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REPEAT PERFORMANCE:
A PSYCHOHISTORICAL STUDY OF LEOPOLD III
AND BELGIAN NEUTRALITY

RUDOLPH BINION

The neutrality proclaimed by Belgium in 1936 and guaranteed by Belgium's big neighbors in 1937 was a precondition for Nazi Germany's bloodless, then bloody, victories of 1938-1940. For neutral Belgium shielded Germany against a prospective French invasion, in that the French high command regarded the Rhineland bordering Belgium as vulnerable, but was pessimistic about assaulting Germany's fortified French frontier. The upshot was that Hitler conquered Czechoslovakia without a battle and that the German armies subjugated Poland, then Denmark and Norway, while fighting only a "phony war" in their rear. Meanwhile the French, having undertaken to defend Belgium, could not very well entrench themselves Maginot-style along their Belgian frontier. But neither could the French and British meet a German offensive through Belgium to good advantage if called in only after it was already underway; they failed catastrophically in May 1940. In short, Belgium's neutrality of 1936-1940 played entirely and perhaps decisively into Hitler's hands.

I

The moving spirit behind Belgium's neutrality of 1936-1940 was King Leopold III. Born on November 3, 1901, Leopold was the first child of Prince Albert of Belgium, who ascended the throne in 1909 as Albert I. Albert was a dedicated monarch who, as commander in chief of Belgium's armed forces during World War I, came to symbolize his people's valiant resistance to the German invader. Prince Leopold was schooled first by a private preceptor, then at Eton from 1915 until the last months of World War I. There he spent as a foot soldier in the front lines — the youngest volunteer in the Belgian army. During the postwar years he received some special university instruction, then attended the *École Militaire*. He also traveled far and wide, particularly in the Belgian Congo. He cultivated an interest in colonial problems, to which he addressed himself in a progressive spirit. But he was most at his ease golfing or, like his father, mountain climbing. In 1926 he courted and

married Princess Astrid of Sweden, who bore him three children over the next eight years.

Leopold was recalled to Brussels with Astrid from a Swiss mountain resort early on February 18, 1934, to succeed his father, whose mutilated body had just been found, in Alpinist's apparel, beneath a chalk crag at Marche-les-Dames outside Namur. Some eighteen months later — on the morning of August 29, 1935 — an open roadster driven by Leopold, in Alpinist's apparel, with Astrid beside him and his chauffeur in the rumble seat, accidentally veered off the road just outside the Swiss village of Küsnacht near Lucerne and coasted uncontrollably down the bank of the lake. Leopold and the chauffeur escaped serious injury, but Astrid, projected head-on against a tree part way down, succumbed a few minutes later in Leopold's arms. Leopold's shock at Albert's ghastly death was as nothing compared with his shock at Astrid's. And Astrid's affected the whole Belgian nation as grievously as did Albert's, for Flemings and Walloons alike idolized the gracious and beautiful queen.

Beyond his regular duties, Albert's successor at first occupied himself with the Congo only. But in the latter 1930's he took extraordinary initiatives along three lines. First: on October 14, 1936, he induced a responsive Council of Ministers to adopt a policy of armed neutrality for Belgium in the face of the growing German menace¹ — a policy applied thereafter under his strict personal surveillance. Next: beginning in 1937 he pushed for a voluntary international redistribution of raw materials so as to remove — in his words — “the basic cause of war.”² Finally: early in 1939, after a series of domestic cabinet crises, he thrice called upon Belgian political leaders to mend their ways so as to restore governmental authority. These endeavors concerning raw materials and cabinet crises proceeded from the same concern as the policy of armed neutrality: the concern lest Belgium succumb to a new European war. And only on behalf of the neutrality policy did Leopold clearly exceed the prerogatives of a constitutional monarch such as Albert had been.³

A conflict of authority between the crown and the government, latent

1. *Foreign Relations of the United States. Diplomatic Papers* (for the years 1936-1940 [Washington, 1953-1959]): this reference: 1936 I, 367, passage beginning: “The King's procedure was very unusual.” This source will hereafter be referred to as *FRUS*.

2. Quoted by Émile Cammaerts, *The Keystone of Europe. History of the Belgian Dynasty 1830-1939* (London, 1939), 354.

3. In fact, apart from his “personal role” in the neutrality policy and (beginning on 4 September 1939) as commander in chief, Leopold would never “closely follow the principal affairs of state, receive the ministers, inquire, admonish, rectify,” as a constitutional monarch should: Hubert Pierlot, twelve articles in *Le Soir* (a Brussels daily), 5-19 July 1947, reprinted in *Rapport de la Commission d'information instituée par S. M. le Roi Léopold III le 14 juillet 1946 et note complémentaire*, to which my page references pertain (Luxembourg, 1947), 52, 53. These sources hereafter referred to, respectively, as Pierlot and as *Rapport* or *Rapport, note complémentaire*.

throughout the prewar period and imminent in the first months of World War II, came to a head in the eighteen days of 1940, May 10-28, during which the German armies overran Belgium. The decisive day was May 25. Early that morning a deputation of the unanimous Council of Ministers including the Catholic Hubert Pierlot, wartime Prime Minister, and the Socialist Paul Henri Spaak, perennial Foreign Minister, sought out Leopold at Wynendael castle near Bruges and urged him to continue the war from abroad with his government rather than allow himself to be taken prisoner. Leopold refused; as commander in chief he meant to share the fate of his army, he explained, and as King he meant to share the fate of his people. The ministers left without him for Paris, where their colleagues were waiting. The following evening Leopold had a request telephoned to Paris for some — any — minister to sign blank decrees authorizing him to dismiss the incumbent government and appoint a new one should Hitler's armistice terms permit.⁴ No minister would oblige him. Besides, Hitler would concede no terms: he exacted an unconditional surrender. The government thereupon unanimously declared that the King, being "under the power of the invader," was, by the terms of the Belgian constitution, "incapable of reigning,"⁵ and at Limoges three days later a rump Belgian parliament specified that his incapacity to reign was both "legal and moral."⁶ Leopold, confined to his castle at Laeken outside Brussels, declared to the same effect: "So long as I am a prisoner I shall abstain from all political activity."⁷ He maintained this position against his ministers themselves when, beginning on June 18, they sought to renew contact with him so that Belgium might conclude an armistice along with France.⁸ They also moved to negotiate an armistice without him,⁹ but the enemy would not recognize "the former Pierlot government" beyond forbidding its members to return to Belgium.¹⁰ Once they almost left for England, and once they actually left for Algeria only to turn back the same day.¹¹ However, the Colonial Minister, with full power over the Congo,¹² did reach London alone. He was followed

4. *Contribution à l'étude de la question royale. Événements-documents*. Ed. Groupement National Belge in collaboration with the Centrale Belge de Documentation. 2 vols.; paginated consecutively (Brussels, [1948]), 156 (Spaak at Limoges—also available in *Rapport*, Annexe 34), 170 (de Man memoir 1945); Henri de Man, *Cavalier seul. 45 années de socialisme européen* (Geneva, 1948), 233, 236-237.

5. *Contribution*, 149 ("dans l'impossibilité de régner").

6. *Ibid.*, 166.

7. *Rapport*, Annexe 53 (29 May 1940); see further *Contribution*, 191-192 (1, 4, 5, 6 June 1940). Three jurists consulted by him concurred: "A prisoner of war, the King is temporarily incapable of reigning" *Contribution*, 168 (30 May 1940).

8. To this end they were prepared to resign: *Contribution*, 203; *Rapport*, Annexes 85-88, 92.

9. *Rapport*, Annexe 91.

10. *Ibid.*, Annexes 94, 99.

11. On 15-17 and 20 June 1940 respectively.

12. Albert de Vleeschauwer, on 19 June 1940, via Spain.

by the Finance Minister in charge of Belgium's gold reserves abroad.¹³ And at length the remainder of the Belgian government in exile made over its prerogatives to Pierlot and Spaak,¹⁴ who stole across Spain, then sailed to London late in October 1940 to set up there with their two colleagues for the duration.¹⁵

The King meanwhile ostensibly continued to abstain from any and every political act — with, however, a few exceptions, the most blatant of which was a trip to Berchtesgaden in November 1940,¹⁶ and the most prejudicial of which was his marriage in late 1941 with a ravishing young commoner.¹⁷ He was also too forbearing toward the occupation authorities to please resisters. Late in 1943 the government sent him a secret message from London urging him to purge his entourage of collaborationists and, upon the liberation of Belgium, to repudiate neutralism retroactively as of May 1940.¹⁸ He declined the dialogue, given his status as prisoner of war,¹⁹ but then replied indirectly through a so-called “political testament”²⁰ in which he affirmed: “I safeguarded the national interest whatever the outcome of the war” and in which he demanded solemn recantation from those ministers who, just after Belgium's military surrender, had loudly convicted him of delinquency — meaning Pierlot and Spaak.²¹ This document was delivered to the Allied commander and to the

13. Camille Gutt, on 2 August 1940, via Spain — conducted by de Vleeschauer, who had met him (together with Spaak and Pierlot) at the Franco-Spanish border. (De Vleeschauer and Gutt were the only Belgian ministers not affected by defeatism that summer except for Marcel Henri Jaspas, who, however, was excluded from the government when he went to London on 18 June 1940 in protest against the decision to seek an armistice.)

14. Between 20 and 28 August 1940 — after the Bank of France had stopped honoring drafts on the Belgian treasury.

15. Later a few others made it to London — where they were none too readily reintegrated by Pierlot and Spaak.

16. This trip was itself a political act even if, as Leopold later claimed, he went only to solicit an amelioration of Belgium's food ration and the release of Belgian prisoners of war. On the moot question whether he also talked politics once there or only Hitler did, *Contribution*, 238-239, 608; *Annales parlementaires de Belgique. Chambre des Représentants* [hereafter referred to as *Annales, Chambre*]. *Session ordinaire de 1944-1945*, 534-535, 554-556; Paul Schmidt, *Statist auf diplomatischer Bühne 1923-45* (Bonn, 1949), 507-511.

17. With sporting Liliane Baels, a resident of Laeken at least since early 1940. The King declared the alliance nondynastic (*Contribution*, 273) — an act of uncertain validity.

18. *Contribution*, 309-311 (21 November 1943).

19. By a note of 11 January 1944 (*Contribution*, 319; *Rapport*, 131 and Annexe 108) radioed to London on 21 January 1944 (Pierlot, 95).

