bühler, *Der Frontbuchhandel 1939-1945. Organisationen, Kompetenzen, Verlage, Bücher. Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt am Main 2002).

6 *Inktpatronen. De Tweede Wereldoorlog en het boekbedrijf in Nederland en Vlaanderen*, ed. H. Renders, L. Kuitert & E. Bruinsma (Amsterdam 2006), pp. 7-38.

reticent about anti-Semitism, as it was in Flanders? Van der Vijver's research reaches this conclusion: "The Propaganda Department was, however, less strict with respect to the application of regulations regarding Jews. They considered it to be undesirable that anti-Jewish measures should be widely known outside of Antwerp. They anticipated little support for the anti-Jewish campaign outside of Antwerp. The Propaganda Department even feared that the presence of excessively poisonous articles in regional papers would lead to "misplaced sympathy".⁷

How was it possible that a certain book could appear in France and could not appear in the Netherlands?⁸ Why were fewer and fewer books published in one country and more and more in another during the occupation?

The answers to these questions lie concealed in publishing policies in the Netherlands and elsewhere during World War II. This issue is so complex because publishers not only operated 'under the influence of' the authorities in Berlin, in a general sense, but were organised directly from the headquarters of the *Ministerium von Volksaufklärung* (people's education) or the *Auswärtige Amt* (Foreign Office), both with respect to newspaper publishing and books. From Berlin, newspapers and publishers were positioned throughout Europe. How did that actually happen? That investigation would represent the beginning of an answer to John B. Hench's research, which describes, in his *Books as Weapons* how on the Allied side – and particularly in the United States – plans were forged throughout the war for accelerating the liberation of Europe by using books as an instrument of propaganda.⁹

Although this research field is largely unexplored, some work on the European politics of Nazi-publishing has been done. Thomas Tavernaro's *Der Verlag Hitlers und der NSDAP*, for example, explains how Eher Verlag absorbed one publishing house after another in Germany and Austria, made use of fictitious imprints and how the imprint Europa-Verlag was used for propaganda directed internationally, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin.¹⁰

7 H. van de Vijver, *België in de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Deel 8: Het cultureel leven tijdens de bezetting* (Kapellen 1990), p. 80.

8 P. Fouché, *L'édition française sous l'occupation 1940-1944* (Bibliothèque de littérature française contemporaine de l'Université, 3; Paris 1987). In fact there were several lists: 'Les Listes Otto', pp. 21-37, and 'La liste d'interdiction belge', pp. 37-40.

9 J.B. Hench, *Books as Weapons. Propaganda, Publishing, and the Battle for Global Markets in the Era of World War II* (Ithaca-London 2010).

10 T. Tavernaro, *Der Verlag Hitlers und der NSDAP. Die Franz Eher Nachfolger GmbH* (Vienna 2004).

With respect to the Dutch situation, we often do not know which publishing houses were in contact with the authorities in Berlin. It is difficult to understand, for example, how it was possible that Kálman Kollár, born in Hungary, and married to Mies Veen, daughter of the Dutch publisher L.J. Veen, was able to establish the Tiefland publishing house. In 1937, Kollár 'voluntarily' emigrated from Vienna to Amsterdam.¹¹ His publishing company, which had operated under an imprint of Franz Leo & Co in Austria, was set up there with the name Tiefland Verlag. It is noticeable that the imprint not only mentioned Amsterdam but also Leipzig. Tiefland Verlag was active until 1943. For example, in 1941 and 1943, respectively, the bi-lingual – German and Dutch – *Spiegel der Niederlande* and *Der Vlämische Spiegel* appeared, both poetry anthologies introduced and translated by Wolfgang Cordan. The books apparently sold well; in 1942, *Spiegel der Niederlande* was reprinted in an expanded version.¹² Tiefland published just nine titles during the years of occupation, ten including the reprint. None of these publications are classified as clandestine, let alone illegal.¹³ In addition to – and shortly after – Tiefland Verlag, Kollár also established, in 1940, Pantheon Akademische Verlagsanstalt. Under this imprint, approximately sixty books appeared between 1940 and 1944, eighteen of which were listed in the catalogue of clandestine publications.¹⁴ Pantheon established a reputation for resistance activities on the basis of these underground titles, but how could the other fifty titles appear? Considering the Amsterdam-Leipzig imprint, and in some cases also Vienna, it seems probable that the publisher at the least consulted with the German authorities, even if only because the distribution of the Tiefland publications for the German-language areas was organised from Leipzig. It might have been a coincidence, but there was also a Pantheon Verlag based in Leipzig; like the Dutch Pantheon, it predominantly published books about the visual arts. Hendrik Edelman writes in his study *International Publishing in the Netherlands* that there is no evidence that the Dutch Pantheon and the German Pantheon had anything to do with each

¹¹ H. Edelman, *International Publishing in the Netherlands, 1933-1945. German Exile, Scholarly Expansion, War-Time Clandestinity* (Leiden-Boston 2010), pp. 147-62; H. Renders, *Verijdelde dromen. Een surrealistisch avontuur tussen De Stijl en Cobra* (Haarlem 1989), p. 141.

