Angèle Manteau and the Indonesian Connection.
A Remarkable Story of the Flemish Book Trade after the Second World War

Kevin Absillis
University of Antwerp, Belgium

Abstract
The famous twentieth-century publishing house A. Manteau would not have achieved its literary success if the manager of the firm, Angèle Manteau, had not been prepared to reach commercial compromises once in a while. In Flanders, publishing companies could not make ends meet with the sales of literary work alone; other activities to finance their less profitable and sometimes even loss-making novels and collections of poems were necessary. Even though Angèle Manteau realised this and constantly tried to improve the profitability of her company, it never flourished and occasionally experienced great difficulty. Towards the end of the fifties the publishing house was heading straight towards bankruptcy. At precisely the same time the Dutch publisher Wilhelmus van Hoeve (1899-1968) suffered some setbacks of his own. His main activity was producing scholarly books about Indonesia, but his business took a turn for the worse when diplomatic contact between the Netherlands and Indonesia was broken off. Among other things this meant that the Indonesian authorities would no longer allow trade with Dutch companies. Van Hoeve therefore started looking for a Belgian partner to organize the export of his books for him. Around 1958 he found the manager of the ailing Manteau company prepared to help him. For the Belgian company the cooperation with van Hoeve soon proved very lucrative. Not only did it put Manteau back on its feet, it even created new opportunities.

Keywords
Angèle Manteau, Wilhelmus van Hoeve, W.P. van Stockum, G.B. van Goor, Indonesia, publishing history in Flanders, publishing history in Holland (1950s & 1960s)

A Less Than Obvious Career Move
Not one of the literary publishers in Flanders during and after the Second World War was more important than the Manteau publishing house. In fact, there are very few twentieth-century Flemish authors who do not appear in the house’s catalogue in some guise or another. Definite highlights in the
publisher's list are the collected works of the Symbolist poet Karel van de Woestijne (1878-1929), the essayist and novelist August Vermeyleen (1872-1945) and the theatre innovator Herman Teirlinck (1879-1967): three prominent cultural figures who formed the basis for the magazine *Van Nu en Straks* [Of Now and Later], a publication that proved to be crucial to Flemish literary history. Manteau also launched several young authors over the years who later built up a permanent reputation, e.g. Nobel Prize candidates Louis Paul Boon (1912-79) and Hugo Claus (1929-2008), as well as the currently widely respected Dutch author Jeroen Brouwers (b. 1940). Finally, Manteau brought out successful translations of such internationally renowned writers as Françoise Sagan (including the bestseller *Bonjour Tristesse*), Curzio Malaparte and Jean Cocteau.

There are at least two peculiarities of note about Angele Manteau, who founded the Manteau firm in 1938 and ran it until 1971, the first being the fact that she was a woman. At that time and until just after the Second World War II demanding careers in academia, management, or business were scarcely available for the so-called ‘weaker sex’. In that period becoming a teacher was in itself a great accomplishment for a Belgian girl. Without going into too much detail about the history of the Belgian women's movement, it is important to note that general suffrage, granted to males just after the First World War in 1919, was only given to females in 1948 – and it was 1965 before the country's first woman minister was appointed. In 1938, a young woman starting up and running a Belgian company, in this case a publishing house, was by no means ordinary.

Secondly, and even more remarkably, this fresh-faced 'Flemish' publisher was of French speaking origin. Angele Manteau was the daughter of a successful French textile producer and grew up in Dinant, a city in the southern, French-speaking part of Belgium. That a native French speaker – and a member of a wealthy family to boot – should take to disseminating literature in Dutch caused something of a fuss in Flanders. In fact, ever since the second half of the nineteenth century Flemish artistic and intellectual circles had been striving to give their language a place in government affairs, the law and cultural affairs – at the time completely dominated by French. Thus for many Flemish writers, publishers and booksellers the distribution of literature served a higher purpose, namely the cultural and political independence of the Fleming, his language and his culture.

Angele Manteau wanted to publish literature in Dutch regardless of ideological concerns. 'Literary quality' was not only the sole consideration but also the mantra she repeated throughout her entire career. Indeed it was this creed