20. Dated 25 January 1944.

21. *Contribution*, 319. In a radio speech of 28 May 1940 Pierlot had accused the King of negotiating with the enemy, and at Limoges Spaak had charged the King with treachery on this account. They were mistaken — but the King's indignation was hardly in order given his original intention to negotiate, which had misled them. He called them

Pierlot government after Brussels was liberated.²² By then Leopold and his family had been deported to a fortress near Dresden,²³ where they remained until they were removed to a guarded villa outside Salzburg toward the end of the war.²⁴

The Belgian chambers, reassembling jointly in September 1944, approved the Pierlot ministry's conduct since the invasion, then instituted a regency pending the King's return.²⁵ When the King was liberated in Austria at the close of the war, the Belgian government of the day — headed by a Socialist, with Spaak as Foreign Minister — urged him to abdicate;²⁶ then it refused to insure public order when, after weeks of wavering, he asked to return instead.²⁷ So he moved to Switzerland provisionally,²⁸ while a virulent campaign for his abdication was waged in parliament and the press. The technical charge against him was that he had repeatedly violated the constitution after the German invasion, primarily in late May 1940, when he had refused to retreat abroad with his ministers to pursue the war but instead had solicited an armistice, then delivered himself up to the enemy. The nontechnical grievance against him was that he had persisted in his neutralist attitude despite the invasion and occupation — an attitude distorted by Spaak into one of accommodation to an expected German victory.²⁹ As Leopold's chief prosecutor, Spaak was evidently working off a bad conscience over his own defeatism of the summer of 1940³⁰ — and over his prewar compliance with Leopold's policy of neutrality, for in London he had made himself over into an apostle of Europeanism. The abdicationists might well have granted Leopold extenuating circumstances for his unconstitutional insistence at Wynendael on sharing the fate of his army and nation, especially since it had followed from his captivity

to task for imputations against the Belgian army as well; in this he in turn was mistaken.

22. On 16 September 1944, three days before the Belgian chambers reassembled.

23. Leopold on 7 June 1944, the others a few days later.

24. On 7-8 March 1945.

25. The regent chosen was Leopold's brother, Charles, who had fought in the underground.

26. On 10-12 May 1945 in Salzburg; then on 5-7 June 1945 in Augsburg and Salzburg; then again on 14-15 June 1945 in Salzburg. For his wavering on the first occasion see *Annales, Chambre. Session ordinaire de 1944-1945*, 532; on the second occasion, *ibid.* ("every evening he inclined toward abdication, every morning he had changed his mind") and *ibid.*, 586 ("it is certain that under our law the present wife of the King is the Queen of the Belgians").

27. Upon its refusal (16 June 1945), he tried unsuccessfully to form a new government from Salzburg (18 June-14 July 1945).

28. On 30 April 1945.

29. *Annales, Chambre. Session ordinaire de 1944-1945*, 574. Cf. *ibid.*, 532, 533 (Van Acker), etc.

30. At least Pierlot, 88, acknowledged that the government's suit for an armistice was a "grave error" and a "lapse" ("*fléchissement*").

that Belgium concluded no armistice with Germany after all and that, until after his deportation, Belgium was ruled by a military commander rather than by a *Gauleiter*.³¹ Leopold's defenders, however, pleaded, not extenuating circumstances, but innocence: a commission of eminent legalists appointed by him even found that his ministers were to blame for having abandoned him at Wynendael!³²

After five whole years of fearful polemics, a popular consultation was held: about 58% of the voters — the Flemish community by and large — declared for Leopold. General elections ensued: they yielded a Catholic majority, which voted Leopold's return — amidst angry cries inside and outside parliament against the "King of a party" and "King of the Flemings." Leopold's homecoming was answered by mass protest meetings; Spaak led a howling demonstration before the town palace; strikes paralyzed Wallonia and much of Brussels and Antwerp; hordes of provincial anti-Leopoldists began marching on the capital. With civil war threatening, the Catholic government itself prevailed upon Leopold during his tenth day back — July 31, 1950 — to abdicate the next morning in favor of his son Baudouin.

II

This ten-year constitutional crisis developed, then, in the course of the blitzkrieg of May 1940 against Belgium. And it developed out of Leopold's conduct of Belgium's defense pursuant to his policy of neutrality.³³

His ministers were, if anything, all too alert to his abiding neutralist tendency once the invasion began. In the very first hours — early on May 10, 1940 — he took up his command post at the front without waiting to put in an appearance before parliament. Prime Minister Pierlot later remarked: "I have always thought that he was reluctant to make, or appear to authorize by his

31. *Contribution*, 479; etc. Furthermore, Leopold's assurance to his troops of 25 May "come what may, my fate shall be yours" (*ibid.*, 142) did offset the German tracts thrown behind the Belgian lines that same day, stating: "your leaders are going to flee by plane" (*ibid.*, 141) and thereby helped sustain final resistance to the German advance while the British began evacuating at Dunkirk.

32. *Rapport, note complémentaire*, 31-32; further [Jacques Pirenne], *L'Attitude de Léopold III de 1936 à la libération* (Paris, 1949)], 69. The latter source is henceforth cited as [Pirenne].

33. "What the King's adversaries hold against him is his attitude of May 1940, as much in the conduct of the war as in the position taken toward the Allies. . . . The conflict born in May 1940 between the King and his government constitutes the core of the debate. . . . Mr. Spaak deems that the whole question should be reduced to the conflict of May 1940. All the rest, and notably the King's attitude during the war, should be discounted": memorandum by Leopold and Spaak on their talk of 18 January 1948 in *Recueil de documents établi par le Secrétariat du Roi concernant la période 1936-1950* (Brussels, [1950]), 785-786; hereafter referred to as *Recueil*.

presence, statements that might have committed him in respect of the Allies . . .”³⁴ As for Pierlot’s chief colleagues, their “first misgivings” dated, according to Spaak, from Pierlot’s first wartime consultation with Leopold, which was held at army headquarters on May 15 with the War Minister, General Denis, present at the close.³⁵ The Germans had broken the French line from Sedan to Namur a day earlier, separating the bulk of the French army to the south from the rest of the French army beside the British and Belgian armies to the north. With striking prescience Leopold foretold that the Germans would advance, not toward Paris, but toward the Pas de Calais: “They’ll be there within a week,” he told Pierlot.³⁶ In that case, Pierlot remarked, the King would of course rapidly maneuver his army southwards into France lest it be cut off. “No, not southwards,” Leopold objected; “northwards!”³⁷ Pierlot thought he had misheard: how then, he asked, could cooperation continue among the Allies? The Allies were not Belgium’s allies, Leopold retorted, but merely the guarantors of Belgian neutrality. “Belgium was defending her independence,” he insisted; “she was not bound to her guarantors’ war aims.”³⁸

The next day at army headquarters Pierlot, Denis, and now also Spaak together told the King, according to Leopold, “that everything possible must be done to prevent the army’s being blocked on home territory and isolated from the Allied forces.”³⁹ Leopold demurred. If he led his army abroad, he maintained, he would come under foreign laws and orders “with no relation to Belgium’s interest.”⁴⁰ As the ministers protested, he switched his tack and argued that he could not just retreat this way or that without orders from the Allied high command.⁴¹ Then demand the requisite orders, he was told, and proceed even without them “if need be.”⁴²

Afterward he noted: “The ministers . . . seemed to gather . . . that the King already had a set idea about the events to ensue and the attitude to

34. Pierlot, 59.

35. *Contribution*, 151, 152 (Spaak at Limoges) — where the date is misstated as May 14.

36. Pierlot, 60; cf. *Contribution*, 152 (Spaak at Limoges).

37. Pierlot, 60; cf. de Man, *Cavalier*, 224 (“eastwards”!).

38. *Rapport*, 37 (the King’s notes — which are also available in *Recueil*, 75-95, 95-97, 99-100). *Contribution*, 152 (Spaak at Limoges), and Pierlot, 60ff. indicate rather that Leopold came out with this view only gradually over the following days.

39. *Rapport*, Annexe 34 (King’s notes); *Contribution*, 152 (Spaak at Limoges), and Pierlot, 61, concordant.

40. Pierlot, 61. *Rapport*, Annexe 34 (King’s notes): “As the King point out that, once the army were outside home territory, his command would become illusory, the ministers replied that, as chief of the army, he could always refuse unacceptable orders . . .”

41. *Rapport*, Annexe 34 (King’s notes); *Contribution*, 152 (Spaak at Limoges); Pierlot, 61.

42. *Contribution*, 152 (Spaak at Limoges); *Rapport*, Annexe 34 (King’s notes),

adopt.”⁴³ Pierlot was shortly to spell out that set idea to the King in writing: “From those two visits . . . I took away the impression that the Belgian army’s retreating into a national redoubt, its back to the sea, cut off from the Allied armies, with no prospect other than capitulation, was envisaged not merely as an eventuality to which events beyond our control might lead, but as a development actually preferable to . . . quitting Belgian territory.”⁴⁴ This impression of Pierlot’s was incontestably correct. Leopold’s talk about waiting on orders was hollow: he stood on his sovereign independence from first to last, emphasizing “that in reality there was no unity of command.”⁴⁵ And the ministers were talking strategic sense besides, for the failure to retreat southward from Belgium after the German breakthrough was the losers’ big mistake of the campaign.⁴⁶

On May 17 a cabinet meeting was held from which it “spontaneously” emerged, as Pierlot reported to Leopold, that “the government’s overriding concern is to see the Belgian army follow the course of the Allied armies and in no case let itself be cut off from them. . . . [By the same token, the ministers’] unanimous opinion is that at all costs the King must avoid in good time the danger of being taken prisoner.”⁴⁷ The next day the government moved to France except for the Prime Minister and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, War, and the Interior, who together pursued the hopeless dialogue with the King one week longer. Repeatedly Leopold affirmed that—in his own words—“Belgium, at war because invaded and in self-defense, had subscribed no other commitment to her guarantors than that of defending her home territory.”⁴⁸ At one juncture he consented to escape abroad should a capitulation become necessary provided he were sure the Allies would go on fighting.

concordant for 16 but especially 18 May 1940 (“Messrs. Pierlot and Spaak envisaged the most diverse solutions for assuring the army’s retreat to France, going so far as to propose the immediate abandonment of present positions so as to cross into France as soon as possible without awaiting the Generalissimo’s orders or instructions”); Pierlot, 69, denied this, however, at all odds for 21 May 1940.

43. *Rapport*, Annexe 34.

44. *Contribution*, 135 (letter of 23 May 1940); cf. Lionel Frederic Ellis, *The War in France and Flanders 1939-1940* (London, 1953), 108-110.

45. Pierlot, 68; cf. Pertinax [André Géraud], *Les Fossoyeurs*, 2 vols. (New York, 1943), 92-93, n.21. Translation, *The Gravediggers of France* (New York, 1944), 75, n.21. References to translation will hereafter follow, in brackets, references to French edition.