¹² H. Edelman, 'Wetenschappelijk uitgeven in bezet Nederland. Tiefland en Pantheon Akademische Verlagsanstalt', in: *Inktpatronen*, op. cit. (n. 6), pp. 358-77.

¹³ D. de Jong, *Het vrije boek in onvrije tijd. Bibliografie van illegale en clandestiene belletrie* (Leiden 1958).

¹⁴ De Jong, op. cit. (n. 13): the nos. 118, 321, 380, 393, 410, 473, 584, 630, 641-2, 754, 799, 813, 825, 873-4, 932 and 1012.

other.¹⁵ There is, nevertheless, reason to doubt this conclusion. In 1940, Erich Reitzenstein published his book *Terenz als Dichter* with Pantheon Akademische Verlagsanstalt. Four variations in the impressum of this book are known to exist: 1) without a place name, 2) Leipzig, 3) Leipzig and Amsterdam, and 4) a variant in which only Amsterdam is mentioned. All too often, in research on the history of books, the treatment of German branches of publishing houses in the occupied areas is naïve. Gerard Groeneveld, for example, in his study *Nieuwe boeken voor den nieuwen tijd*, writes that De Amsterdamsche Keurkamer had a branch in Teplitz-Schönau, but fails to explain the relationship between these two branches.¹⁶ Groeneveld makes clear that De Amsterdamsche Keurkamer was an unambiguously national-socialist business. How could it not be? It published the Dutch translation of *Mein Kampf*. But what remains unclear is the extent to which the authorities in Berlin exerted control over publishing policies by way of Teplitz-Schönau. The national-socialist publishing house Westland is also said to have been set up directly by the NSDAP, but solid research concerning this publishing company has yet to be done, for example, about why there was a direct flow of funds from Berlin to Westland.¹⁷

In October 1940, the Dutch publisher Robbert John Goddard travelled to Berlin, according to his own account, to purchase new typesetting machines and type for a new publishing house. In May 1940, his work as a publisher came to an end because of the bombardment of the Dutch town Middelburg, where he worked for publishing house Den Boer. In reality, he went to visit the German Foreign Ministry. There were plans for the establishment of a publishing house in the Netherlands.¹⁸ Soon after, F.W. Wickel, the official that Goddard had spoken with, became *Gesandtschaftsrat* and head of the *Referat Sonderfragen* of the *Hauptabteilung Volksaufklärung und Propaganda* in Berlin.¹⁹ Still in Berlin, Wickel asked Goddard if he would be interested in

¹⁵ Edelman, op. cit. (n. 11), p. 147.

¹⁶ G. Groeneveld, *Nieuwe boeken voor den nieuwen tijd. Uitgeverij De Amsterdamsche Keurkamer 1932-1944* (Den Haag 1992), p. 147.

¹⁷ Bühler, op. cit. (n. 5), p. 59. Adriaan Venema also writes that Westland received 'a lot of money from the German authorities': A. Venema, *Schrijvers, uitgevers en hun collaboratie. Deel 4: Uitgevers en boekhandelaren* (Amsterdam 1992), p. 103.

¹⁸ Nationaal Archief, The Hague: CZR-dossier Sam van Deventer, inv. nr. 105: minutes of the interrogation of Goddard by the Zuiveringsraad (Purification board), 9 August 1946. See also C. van der Zwet, 'Vals ingeburgerd. Uitgeversmaatschappij Oceanus 1941-1945', *De Boekenwereld*, 25 (2009), pp. 274-92.

¹⁹ A. Venema, *Schrijvers, uitgevers en hun collaboratie. Deel 2: De harde kern* (Amsterdam 1989), p. 12.

becoming the head of a publishing house that was to be established in the Netherlands. Goddard was very interested to start over as a publisher. In June 1941, the Oceanus publishing company was established in The Hague. The charter of foundation creates the impression that this was a Dutch undertaking; 'closer inspection reveals, however, that it is nothing other than a masquerade of German manufacture'.²⁰ Officially the founders are Salomon van Deventer, director of the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller and Gerrit Hendrik de Marez Oyens, an Amsterdam banker. Both are in debt to Wickel: Van Deventer because Wickel helped him keep the estate De Hoge Veluwe and the Kröller-Müller art collection out of the hands of the NSB, and De Marez Oyens, director of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, because Wickel spared him in connection with the escape of several Jewish orchestra members. At any rate, Van Deventer in particular, as Chairman of the Board, continued to work on behalf of Oceanus. He travelled, for example, in 1942, to Berlin to discuss a special lectureship for foreign literature that was to fall under the administration of Fritz Schmidt, *Generalkommissar zur besonderen Verwendung*.²¹ Such a lectureship would encroach directly and publically on the territory of the Lectoraat (lectureship) from the *Departement van Volksvoorlichting en Kunsten* (Department of Public Information and Arts) in The Hague. And in fact, nothing came of the proposal.

Wickel, who in the meantime had come to reside in the Netherlands, became an advisor to Oceanus, attended the meetings of the board of directors and was involved in the development of the publisher's list. Directly after the establishment of the company, the bearer shares were delivered to A.G. Mundus Verlag. It was the goal of the German publishing house Mundus to set up branches in all occupied countries to facilitate the effective promotion of national-socialist propaganda. In reality, then, Oceanus was a publishing house set up and administered in Germany. Even the striking book series *De Onvergankelijken* (The Immortals), was conceived by Mundus. It is of course no coincidence that Oceanus' publications were invariably advertised in the *Deutsche Zeitung in der Niederlanden*.²²

Oceanus was, in fact, directed by Mundus and its publisher's list included not only Dutch authors who were in favour of the New Order, but also German national-socialists. F.M. Hübner, author of innumerable books about Dutch

²⁰ Van der Zwet, art. cit. (n. 18), p. 277.

²¹ Venema, op. cit. (n. 17), p. 294.

²² Niod Archief, Amsterdam, 174a Uitgeversmaatschappij (Publishing house) Oceanus, inv. nr. U1a-U1d.

and Flemish painting, was appointed by the *Reichskommissariat* as an administrator (Verwalter) of various Dutch art dealers. A book like *De Duitse letteren na den Wereldoorlog*, by the national-socialist literary scholar Heinz Kindermann, also gives an impression of Oceanus' European ambitions. And if circumstances called for it, Oceanus also did business with the Mundus branch in Paris.²³

Another example of a book company under the direction of the Nazis is the importer Van Ditmar. An excerpt from the monthly report of Oceanus for March-April 1943:

In Belgien haben wir vorerst die Verbindung mit Van Ditmar's Boekenimport, Antwerpen, ausgebaut. Wir übergaben dieser Firma, wie bereits bekannt sein dürfte, die Alleinvertretung für unsere Ausgaben innerhalb des flämischen Sprachgebietes. Ferner führten wir in Antwerpen und Brüssel verschiedene interessante Unterhaltungen mit einigen Verlegern über eine evtl. Gemeinschaftliche Herausgabe von Büchern für beide Länder. Auch von einer derartigen Zusammenarbeit erwarten wir in Zukunft – falls die Papiersituation nicht schwieriger wird – gute Ergebnisse.²⁴

Nevertheless, the 'connection' had come to exist much earlier and through influences from higher up. As early as May 1940, the Nazis had taken possession of Van Ditmar's Boeken-Import, established in Rotterdam and Amsterdam. F.A. Bredow, *Sonderbeauftragter der Reichspressekammer*, on behalf of the Deutscher Verlag (as the Nazis called the great Ullstein Verlag), was appointed director of Van Ditmar.²⁵ One of the business components of Deutscher Verlag was Mundus. Van Ditmar was of interest to this company because it administered the distribution network for *The Times* and *The Daily Mail*.²⁶ Mundus was thus active in various ways in foreign countries, under the direction of and in cooperation with the German government. And it was at times heavy-handed. During negotiations between the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the publishing house Hachette's large French distribution company Les Messageries, Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda interfered by purchasing 49%

²³ Venema, op. cit. (n. 17), p. 189.

²⁴ Niod Archief, Amsterdam, 174a Uitgeversmaatschappij (Publishing house) Oceanus, inv. no. 1: Bericht über die Monate März/April 1943; N.V. Uitgevers-Maatschappij [Publishing house] 'Oceanus'.