46. See e.g., Erich von Manstein, *Verlorene Siege* (Bonn, 1955), 100, 123. Churchill told the Commons on 4 June 1940 that, after the German breakthrough, only such a retreat could have saved the British and French armies in Belgium but that the high command, besides hoping to mend the broken front, was loath to abandon the Belgian army to its fate. *Parliamentary Debates. Fifth Series—Volume 361. House of Commons* (London, 1940), 787. Henceforth cited as *Parliamentary*.

47. *Contribution*, 131 (letter of 17 May 1940).

48. *Rapport*, Annexe 34.

“But,” he added — with “some passion,” as Spaak related — “there is . . . one hypothesis you simply will not envisage: that the war is over and that consequently I must be in the country then.”⁴⁹ Even then, the ministers objected, he could not negotiate peace terms to greatest advantage as a prisoner of war.⁵⁰ Their objection was the more futile since his concession was itself unreal.⁵¹ As Spaak afterward recalled, “we felt that little by little the King recurred to his original idea . . . that the head of an army, when he is a king, should remain amidst his troops and share their fate. . . . Our stupefaction and our terror began,” Spaak added, “when we understood that not only would the soldier consent to remain among his captive troops, but the King would consent to play a role under the occupation.”⁵² Pierlot and even Spaak conceded, though, that the King had no clearer advance conception of that role than that he might somehow help keep the country alive and relieve its worst sufferings.⁵³ He was not focusing beyond the surrender to come.

Leopold meanwhile deplored the government’s evacuation to France — “this unspeakable abandonment,” he called it.⁵⁴ And he took exception to his ministers’ minding his military business,⁵⁵ even as his ministers were protesting their exclusion from the councils of war.⁵⁶ After a tense confrontation with them in the antechambers of an inter-Allied conference held on May 21, he noted: “I would put the ministers’ exposé into plain language as follows: ‘You have a policy you’re hiding from us It consists in directing the army

49. *Contribution*, 154; cf. Pierlot, 63-66, and *Rapport*, Annexe 35 (King’s notes). (There is some confusion in all three versions as to whether the King, before he would go abroad, required to be sure that *both* France and England would continue fighting — but this made no practical difference.)

50. *Contribution*, 154 (Spaak at Limoges).

51. Already at Wynendael he foresaw that at least England would fight on (Pierlot on Wynendael, *Contribution*, 139 — also available in *Rapport*, Annexe 39, and *Annales, Chambre. Session ordinaire de 1944-1945*, 565-567; cf. Pierlot, 70-75), although he noted afterward: “The ministers still hold that the Allies are certain to be victorious; the King does not share this optimism” (*Rapport*, Annexe 38). Then on the eve of the capitulation he foretold England’s eventual victory (*Recueil*, 58; J. Wullus-Rudiger [Armand Wullus], *Les Origines internationales du drame belge de 1940* [Brussels, 1950], 255, 288), and the day after capitulating he even predicted its date (*Annales, Chambre. Session ordinaire de 1944-1945*, 611).

52. *Contribution*, 154-155 (Spaak at Limoges).

53. Pierlot, 65; *Contribution*, 139 (Pierlot on Wynendael), 156 (Spaak at Limoges).

54. *Contribution*, 133 (letter to Pierlot, 22 May 1940; also *ibid.*, 132: “the policy of evacuation which I have always opposed,” and *ibid.*, 133: “the ridiculous haste with which the governmental services have all removed themselves to France”). Similarly *Rapport*, Annexe 34 (King’s notes: “The superior interest of the State requires that the government and the executive organs of the administration not quit the home territory”), and *Contribution*, 140 (Pierlot on Wynendael, quoting Leopold: “It is not those who have left [Belgium] that most deserve our concern, but those who have remained”).

55. *Contribution*, 132 (letter to Pierlot, 22 May 1940).

56. *Ibid.*, 135-136 (Pierlot to Leopold, 23 May 1940); de Man, *Cavalier*, 228-229.

toward a position in which, cut off from the Allied armies, it is reduced to capitulation . . . ’”⁵⁷ Revealingly, this plain language went beyond the ministers’ worst imputations.

By then the German army had already reached the Pas de Calais, thereby blocking the Belgian army’s escape route. This left the final issue between Leopold and his ministers that of, as Pierlot put it to him, “the nation’s vital interest in not seeing the King tie his fate to that of the army . . .”⁵⁸ or, as the British government put it to him, the “absolute necessity” for the Allied cause of his avoiding capture.⁵⁹ Yet well before the showdown at Wynendael castle, Spaak recollected, “we had the feeling that we were up against a stone wall, that no words had sense or effect any more.”⁶⁰

At Wynendael, Leopold received his ministers standing. Pierlot pronounced a solemn plea to him to follow them into exile. “There lies the King’s duty,” he declared. “The government is unanimous in this firm conviction.”⁶¹ Leopold, by his own records, replied that “he was resolved to remain with his army and amidst his people so as to share their fate; by acting thus, he was fulfilling his role as Chief of State and as commander in chief of the army. This decision was dictated to him by his conscience. To leave at this time would be to desert . . .”⁶² Having spoken, Leopold moved to terminate the audience; Spaak, however, prevailed upon him to sit down with them and consider where his decision would lead. The King was told that the Allies were bound to judge him a traitor to the common cause; that, far from sharing the fate of his captive troops or people, he would be quartered in his palace; that any public initiative he might take under the enemy’s control would only compromise him and Belgium both; that accordingly his remaining in Belgium would gravely trouble the nation’s conscience; and that, with none of his ministers willing to cover his remaining, a catastrophic constitutional crisis was bound to ensue.⁶³

57. *Rapport*, Annexe 36; cf. *Contribution*, 132 (Leopold to Pierlot, 22 May 1940: “pursuing a policy aimed at bringing the country to conclude a separate peace”).

58. *Contribution*, 135 (Pierlot to Leopold, 23 May 1940). De Man, *Cavalier*, 231, quotes an equivalent telephone message to Leopold from the Belgian ministers then in France.

59. *Rapport*, Annexe 34 (statement by Halifax, telephoned to Leopold by Pierlot late on 24 May 1940); cf. *Recueil*, “Addenda,” 24-25 (Churchill to Keyes, 27 May 1940), and Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, II: *Their Finest Hour* (Boston, 1949), 90-91.

60. *Contribution*, 155 (Spaak at Limoges).

61. *Ibid.*, 138 (Pierlot on Wynendael).

62. *Rapport*, Annexe 34; *Contribution*, 138 (Pierlot on Wynendael) and 156 (Spaak at Limoges), concordant. Cf. *Rapport*, Annexe 33 (Leopold to George VI, 25 May 1940); de Man, *Cavalier*, 232-233.

63. *Contribution*, 138-139 (Pierlot on Wynendael); cf. *ibid.*, 156 (Spaak at Limoges), and *Rapport*, Annexe 34 (King’s notes: “if the King, breaking with his government’s views, decided to remain in Belgium . . . it is certain that the members of the govern-

Leopold's replies, such as they were, were slow in coming and indicated, as both Pierlot and Spaak emphasized, that he had not thought about, or at all odds had not thought through, the effects his decision would have.⁶⁴ And yet, as Pierlot and Spaak also emphasized, it was clear throughout that his decision was irrevocable.⁶⁵

Upon taking leave of his ministers, Leopold issued an order of the day to his soldiers: "come what may, my fate shall be yours . . ."⁶⁶ A final proclamation to his troops followed three days later: "Hurléd all at once into a war of unheard-of violence, you have fought bravely to defend the national territory foot by foot. . . . In the disaster that has befallen you, I am not leaving you. . . . Tomorrow we shall go to work with the firm will to raise our homeland from its ruins."⁶⁷ As Pierlot later commented: "On May 28, 1940, Belgium, to the King's mind, had gone out of the war."⁶⁸

Concerning the running discussion that ended at Wynendael, Spaak declared in 1945: "We had been absolutely surprised when we heard, for the first time, this affirmation from the King's mouth: that we had no special obligations toward our French and English allies, that we had a single duty to fulfill: defend our own territory, and that the day when our territory would be completely overrun, the war would be over for us, for we would have fulfilled all our obligations."⁶⁹ And in 1947 Pierlot ascribed Belgium's military disaster of May 1940 "primarily" to Leopold's "preconceived idea" of "confining the operations of the Belgian army to the national territory," and traced Belgium's constitutional crisis back to Leopold's very "personal" conception of Belgium's obligations toward the powers called to her aid.⁷⁰

ment already installed in Poitiers would not consent to resign, for they would judge the King's attitude in opposition to his government's unconstitutional").

64. *Contribution*, 140 (Pierlot on Wynendael), 156 (Spaak at Limoges).

65. *Ibid.*, 139 (Pierlot on Wynendael: "By all indications the King's mind was made up. Nothing could dissuade him from his resolve any more"), 156 (Spaak at Wynendael: "it was no use pursuing the discussion"). De Man, *Cavalier*, 234 (epiloguing): "King Leopold had been moved, though in no wise shaken in his resolve."

66. *Contribution*, 142. A palace memorandum of 3 June 1940 on the antecedents to the capitulation is brief and pointed as regards that dramatic morning: "On May 25 the King notified his ministers, then his army, of his unshakable determination to share his soldiers' fate" (*ibid.*, 177).

67. *Ibid.*, 146.

68. Pierlot, 91. This was in fact the exact purport of instructions to Belgian officials abroad issued within the King's entourage that summer while Pierlot and Spaak were making their devious way from France to England: the authorized word was "to reject the thesis of an alliance with our guarantors linking our fate to theirs. Our counter-obligation did not exceed that of defending our territory. For us the struggle ended on May 28" (*Rapport*, Annexe 127; similarly *ibid.*, Annexe 125, and *Contribution*, 223-224, 225-226, and 226).

69. *Annales, Chambre. Session ordinaire de 1944-1945*, 572.

70. Pierlot, 63, 75-76, and *passim*.

III

Actually Leopold's contemned view that Belgium's obligations to her guarantors did not extend beyond the defense of her territory was exactly congruent with the wording of the Franco-British guarantee to Belgium.⁷¹ It was hardly unjust to the Franco-British guarantors, for they entered Belgium out of military self-interest after having long pressed Belgium to admit them before Germany attacked.⁷² And it was continuous with that policy of neutrality which, for want of counteraction by the Belgian parliament, remained Belgium's official policy after the invasion as before.⁷³ Of course the King ought normally to have bowed to his ministers until further notice from parliament — but had *they* not bowed to *him* hitherto in this matter of Belgium's neutrality? This is, in fact, why they were so vehement in falling out with him:

71. This guarantee of 24 April 1937 (*Contribution*, 48) was conditional on Belgium's readiness to defend her "frontiers"; Leopold's contradictors, however, argued a broad construction on this text — as also on the King's oath to maintain Belgium's "national independence and territorial integrity."

72. During the Polish campaign (*FRUS*, 1939 I, 444-445) and the January alert (Académie royale de Belgique. Commission royale d'histoire. *Documents relatifs au statut international de la Belgique depuis 1830*. I *Documents diplomatiques belges 1920-1940*. Publiés par Ch. De Visscher et F. Vanlangenhove. *La politique de sécurité extérieure*, vols. IV, V [Brussels, 1965, 1966]; hereafter referred to as *DDB*; this reference: V, Nos. 214, 222; and Jean Vanwelkenhuyzen, "Die Krise vom Januar 1940," *Wehr-Wissenschaftliche Rundschau*, 5 Jahrgang, Heft 2 [II, 1955], 83ff.), then most urgently following the German invasion of Denmark and Norway on 9 April 1940 (*DDB* V, Nos. 228-231, 233-234; Pierre Van Zuylen, *Les Mains libres; politique extérieure de la Belgique, 1914-1940* [Paris, 1950], 241 ff.; Pertinax, 232-233 [188-189]; Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, *Fall Gelb. Der Kampf um den deutschen Operationsplan zur Westoffensive 1940* [Wiesbaden, 1957], 212). On 28 March 1940 they decided to enter Belgium even uninvited should Belgium or Holland be attacked (Maurice G. Gamelin, *Servir*, 3 vols. [Paris, 1946-1947], I, 88-89, and III, 348-350; Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, I: *The Gathering Storm* [Boston, 1948], 578; Paul Reynaud, *La France a sauvé l'Europe*, 2 vols. [Paris, 1947], II, 47n).

73. On 10 May 1940 the parliament did, however, cheer when Pierlot declared "an indissoluble fraternity of arms" between the Belgian and the Franco-British troops, then when Spaak reiterated his policy statement of 17 April 1940 (*Annales parlementaires de Belgique. Sénat* — hereafter referred to as *Annales, Sénat* — *Session ordinaire de 1939-1940*, 956): "Loyally neutral as long as possible; if that becomes impossible, heroic as in 1914" (*ibid.*, 1132, 1135; likewise *Annales, Chambre. Session ordinaire de 1939-1940*, 1427-1433). Evidently Leopold's ministers never argued that for him to pursue the war from abroad would not necessarily have been incompatible with the policy of neutrality — or even that he would thereby have served Belgium best whether he was bound to the Allies or not. But neither argument would have availed against this, voiced by Leopold on 24 May 1940: "The King does not even have the right, as commander in chief of the army, to employ it beyond the duties resulting from his constitutional oath on the one hand (defense of territorial integrity) and from the obligations contracted by his government on the other (defense of neutrality), these being duties of a strictly national and territorial nature" (quoted by de Man, *Cavalier*, 232).

they had fallen in with him all too long. Even so, they were to go on answering for his policy in respect to the months and years preceding the invasion: what else could they do? Yet Pierlot himself afterward represented the break between the government and the King as the culmination of a long conflict of authority over the application of that supposedly common policy — a conflict attended, moreover, by an increasingly manifest “divergence of views” concerning that policy in itself. “Seen by the government,” Pierlot specified, “neutrality was a concrete program determined by a specific situation. On the King’s side, it corresponded to a deep inclination.” And again: “The ministers considered on the whole that Belgium’s return to neutrality was a contingent solution. . . . [But,] for the King, neutrality was a return to true Belgian traditions . . .”⁷⁴

In the 1830’s a state of perpetual neutrality guaranteed by the Powers had been imposed upon the newly created Belgian Kingdom. As Germany violated that guaranteed neutrality in 1914, Belgium demanded and obtained its abrogation through the peace settlement of 1918-1919. André Tardieu was to remark when Belgium later reverted to neutrality at Leopold’s bidding: “I can still hear King Albert telling me . . . at the Peace Conference: ‘Before all else, relieve us of the sterile and onerous Charter of 1839’.”⁷⁵

Nonneutral Belgium fast became a virtual French satellite. When, however, Hitler remilitarized the Rhineland in the spring of 1936 and the French failed to react for want of British backing, the Belgians felt critically insecure.⁷⁶ The Flemings never had trusted the French, and just then France’s credit among the Walloons was uniquely low. Walloon workers ordinarily employed across the French border had been jobless since the depression hit France, and the Walloon bourgeois were frightened by the electoral victory of the French Popular Front. The Belgian elections that followed in that same spring of 1936 registered huge gains for the Right and especially the extreme Right, as if in reaction against France. Rearmament rose to prominence on the political agenda; it was expected to pass the chambers, however, only on the assurance that it would serve no French military purposes unrelated to the defense of Belgium. This was Leopold’s cue for summoning the Council of Ministers on October 14, 1936, to resuscitate Belgian neutrality. To resuscitate

74. Pierlot, 51; cf. *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945* (Washington, various dates) — hereafter referred to as *DGFP* — Series D, VIII, 18.

75. André Tardieu, *La Note de semaine 1936* (Paris, 1937), 175.

76. For the rapid evolution of Belgian official and public opinion during the Rhineland crisis, see *DDB* IV, 134-143, and Ministère des Affaires étrangères. Commission de publication des documents relatifs aux origines de la guerre 1939-1945. *Documents diplomatiques français 1932-1939 2^e série* (1936-1939), (Paris, various dates) — hereafter cited as *DDF* — I, 440, 541-542, and II, 36; and, respectively, *ibid.*, I, 608-609, and II, 34-35. (Just before Hitler’s Rhenish coup, the Franco-Belgian military convention of 1920 had been restricted to the Rhineland at Belgium’s request: see *DDF* I, 398n.)

it, that is, in disguise: undisguised, it would have been anathema to some Belgians with long memories and moreover incompatible with continued membership in the League of Nations, to which the Socialists in particular were committed.

The King's policy found its chief executor in Spaak. Indeed, Leopold proposed it as the simple answer to a recent call by Spaak for "a foreign policy thoroughly and exclusively Belgian."⁷⁷ Spaak himself made it his own retroactively when he presented it to the Chamber the following October 28 as a policy not of "neutrality," but of "independence,"⁷⁸ for the previous September he had induced his party to declare against "a return to neutrality" and for "a policy of complete independence."⁷⁹ Thus camouflaged, the new policy passed the Chamber by a ratio of three to one, Spaak having reaffirmed Belgium's fidelity to the League with, however, an ominous remark on the need to clarify certain provisions of the Covenant. Behind this remark was a warning the previous day from Leopold to Spaak against letting France or England claim a right of military passage through Belgium by virtue of the Covenant.⁸⁰

The rearmament bill passed the Chamber early in December 1936. In the attendant debate the Prime Minister felt obliged to deny that "the King's policy" was just that⁸¹—a denial due to be reiterated by Spaak over a year later.⁸² The Prime Minister also declared that Belgium meant to interpret

77. *Contribution*, 41 (speech by Spaak to the Foreign Press Union, 20 July 1936), 43 (speech by Leopold to the Council of Ministers, 14 October 1936); Raoul F. C. Van Overstraeten, *Albert I—Léopold III. Vingt ans de politique militaire belge, 1920-1940* (Bruges, 1946), 239 (Leopold to Spaak, 27 October 1936).

78. *Annales, Chambre. Session extraordinaire de 1936*, 371. However, on 14 October 1936 Leopold had freely assimilated the new policy to Belgium's old neutrality (cf. *DDF* III, 548), and subsequently he told the German minister in Belgium that "independence" was a mere euphemism for "neutrality," a word in undeserved disrepute among Belgians (*DGFP*, Ser. D, V, 581). On 8 June 1939 Prime Minister Pierlot called the equivocal policy "neutrality in practice" (*Annales, Chambre. Session extraordinaire de 1939*, 451), and on 7 October 1939 he declared outright concerning Belgium's neutrality in World War II: "Our position of today was ours long before the event; it dates from 1936" (*Contribution*, 100: statement to the press). For Spaak himself, see below.

79. *Contribution*, 42. But by then Spaak was already privy to Leopold's purpose, for he leaked it in Geneva at that time: see Geneviève Tabouis, *Ils l'ont appelée Cassandre* (New York, 1942), 300; [translation, *They Called Me Cassandra* (New York, 1942), 309]; *DDF* III, No. 325.

80. Leopold to Spaak, 27 October 1936, quoted in Van Overstraeten, 237-239. Already on 20 July 1936 Spaak had called collective security none of Belgium's business (*Contribution*, 41-42: speech to the Foreign Press Union).

81. *Annales, Chambre. Session extraordinaire de 1936*, 318 (Van Zeeland, 2 December 1936).

82. *Annales, Chambre. Session ordinaire de 1937-1938*, 1044 (16 March 1938). The reproved usage is, however, recorded as of 1939-1940—for the Prime Minister (below), the various members of the Royal Household (Walter Shepherd Barge, "Belgium's 'Policy of Independence,' 1936-1940" [Unpublished Master of Arts Thesis: Columbia

for herself her obligation under the League Covenant to cooperate in any common action against an aggressor state.⁸³ Thus Belgium forsook the League, for all practical purposes, while nominally remaining a member. The Scandinavian states, then the Netherlands, followed Belgium's example in 1938.⁸⁴

Hard upon endorsing the King's policy the Belgian government began petitioning England, France, and Germany to guarantee Belgian neutrality as of old. Before the Reichstag in January 1937, Hitler declared his government willing.⁸⁵ The French and especially the British were more reluctant until Leopold visited London in March 1937.⁸⁶ The desired Franco-British declaration followed on April 24, 1937. Spaak presented it triumphantly to the Chamber as preserving for Belgium the benefit of all prior arrangements with France and England while releasing Belgium from every return obligation beyond that of defending her own territory against aggression.⁸⁷ The era of military agreements, Spaak concluded, was closed for Belgium.⁸⁸ The German guarantee was delivered on October 13, 1937.⁸⁹ The King's policy had been

University, 1965], Ch. III, n.48), and even the King himself (John Cudahy, "Did Leopold Betray Us?" in *The Sunday Express* [London, 24 November and 1 December 1940]; reprinted in *Contribution*, to which the page reference, 185, pertains. Also, John Cudahy, *The Case for the King of the Belgians* [New York, 1940], 10). [Pirenne], 23, quotes (and *Rapport*, 33, half quotes) a somewhat ambiguous later statement by Spaak: "The Belgian government has always, pursuant to the Constitution, assumed responsibility for Belgium's foreign policy. . . . So to hold King Leopold responsible for that policy is to present the facts in a false light" — but [Pirenne]'s source reference, dated May 1940, does not check (and *Rapport* gives no source or date).

83. *Annales, Chambre. Session extraordinaire de 1936*, 318 (Van Zeeland, 2 December 1936) — with especial regard to the Covenant's Article 16, paragraph 3.

84. Even after Munich, however, Ribbentrop was dissatisfied because Article 16 had not been formally repudiated by Belgium and the other states of the so-called Oslo group: *DDB V*, 128.

85. Hitler, however, vexatiously called a spade a spade in that he declared his government willing to guarantee a "neutral" Belgium (see *DDB IV*, Nos. 198-200, 203; and, concerning German misusage in general, Jacques Davignon, *Berlin 1936-1940. Souvenirs d'une mission* [Paris, 1951], 50-55; *DGFP*, Ser. D, V, 636 n.5, 647, and VII, 270; *DDB V*, No. 78) — but then, Leopold himself wrote to George VI on 25 May 1940: "Belgium had fulfilled the pledge which she made in 1937 to maintain her neutrality" (Joseph P. Kennedy and James M. Landis, *The Surrender of King Leopold, with an appendix containing the Keyes-Gort correspondence* [New York, 1950], 56). Already on 29 January 1935 Hitler had told Lord Lothian that "he was prepared to give England a binding guarantee that Germany would never attack Holland or Belgium" (James R. M. Butler, *Lord Lothian* [New York, 1960], 335).

86. See *DDB IV*, Nos. 216, 218, 219; *FRUS*, 1937 I, 64-65.

87. *Annales, Chambre. Session ordinaire de 1936-1937*, 1285-1286. Actually the Franco-British declaration also registered the Belgian government's "renewed reassurances of the fidelity of Belgium" to her obligations under the League Covenant, but Spaak now renewed his government's assurances of Belgium's infidelity to Article 16 ("in no case can the right of passage be imposed on Belgium": *ibid.*, 1286-1287).

88. *Ibid.*, 1287.

89. Instead of 14 October 1937 as scheduled: *DGFP*, Ser. D, V, 633 n.3.

underwritten on all sides within just one year of its issuance.⁹⁰ Its popularity in Belgium was never greater than at that time.

In February 1938, as Germany prepared to annex Austria, Leopold ordered Belgium's French frontier fortified and reinforced; his government concurred. Three months later, during the first alarm over Czechoslovakia, Belgian maneuvers were held along the French frontier — "so as to indicate," Spaak told the French ambassador, "that if you come this way to support the Czechs, you will encounter the Belgian army."⁹¹ Then in September 1938, when war threatened over Czechoslovakia, Leopold mobilized the Belgian army to block French passage. The French ambassador appealed to the heads of the Catholic, Socialist, and Liberal parties; he was rebuffed by the three of them.⁹²

Yet not all Belgians blinded themselves to the evidence that their neutrality was serving Germany's aggression, from which only Germany's own guarantee exempted them. Already during the Austrian crisis Spaak was thrown on the defensive within the Socialist party over Belgium's abandonment of collective security.⁹³ During the September crisis, anti-neutrality was rife in Wallonia, and afterward, when parliament reassembled, Walloon deputies protested the mobilization against France. After each crisis, the government called for national unity lest Belgium suffer the same fate as Austria, then Czechoslovakia. This call was sounded against the Flemish separatists, on whose behalf Hitler might intercede, but it resounded against the critics of neutrality, about which the Flemings were supposedly adamant. The Flemish extremists did join in a national unity drive for the general elections of April 1939: the vote then swung back toward the Left as the Flemish press itself openly questioned the worth of a pledge from Hitler.⁹⁴ The British meanwhile pressed the Belgians to resume military consultations with the French.⁹⁵ General Denis scoffed at "the political froth of Independence and Neutrality" to the British

90. While the German guarantee was pending, Leopold viewed it as the "finishing touch" to Belgium's new international posture (Van Overstraeten, 259), whereas Spaak was slow in extricating Belgium from the unavailing negotiations for a new Locarno, underway since the Rhineland crisis (*DDB* IV, Nos. 166, 202, 213, 238; Davignon, *Berlin*, 60-62; *Annales, Chambre. Session ordinaire de 1936-1937*, 1285-1286).

91. Gamelin, II, 334. See further *DDB* V, Nos. 10-11; *DGFP*, Ser. D, V, 656 n.4, and II, 737.

92. Van Overstraeten, 298; cf. Wullus-Rudiger, 159.

93. Spaak conceded before his party on 23 February 1938: "over the Socialist troops hovers, it is true, an atmosphere of unrest and disconcertedness . . . [which] goes deeper, moreover, in Wallonia than in Flanders" (*Contribution*, 61).

94. See *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, ed. E. L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, 3d series (London, 1949-1954), V, 270. This source is hereafter designated as *DBFP*.

95. See *DDB* V, Nos. 65-67, 70, 71; *DBFP* V, 221n; and for kicks, *DGFP*, Ser. D, VI, Nos. 517, 575.

military attaché in the company of the Belgian army's chief of staff, who therewith proposed to exchange "information and plans" with the British and French attachés unbeknown to "the politicians" or "the Palace."⁹⁶ The new Chamber grumbled increasingly for staff contacts until in June the Senate confronted the government with a resolution to this effect.⁹⁷ The government for its part reviewed the neutrality policy periodically all that spring of 1939 — only to reaffirm it on June 23.⁹⁸ This was a foregone conclusion so long as Leopold was intractable: for the government "to open a conflict with the Crown" in those dangerous times was unthinkable.⁹⁹ Prime Minister Pierlot explained to (of all people!) the German chargé d'affaires in Brussels that, "as was known, the 'policy of independence' was the policy of the King, who adhered unwaveringly to it and exerted a strong influence on questions of foreign policy."¹⁰⁰ Just before those final deliberations of June 1939 Spaak declared that the "policy of independence" could be renounced at any time.¹⁰¹ Just afterward Leopold told French President Lebrun that "no event, in whatever circumstances, would cause Belgium to deviate from this policy of independence."¹⁰²

When the Polish crisis broke, Leopold convened a one-day conference of small neutral states¹⁰³ at the close of which he broadcast a conjoint appeal for peace. Two days later — on August 25, 1939 — he began mobilizing the Belgian army. Hitler then spontaneously renewed Germany's pledge to Belgium, so Pierlot requested Belgium's other two guarantors to renew theirs. "Mildly surprised, the British and French complied."¹⁰⁴ All three declarations were delivered straight to Leopold.¹⁰⁵

96. *DBFP* IV, 78; cf. *ibid.* III, 583, and IV, 66-67, 76, 105, 509.

97. See *DDB* V, Nos. 72, 74-76.

98. See Churchill, *Storm*, 381.

99. Pierlot said this last — displacedly? — concerning his running difference with Leopold, prior to the invasion, as to whether the royal function of commander in chief was the "purely personal power" that Leopold took it to be: Pierlot, 55.

100. *DGFP*, Ser. D, VII, 290; cf. *ibid.* V, 640, 641, 647, 653 and VII, 270, 321; *DBFP* VI, 66; Churchill, *Storm*, 381.

101. *Annales, Chambre. Session extraordinaire de 1939*, 445 (confirmed by Pierlot: *ibid.*, 450).

102. *DGFP*, Ser. D, VI, 951; cf. *ibid.* VII, 321 ("was firmly resolved to carry out the policy of independence . . . in all circumstances"), VIII, 675 ("would never permit the Belgian government to depart from the clear line of a neutral policy . . . even in the most critical hour"), and IX, 150 ("nothing would induce him to abandon the policy of neutrality").

103. The so-called Oslo group, the four Scandinavian states plus the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Belgium.

104. Barge, 54.

105. *DGFP*, Ser. D, VII, 286, 321; *DBFP* VII, 270-271, 303-304, 329; *DDB* V, Nos. 120-124, 132-134.

Meanwhile Leopold joined Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands on August 28 in an offer of “good offices” for settling the crisis;¹⁰⁶ this offer was still pending when Germany invaded Poland four days later. Leopold’s idea was to put Germany in the worst possible moral position for violating Belgian neutrality on top of Hitler’s reassurances. This maneuver was repeated when the German army, following its rapid conquest of Poland, began noticeably building up along the Dutch and Belgian borders. A surprise attack was forecast for about November 12,¹⁰⁷ so Leopold journeyed to The Hague on November 6 and there with the Dutch Queen renewed the offer of “good offices.”¹⁰⁸ An even more serious alert followed when in January 1940 the Belgian authorities, after having been warned by Mussolini himself of an impending German attack,¹⁰⁹ came into possession of some corroborative secret *Luftwaffe* instructions;¹¹⁰ they secured Belgium’s defenses accordingly and alerted the Allies, then slyly informed the Germans to this effect.¹¹¹ But the most serious Belgian alert of the phony war was the one preceding the invasion itself. By May 9, 1940, the omens had been such for three weeks running that — to quote the director general of the foreign office — “no further doubt [was] permissible as to the fatal march of events.”¹¹² And on that day the foreign office concluded that the attack was due the next morn-

106. To his government’s annoyance: Van Overstraeten, 351 (this being a dubious source, however: it is supposedly a diary, yet its dates are sometimes wrong).

107. *DDB V*, No. 185.

108. Leopold was accompanied by a wary Spaak (Van Overstraeten, 407-414; cf. *Annales, Chambre. Session ordinaire de 1939-1940*, 195) and by his aide-de-camp, Van Overstraeten. The initiative was this time Wilhelmina’s, the inspiration her foreign minister’s (Eelco Nicolaas Van Kleffens, *The Rape of the Netherlands* [London, 1940], 86; and his *Juggernaut over Holland* [New York, 1941], 49; cf. *DDB V*, Nos. 186, 188).

109. Mussolini’s warning was relayed by Ciano through Leopold’s sister (Marie José, Princess of Piedmont), then through the Belgian ambassador in Rome for good measure. Mussolini’s informant was the Italian military attaché in Berlin, who also warned the Belgian ambassador there. The Duke of Wurtemberg meanwhile warned Belgium in the same sense through the Belgian ambassador in Bern, as did the Vatican through its nuncio in Brussels. (See Galeazzo Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943*, ed. Hugh Gibson [New York, 1946], 183, 186 [26, 30 December 1939]; *DDB V*, Nos. 207-209, 211-213; de Man, *Cavalier*, 213-216; Davignon, 107, 174-176; Ernst von Weizsäcker, *Erinnerungen* [Munich, 1950], 275-276; Van Zuylen, 522.)

110. See *DGFP*, Ser. D, VIII, Nos. 528, 529, 531, 532, 534, 538, 540, 585; Vanwelkenhuyzen, 66-70; Jacobsen, 93-99.

111. *DGFP*, Ser. D, VIII, 670, 674-675, 681-682; *DDB V*, Nos. 216-219, 223-224, 226-227; Van Zuylen, 524ff. Leopold is occasionally misrepresented as having acted on his own to admit British and French troops into Belgium preventively on this occasion, when in reality his one personal initiative — asking the British what guarantees they would give Belgium if called in — tended the other way: *DDB V*, Nos. 214-215, 221-222, 225; Van Zuylen, 524ff.; *Recueil*, “Addenda,” 11 (Keyes to Leopold, 17 February 1940); Vanwelkenhuyzen, 70-90; Jacobsen, 210-211.

112. Van Zuylen, 551; cf. Davignon, 227ff.; *DDB V*, No. 236.

ing.¹¹³ The American ambassador in Brussels called on Leopold late that afternoon and related afterward: "He told me that no real evidence had passed under his notice giving any reason for alarm. . . . He looked very tired, but more cheerful, I thought, than at any former meeting."¹¹⁴

Throughout Belgium's months of tension pending the invasion, the official watchword was *unity* still but now also *self-restraint* — likewise in the service of neutralism. Witness Leopold's message of September 4, 1939, to his compatriots: "I ask each of you to impose upon himself, in expressing his sentiments, the rigorous discipline that strict neutrality commands. The whole nation is in duty bound to back . . . the government in its firm determination to keep the country out of the conflict. . ." ¹¹⁵ In other words, anti-neutralism was anti-national. For the first few weeks the nation was dutifully, even enthusiastically, self-restrained. Beginning with the November alert, however, Wallonia in particular showed a growing desire for an alliance with the West.¹¹⁶ By mid-April 1940, following the invasion of Denmark and Norway, even the best disciplined journal of them all, *Le Soir*, had come out discreetly for staff contacts with the Allies.¹¹⁷ The government all along was too easy on the press to suit Leopold; according to Pierlot, "in most of the letters he sent me over the months preceding May 10, 1940, he insisted — sometimes imperiously — on . . . more rigor."¹¹⁸ Parliament for its part held neutralist ranks throughout, only to break them retroactively at Limoges.¹¹⁹ As for the ministers, their outward show of solidarity over the King's policy was unflinching. And no wonder, for — in Pierlot's cagey words — "the King . . . personally and with great vigilance watched over its application, insisting on all occasions that it be understood in the strictest sense. Realizing the effort that it sometimes demanded from the ministers, the King felt displeased and sought to impart to them the warmth of his conviction."¹²⁰ Thus the King repeatedly

113. Van Zuylen, 551-552.

114. Cudahy, "Did Leopold Betray Us?" 186; *Case*, 16 (cf. *FRUS*, 1940 I, 188).

115. *Contribution*, 98.

116. Barge, 58, 64-65, 67, 70.

117. *Le Soir*, 15 April 1940.

118. Pierlot, 51.

119. But see *Annales, Sénat. Session ordinaire de 1939-1940*, 194-195, 940 (on Belgium's mounting "anxiety") and *Annales, Chambre. Session ordinaire de 1944-1945*, 597. Pierlot's rejoinder at Limoges — "We are not here to discuss the policy of neutrality till the invasion. We did not all agree in this matter. We followed the policy approved by the chambers . . ." (*Contribution*, 163) — was an extreme oversimplification. In 1941 Spaak followed it up in London with a "grey book" in defense of the "policy of independence," represented as all Belgium's policy before the invasion (Belgium. Ministère des Affaires étrangères. *La Relation officielle des événements, 1939-1940* [London, 1941], translated as *The Official Account of What Happened 1939-1940* [London, 1941]. Hereafter referred to as: Belgium).

120. Pierlot, 51; cf. *DGFP*, Ser. D, VIII, 18, 536, 675, and IX, 150.

snatched their inclinations to admit the Allies into Belgium in advance of the German invasion.¹²¹ He was even deaf to their pleas for secret military consultations with the Allies;¹²² he went no further than to arrange some ultra-discreet briefings of Allied agents on Belgium's defensive dispositions.¹²³ The official façade of unity over neutrality was especially transparent when on April 25 the Liberal ministers refused to line up on a matter of public schooling, their point being that they had lately lined up on neutrality once too often — following the invasion of Denmark and Norway. The cabinet resigned; Pierlot informed the King — and the King replied in these telltale terms: "I would be going against the superior interests of Belgium in accepting the government's resignation after the Senate's recent vote confirming that our foreign policy expresses the nearly unanimous will of the nation."¹²⁴

Spaak was Leopold's one minister whose neutralism remained above suspi-

121. Van Overstraeten, *passim*; Cudahy, *Case*, 10. The army chief of staff did open the southern frontier at the height of the January alert; he was summarily dismissed by Leopold, perhaps at his own contrite request: see Van Overstraeten, 461; Vanwelkenhuyzen, 77-79, 84-85, 90; Jacobsen, 210; Wullus-Rudiger, 191.

122. *DDB* V, Nos. 164, 168, 173, 179, 194; Van Overstraeten, 368ff., 416ff.; Jacobsen, 206-209.

123. That there were no formal staff conversations is affirmed by Churchill, *Finest*, 429-430; Anthony Eden, *The Reckoning* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 114-115; Edmund Ironside, *The Ironside Diaries, 1937-1940*, ed. R. Macleod and D. Kelley (London, 1962), 132-133, 150-152, 157; Leslie Hore-Belisha, *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha*, ed. R. J. Minney (London, 1960), 254; Hastings Lionel Ismay, *The Memoirs of General the Lord Ismay* (London, 1960), 124; Basil H. Liddell Hart, *Memoirs*, 2 vols. (London, 1965), II, 263; Robert Clive, letter in *The Times*, 31 May 1940, 7; Weygand, in France, *Assemblée Nationale. Rapport fait au nom de la commission chargée d'enquêter sur les événements survenus en France de 1933 à 1945*, par Charles Serré, rapporteur général, député. 9 volumes; paginated consecutively (Paris, 1947-1951) hereafter referred to as: France 1639; Georges (*ibid.*, 679-680); Maurin (*ibid.*, 912); and Van Overstraeten, 420-422. At the same time Pierlot (*Annales, Séance des chambres réunies, 19 septembre — 9 novembre 1944*, 14; Pierlot, 56), Spaak (Belgium; also *Annales, Sénat, Session ordinaire de 1946-1947*, 1238-1239: 3 July 1947), and Ellis (24: based on the British military records) mention secret unofficial military consultations, in which Van Overstraeten (393-395, 419, 519, and *passim*) and Keyes (quoted in Wullus-Rudiger, 349-350; cf. Van Overstraeten, 473-474) claim to have participated, while Gamelin (I, 81-87, 318, and III, 147; cf. France, 466; Van Zuylen, 489-492; Churchill, *Storm*, 482-483; and *Recueil*, 42) cites a military convention negotiated by him with the Belgians as of 14 November 1939 — but all these accounts, besides contradicting one another, exaggerate the value of the contacts concerned. From the concordant testimony of Churchill (*Finest*, 28, 429-430), Eden (114-115), and various French cabinet members and generals of 1939-1940 (Lebrun, in France, 963; Maurin, 912; Weygand, 1706; Georges, 695; Bruneau, 1168; Bruché, 1220), it follows that as of May 10, because of Belgian intransigence, a coordinated Allied-Belgian command had not been established, information detailing the Belgian defense network, terrain, and rail and highway system had not been transmitted, and routes for Allied troop and transportation movements had not been assigned. Cf. Cudahy, "Did Leopold Betray Us?" 185 (and *Case*, 11); Pertinax, 66 and n.9 [50 and n.9]; Jacobsen, 207-209, 211.

124. *Contribution*, 115.

cion until the very invasion. On the evening of May 9, 1940, after receiving a final, categorical forewarning from the Belgian embassy in Berlin, Spaak alerted the Allies, then spent the night in his office¹²⁵ with his principal colleagues — waiting. The appeals went out to London and Paris when the news came in — just after 5:00 A.M. And yet that resolute neutralist himself acknowledged years later that “the policy of independence or neutrality . . . was a mistake.”¹²⁶

IV

Even though Leopold's policy failed in its professed purpose, which was to keep Belgium out of war,¹²⁷ it was subsequently vindicated not only by the ministers and officials who had taken public responsibility for it, but even by some independent observers.¹²⁸ The gist of the case for it is that, although none of the Belgians concerned took Germany's guarantee at face value (and this is true),¹²⁹ until the Germans actually did attack, there was no telling for sure that they would; that the neutrality policy in no way compromised the eventual defense of Belgium but in fact, by impeding hostilities in western Europe for over eight months after war was declared there, procured the Allies that sorely needed, if ill spent, extra time in which to prepare; and that Belgium gained a moral advantage from remaining loyally neutral until Germany did finally attack.¹³⁰

125. After dining at the Bulgarian embassy: Cudahy, *Case*, 10.

126. Statement of 25 January 1948: *Le Monde* (a Paris daily), 27 January 1948, 2.

127. *Ibid.*: the neutrality policy “failed, for it did not prevent Belgium from being drawn into the war.”

128. Thus Cammaerts (an Anglicized Belgian), *The Prisoner at Laeken. King Leopold. Legend and Fact* (London, 1941), 98ff., and Alfred Fabre-Luce (a Frenchman), *Une Tragédie royale. L'affaire Léopold III* (Paris, 1948), 89-91, 134.

129. Thus Spaak's telegram of 15 January 1940 to the Belgian ambassador in Berlin: “documents fallen into our hands . . . betray Germany's carefully considered determination invade Belgium. Remain nonetheless firmly resolved maintain neutrality . . .” (*DDB V*, No. 216).

130. The supreme presentation of this case is Van Zuylen's. Van Zuylen argued besides that Belgian policy in no wise changed on 14 October 1936 (ditto Spaak in Belgium, and Wullus-Rudiger) — an incongruous contradiction of Leopold (Leopold to Spaak, 27 October 1936, in Van Overstraeten, 237: “our new political orientation”), of the then Prime Minister (Paul Van Zeeland, in *The Belgian Campaign*, 13-16), of the then president of the Chambre (Frans Van Cauwelaert, *ibid.*, 69: “the new orientation of our foreign policy”), and of the foreign office itself, of which Van Zuylen was then political director (*DDB V*, 352: “the speech by King Leopold III ushering in Belgium's new policy of independence”), not to mention outsiders (see e.g., Arnold J. Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1936* [Oxford, 1937], *passim*). It is true, though, that “the King's new policy” (*DGFP*, Ser. D, V, 641) fell in with the policy urged by Van Zuylen and others at the foreign office after the Rhineland was remilitarized: see *DDB IV*, Nos. 77 (25 April 1936) and 103 (19 August 1936).

None of this apologia holds. To begin with, Leopold's policy deflected from the eventual defense of Belgium all the materiel and man-hours spent in fortifying Belgium's French frontier, plus those spent by the Franco-British forces in a belated attempt to fortify France's Belgian frontier.¹³¹ But neutrality was incalculably costlier to Belgium in that, had Hitler not been protected by it militarily in the west, he could have been foiled during the Czechoslovakian crisis, or in all likelihood during the Polish campaign, or even during the Danish and Norwegian campaign.¹³² Joint defensive planning with the Allies would have been small compensation. Indeed, the Allies' only real hope of halting a full-fledged German offensive on Belgium lay in their taking up positions in Belgium beforehand. To them this was patent — and

131. Barge, 72-73.

132. All in all, Daladier capitulated with Chamberlain at Munich because of the military difficulties created for France as against Germany by Belgian neutrality. The French command held small hope of crashing the Siegfried line (even with British help) before the Germans could subdue Czechoslovakia and turn westward in full force, but was duly sanguine about saving Czechoslovakia (even without British help) were an attack through Belgium permissible: *DBFP* II, 269, 365; *FRUS*, 1938 I, 583; Gamelin, II, 334, 344-347; France, III, 639. True, the peace party in Daladier's cabinet was strong, but this just because of the dim military outlook consequent on Belgium's neutrality. Daladier was the less inclined to capitulate since he expected that, "if German troops cross the Czechoslovak frontier, the French will march to a man" (*DBFP* II, 269); the cheers that greeted his return from Munich took him altogether by surprise (Gamelin, II, 359; Paul Reynaud, *France* I, 571, *Au Coeur de la mêlée 1930-1945* [Paris, 1951], 287, and *Mémoires*, II: *Envers et contre tous 7 mars 1936-16 juin 1940* — hereafter referred to as *Mémoires* — [Paris, 1963], 218-219). For the aftermath of Munich see *DBFP* III, 287, and for the phony war see Gamelin to Daladier, 1 September 1939 (*Contribution*, 97); *FRUS*, 1939, I, 444-445; Churchill in *Parliamentary*, 789. The Siegfried Line was in fact weaker during Hitler's Czechoslovakian and Polish operations than the French realized (see Alan Bullock, *Hitler. A Study in Tyranny* [New York, 1962], 449-450, 472; International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg. *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal Nuremberg 14 November 1945-1 October 1946*, 42 vols. [Nuremberg, 1947-1959], X, 519, 522 — this source hereafter referred to as *IMT*). And on the balance, the indications are that Germany was vulnerable to an Allied offensive through Belgium even between the Polish and the Scandinavian campaigns: compare *IMT* XV, 381-382, with *ibid.* X, 520-521. But this much is patent: that only because "Belgium shielded the Ruhr" (Christopher Thorne, *The Approach of War, 1938-1939* [London, 1967], 5) was Hitler able to operate on other fronts (see *DGFP*, Ser. D, I, 35; II, 475-476, 686-687, 727-730; VII, 203-204, 478; also Ser. C, V, 1094-1095; Ser. D., II, 219-220, 737-738, 977, 979-980; V, 641-642, 647, 653, 656-657, 657-658, 658-659; VI, 713-714, 799-800, 956; etc. — and *DDB* V, 121, 185). Czechoslovakia for her part was almost in a position to resist Germany unaided in 1938 (see e.g., Thorne, 58 and n.22). For a most clear-sighted, indeed clairvoyant, running exposition of the drastic European effects of Leopold's policy, complete with interviews of Van Zeeland, Gamelin, Delbos, and Daladier, see William Bullitt's dispatches of the time from Paris: *FRUS*, 1937 I, 77-80, 84, 89-92, 96-98, 676-677; 1938 I, 583; 1939 I, 444-445 (cf. *DDB* V, 372). Of the many relevant memoirs, see especially Joseph Paul-Boncour, *Entre deux guerres. Souvenirs sur la III^e République*, III: *Sur les chemins de la défaite 1935-1940* (Paris, 1946), 45-47, 171-173; and Reynaud, *France* I, 394-401; *Coeur*, 210-215; and *Mémoires*, II, 116-118, 222-223.

not just after the event, but well before.¹³³ To the Germans, too, it was patent: thus they covertly subsidized Belgium's neutralist press from the time the war began. Their full-fledged western offensive, originally scheduled for just after the Polish campaign, was postponed again and again because of technical snags (chiefly bad weather), never because of Belgian diplomacy.¹³⁴ Theoretically, there was always the possibility that they would desist; practically, though, Belgian neutrality itself had long since disposed of that possibility by offering them every prospect of an easy victory in the west when Belgium's usefulness in covering them there would be spent. As for neutral Belgium's proud moral position, it came to one of blamelessness for the expected aggression — but, by the same token, of blamefulness in a cause which was clearly Belgium's own even apart from her specific commitment to it under the Covenant of the League. Those who sought to check Hitler abroad before Belgium's turn came granted Belgium no moral advantage when it did come. Afterward Spaak had all he could do in London *not* eating his neutralist words in praise of Belgium's "sacred egoism."¹³⁵

The fallaciousness of the King's policy can best be seen in the light of that text from which it proceeded: the King's statement of October 14, 1936, to the Council of Ministers.¹³⁶ Let me quote from that statement at appropriate length:

For over a year now the government has been considering how to strengthen Belgium militarily. There have been several compelling reasons for its concern:

(a) Germany's rearmament, following upon the total remilitarization of Italy and Russia, has prompted most other states . . . to take exceptional precautionary measures;

(b) the methods of warfare have undergone such vast changes due to technical

133. See France II, 256, and IX, 2760ff.; *Contribution*, 97; *DDB* V, Nos. 164, 173, 179, 194, 230, 233. Cf. Churchill, *Storm*, 472-473, and *Finest*, 34.

134. *IMT* XV, 382; Arthur Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide. A History of the War Years Based on the Diaries of Field-Marshal Lord Alanbrooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff* (New York, 1957), 45-47; Manstein, 61-121; John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power. The German Army in Politics 1918-1945* (New York, 1954), 472; Barge, 58-59, 64; Jacobsen, 49. They also took a few days to revamp their plan of invasion after those *Luftwaffe* instructions were captured on 10 January 1940 (Churchill, *Storm*, 557; Bullock, 575; cf. Vanwelkenhuyzen, 90) — but how otiose the corresponding Belgian diplomatic maneuver was is evident from the fact that in early May 1940 the Germans knew that Belgium was forewarned of the impending invasion (Davignon, 108), yet proceeded undaunted. For Hitler's indifference to Belgium's neutrality see Wheeler-Bennett, 438, 439, 464, 473; Bullock, 569; Jacobsen, *passim* — and for Hitler's henchmen, see e.g., *IMT* X, 284-285 (Ribbentrop), and XV, 468-473 (Jodl); Manstein, 90.

135. *Annales, Sénat. Session ordinaire de 1939-1940*, 940 (16 April 1940).

136. This statement — the very "definition of our policy" for Belgian officials until 10 May 1940 (*DDB* V, 202) — "was composed and written by the King himself from the first line to the last. . . I want to stress that it is his personal work": Louis Wodon to Wullus-Rudiger, 13 November 1939 (Wullus-Rudiger, 328).

progress, notably in aviation and mechanization, that henceforth the initial operations of an armed conflict can be of a potency, speed, and magnitude particularly alarming for small countries like Belgium;

(c) the lightning reoccupation of the Rhineland, which moved the base for an eventual German invasion up to our frontier, has intensified our misgivings;

(d) at the same time we have seen the foundations of international security shaken through violations of conventions, even conventions freely subscribed, it being almost impossible in present circumstances to apply the provisions of the Covenant of the League of Nations against such violations; . . .

In view of [this] dangerous international situation, the country will expect the government to propose the necessary [military] measures to parliament without delay. And here it were fitting that the issue be put before the public with full clarity.

Our military policy — like our foreign policy, on which it perforce depends — should have as its object, not to prepare for a more or less successful war by means of a coalition, but to keep war off our territory.

The reoccupation of the Rhineland, by vitiating the Locarno agreements in their letter and in their spirit, put us almost back into our international position of before the war.

Because of our geographic situation, we require a military machine capable of dissuading any one of our neighbors from utilizing our territory for an attack on another state. In discharging this mission, Belgium makes an outstanding contribution to peace in western Europe and thereby acquires a right to the respect and, if need be, the aid of the states concerned with peace there.

On this much I believe Belgian opinion to be unanimous. But our commitments should extend no farther. Any one-sided policy would weaken our position abroad and would, rightly or wrongly, arouse dissension at home. An alliance, even a purely defensive one, does not meet our needs; for, however promptly an ally's help might come to us, it would come only after the invader's blow, which would be staggering. We would in *any* case have to meet this blow alone. . .

That is why we must, as the Foreign Minister recently said, pursue a policy "thoroughly and exclusively Belgian." Its resolute aim must be to keep us out of the conflicts of our neighbors, as accords with our national ideal. It can be sustained by a reasonable financial and military effort. And it will win the support of the Belgians, motivated as they all are by an intense and profound desire for peace.

May those who doubt whether such a foreign policy be possible . . . remember how our scrupulous observance of neutrality weighed decisively in our favor . . . throughout the war and during the settlement that followed. Our moral position would have been incomparably weaker at home, and the world would not have shown us the sympathy it did, had the invader been able to point to an alliance between ourselves and one of his opponents.

The sole aim of our military system must, then, be — I repeat — to preserve us from war, from whatever side war may come; and it is important that the public should receive a categorical assurance to this effect. . .¹³⁷

and so forth.

137. *DDB IV*, 323-328; *Contribution*, 42-43.

Note, first, an oddity in Leopold's exposition. He insisted that the single purpose of the proposed new policy was to preserve Belgium from war. And yet when he argued the moral benefit that Belgium derived after 1914 from having scrupulously observed her neutrality before it was violated, he did so quite as if he took for granted that the proposed reversion to neutrality would fail in its single purpose: that history would repeat itself. But note also the discrepancy between Leopold's clear *prevision* of the initial impact of a mechanized blitzkrieg on Belgium and his chimerical proposal that Belgium fabricate unaided a defensive system capable of dissuading the Germans from utilizing her virtually indefensible territory. To be sure, he maintained that his neutrality policy was only a *pis aller* for collective security, which the remilitarization of the Rhineland had shown to be "almost" unenforceable; but then that neutrality policy, after having been justified on the ground that collective security was "almost" unenforceable, served Belgium as justification for obstructing the enforcement of collective security during the Czechoslovakian crisis. In Leopold's original phrasing, it was "almost impossible . . . to apply the provisions of the Covenant of the League of Nations against . . . violations of conventions, even conventions freely subscribed"; Belgium's reversion to neutrality, justified in these terms, thereupon served to justify Belgium in violating her own freely subscribed commitment to those very provisions. Again, Leopold's premise was that "even conventions freely subscribed" by Germany were worthless, but his conclusion was a policy of neutrality geared to Germany's guarantee. The point of that policy, as he explained at its inception, was to discourage Germany from aggression against Belgium, and yet it was upheld to the last despite Germany's blatant undiscouragement. It was put across on the consideration that "in any case" Belgium alone would have to bear the full deadly impact of German aggression before help could reach her, but then it served as the dogmatic reason why the Allies might not take up defensive positions in Belgium beforehand. It was commended as a tried and proven moral asset to Belgium should the Allies have to rescue her a second time, but was sustained in spite of the Allies' accounting it a moral liability this time round.¹³⁸ Enough! The King's policy of 1936-1940 was self-refuting as well as self-defeating — and not merely in retrospect, but within the perspective that was then his.