²⁵ M.M. van Melle, *75 Jaar Van Ditmar boekenimport en uitgeverij* (Amsterdam 1999), p. 23.

²⁶ G. Groeneveld, *Zwaard van de geest. Het bruine boek in Nederland 1921-1945* (Nijmegen 2001), p. 75.

of the shares of Les Messageries and handing them over to Mundus.²⁷ It is just one of the cases that illustrate how the legitimate publishing policy in the occupied countries was often directly determined by the authorities in Berlin, even when it interfered with equally German political activities of the Nazis which had been parachuted into The Hague, Paris or Brussels. In the Netherlands, for example, the Volk und Reich Verlag was established in Amsterdam in 1942. The company existed under the auspices of the *Reichskommissariat* in The Hague, but there were also branches in Berlin, Prague and Vienna. Although Volk und Reich was active in Amsterdam from 1942, a propaganda machine had been established earlier in the Netherlands. In 1939, for example, the Dutch-language book *Het 'Athenia'-Geval*, by Adolf Halfeld, was published by the parent company in Berlin.²⁸

In Berlin haben wir in erster Linie mit MUNDUS und dem gegenwärtigen Leiter der Abteilung Schrifttum die verschiedenen Schwierigkeiten besprochen, die wir leider noch immer bei der Prüfung unserer Manuskripte und der von der "Sektion der Graphischen Industrie" zu urteilenden Druckerlaubnisse haben. [...] Des weiteren erörterten wir in Berlin die Papiersituation. Durch Unterstützung der MUNDUS ist es uns gelungen, eine bedeutende Partie Text- und Kunstdruckpapier anzukaufen.²⁹

In the same minutes, mention is made of contact with Jo van Ham, in charge of the *Afdeeling Boekwezen* (Book business department), a section of the *Departement van Volksvoorlichting en Kunsten* (Department of Public Information and the Arts), about a rejected or long delayed allotment of paper for manuscripts. Concerning this matter, direct communication was made with 'Berlin', with Mr Brugger, and in the Netherlands with Mr Lohse of *Referat Schriftum* in The Hague. The Nazis of the *Reichskommissariat* (*Referat Schriftum* resorted under the *Reichskommissariat*) and those of the *Departement van Volksvoorlichting en Kunsten* in The Hague were, in this instance, simply passed over. In the Oceanus' Board of Directors meeting in August, the subject was

²⁷ Fouché, op. cit. (n. 8), p. 60.

²⁸ See the bibliographical information about this publication in Worldcat.org.

²⁹ Niod Archief, Amsterdam, 174a Uitgeversmaatschappij [Publishing house] Oceanus, inv. no. 1: Bericht über die Monate März/April 1943; N.V. Uitgevers-Maatschappij [Publishing house] 'Oceanus'.

raised again. 'Perhaps it would be wise to discuss this again in Berlin.'³⁰ These two examples indicate that the publishing houses in the Netherlands that were directed from Berlin could, if they wished to, detach themselves from the nazi-fied institutions functioning in the Netherlands. In the case of Oceanus, its responsibilities were closely watched in the Board of Directors meetings by H. Seydel, Director-General of Mundus.³¹ Seydel must have been a busy man, because he was also referred to as the 'représentant à Paris du groupe Mundus'.³² In fact, then, he was the man who directed the various European branches of Mundus.

It would be a good idea if book historians, who have done such good work in revealing national-socialist publishing policies in their own countries, would turn their attention to a European synthesis. Such research could teach us about the struggle for power that took place among German directors in the book trade, diplomats, the military and politicians. The fighting, after all, did not only take place on the battlefield.

³⁰ Niod Archief, Amsterdam, 174a, Uitgeversmaatschappij [Publishing house] Oceanus, inv. no. 2: Minutes of the general meeting of shareholders on Tuesday 16 March 1943 at the office and under the chairmanship of the Chairman of the Board Mr S. van Deventer.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Fouché, *op. cit.* (n. 8), p. 142.



The Netherlands saw the rise of the 'Boekenweek' (Week of the Book) and its 'Boekenweekgeschenk' (a free book for customers) interrupted in wartime. The Nazis put an end to it in 1941, in order to ban Jewish authors from the book market completely. The Boekenweek itself started in 1930 with a 'Book day'. This idea had been inspired by similar book days in Spain and Germany, introduced by fascist groups in those countries. This fact has never been researched, although it seems to be an example of how the book business in several European countries was related to one another.