There remains a last line taken by retrospective apologists for the King's policy, a line of excuse rather than of justification for it: that its promulga-

138. Cudahy, "Did Leopold Betray Us?" 185 (and *Case*, 11), paraphrasing Leopold for January 1940: "He admitted that the British had complained about lack of cooperation. . . . The criticism of the French was even more acridly hostile. Belgium could please no one, but was kicked about by all sides. The King himself was vilified and condemned with harsh and unfair words."

tion was necessary to ensure quick passage of the government's rearmament bill and that at no time thereafter was its repeal politically feasible. The first contention is untenable, since what ensured quick passage of the rearmament bill (for what that bill was worth)¹³⁹ was the official declaration of independence from France together with the government's assurances that this was *not* the doctrinaire neutralism that in fact it was to be.¹⁴⁰ The second contention derives from the official reckoning that Belgium was just about unanimous for neutrality all along—an official *misreckoning* except in the tricky sense that (as Leopold put it) insofar as there was no national unanimity for alignment this way or that, there was national unanimity for nonalignment.¹⁴¹ In truth, sustaining the King's policy took continual official equivocation and exertion right, left, and center, and at least in June 1939 it could easily have been dropped.

Yet it remains that this delusive, disastrous policy *was* democratically sustained as Belgium's foreign policy for the years concerned. How? Well, if we consider the state to act out of motives like those of a single individual—and this is how we do consider the modern state when we talk summarily about its outward activity—we could imagine that Belgium, a bloody battlefield for the war of 1914-1918 among her neighbors, felt exposed to new and worse violence as of 1936 and, in the anxious hope of eluding it, strove to turn Hitlerite aggression eastward by blocking interference with it from the west. Some such consequent rationale of Belgium's "sacred egoism" of 1936-1940 may even hold true for individual Belgian neutralists as well, all the way up to Spaak himself. But no consequent rationale will hold in the case of Leopold, except for whom Belgium's policy of neutrality would never have been conceived or executed.

V

What was the King's attitude behind the King's policy? On the surface it was one of willful refusal to believe that Germany would attack, all indications to the contrary notwithstanding. Occasionally he would cite Hitler's pledge, though he well knew its worthlessness; or again, Belgium's military deterrent,

139. About which see, however, *DGFP*, Ser. C, V, 1095 ("the increase in armaments . . . can be described as very modest"), and France, II, 256 ("Belgium . . . has not made the requisite military effort").

140. *Annales, Chambre. Session extraordinaire de 1936*, 371. Cf. the Catholic *Vingtième Siècle* of 11 April 1939 (quoted in *DBFP* V, 271): "We have raised our voice against the slipping of this [policy of] independence in the direction of a rigid and systematic policy of neutrality . . ."

141. At that, sympathy for Germany, rife among Flemish extremists in 1936, virtually disappeared after the Anschluss: see *DGFP*, Ser. D, V, 649, 581 n.3, 655-657; II, 980; VI, 378, 499-500; VIII, 18-19, 270-272; IX, 22-26, 149-150.

though he well knew its inefficacy. Usually, though, he would cite nothing: he would just decline the fearful prospect. So far, this sounds like gross wishful thinking.¹⁴² But in fact the reverse was true, for Leopold did allow that the attack was a prospect after all, and this in terms which, taken together, betrayed a secret persuasion that the prospective attack was inevitable, that it would be irresistible, and that Belgium would succumb to it.

That persuasion shows through the very shallowness of his counteraffirmation of January 1940 to the American ambassador in Brussels: "There is no danger but immediate danger."¹⁴³ That same persuasion sounds through the starkness with which, in this same period, he forecast to a former minister what he could not himself believe: "I cannot believe that Belgium will be attacked. . . . We are loyally fulfilling the duties of our neutrality [and] . . . of our [national] defense. If the catastrophe comes, our country will be entirely destroyed, streams of blood will flow, but we will do our duty actively to the last. Our country's fate will be terrible, but never will it be possible to say that we failed in our duty."¹⁴⁴ Leopold voiced that inner persuasion most clearly, however, in that, even as he declined the fearful prospect, he continually pointed back to the precedent of 1914 — and ahead to Germany's magnified power of aggression. This he did already in that maiden statement of his on Belgian neutrality, which I quoted at length — and one word of which I intentionally misrendered as syntax required. Actually Leopold did not say: "however promptly an ally's help might come to us, it would come only after the invader's blow, which would be staggering." He said: "which will be staggering."¹⁴⁵

The King's chief wartime minister caught none of this foreboding undertone: "Without speaking of certitude," Pierlot affirmed, "the King was persuaded that the policy of armed neutrality would remove war from our country."¹⁴⁶ The American ambassador half overheard the undertone: "Belgium was due for it," he recollected, "if a German attack was to occur in the Western theater, and Spaak for one believed that such an offensive would take place before the summer was over. The King had the same realistic grasp

142. Thus Clive, 7: "The King's policy . . . was inspired by the hope, which developed into an obsession, that in this way alone would he be able to save Belgium from the horrors of war. This obsession made him blind to other considerations."

143. Cudahy, "Did Leopold Betray Us?" 186 (and *Case*, 11).

144. Quoted, "verbatim," by Pierlot, 50. Cf. Leopold's radio address of 27 October 1939 to the American nation: "If we became involved in the fray, it . . . would spell utter destruction for Belgium whatever the issue of the war. . . . But we cannot believe that the belligerents would fail to respect our neutrality . . ." (*Contribution*, 100-101).

145. Belgium, 55. Translates: "would be." Cf. Leopold to Spaak, 27 October 1936: "The surprise invasion will ineluctably precede" the arrival of help, "and we shall in any case have to sustain the first blow with our own forces alone" (Van Overstraeten, 239).

146. Pierlot, 51.

of the grim danger ahead, although he clung to a fatalistic belief that in some mysterious fashion his country would escape the impending holocaust."¹⁴⁷ Spaak, however, overheard in full: "I did not want this war," he told a compatriot as France was falling. "The King did not want it either. With hallucinatory prophetic prescience the King had long since seen what was due to happen. . ."¹⁴⁸

Now, suppose that Leopold had acted on this dire foreboding of his beginning in 1936: what might he have done? The catastrophe being regarded as unavoidable, he could in good conscience have done no more than to clear Belgium of responsibility for it in advance: to lead Belgium in demonstratively doing nothing to deserve it and, within this limitation, seemingly doing everything to avoid it. Is this, then, the simple story behind the King's policy? By no means, if only because the King contrived to *make* his foreboding prophetic. His policy *conduced* to the catastrophe for which it purportedly cleared Belgium — and cleared him. His premonition concealed a guilty project, as is the way with premonitions. The neutrality policy, ostensibly his means of warding off a dread fatality, was in actuality the very opposite.

The King pursued this dread fatality, Belgium's violent destruction, on the same basis — his policy of neutrality — after the invasion as before. Remember how, in the very first days of the invasion, he already — to quote Spaak's account to the rump parliament — "with a clairvoyance that today appears almost horrible, had foreseen the military movements to come. . ."¹⁴⁹ Remember how his fatalistic resignation to the Belgian army's encirclement and surrender incensed his ministers, whom he then suspected of suspecting him of a secret defeatist design. And remember how he argued from Belgium's neutrality against their injunctions to lead the army to safety abroad.

Belgium's neutrality was likewise Leopold's ground for refusing to pass into

147. Cudahy, *Case*, 4, concerning 17 January 1940 — but cf. Cudahy to the Secretary of State, 18 May 1940, in *FRUS*, 1940 I, 185: "The King sent for me this morning and asked me to tell the President that he considered the invasion of Belgium only a matter of time." The German ambassador also half overheard the undertone through the medium of "a representative of the Court, who is very close to the King" and who, during the January crisis, "emphatically told me . . . that the king . . . was firmly resolved to pursue to the end — even to the bitter end — this policy of neutrality, which he himself had initiated": *DGFP*, Ser. D, VIII, 675. See also Liddell Hart, II, 206, on Leopold's "deep distrust of Hitler, and anxiety about his aggressive aims" as of April 1938, and Joseph E. Davies, in *The Belgian Campaign and the Surrender of the Belgian Army. May 10-28, 1940* (Belgian American Educational Foundation, New York, 1940), 77, on 14 January 1940: "He was harassed and worried. Nevertheless, he was objectively realistic in his appraisal of the situation, and firm in his determination to follow out his policy to the end. He was hoping desperately against hope that all the belligerents would respect the promises which they had given to Belgium."

148. Quoted in *Contribution*, 214, from a letter of 23 July 1945 to *Le Rappel* by Jean Lemaigre (conversation of 18 July 1940; ellipsis Lemaigre's).

149. *Contribution*, 152.

exile with his government — for his “set idea” of surrendering along with his troops,¹⁵⁰ as if to impress a national and personal character upon the defeat.¹⁵¹ Here, then, his neutralism served not to clear, but to compromise, him in respect of that scheduled defeat. The opprobrium to be heaped upon him thereafter was comprehended under his resolve to share his soldiers’ and his people’s fate “come what may.” So was the constitutional crisis that he opened through this resolve and that he was to perpetuate by his continued impolitic fidelity to neutralism through the occupation and even beyond — in Pierlot’s phrase, “into the very heart of victory.”¹⁵² Therewith that last political excuse for his neutralism fell: his supposed concern for national union. For when he broke with his ministers, their unanimity against him was — as Spaak put it at Limoges — “complete and absolute, whether they were Flemings or Walloons.”¹⁵³ And he was to maintain the nation in a state of climactic *disunion* for the five years before he finally abdicated.¹⁵⁴

Leopold’s most cogent explanation for his surrender was a *non*explanation. He invoked an inscrutable inner imperative, which was a sentimental imperative moralized. At Wynendael he declared: “As against the most solid logical or political considerations, there are reasons of sentiment that cannot be got around.”¹⁵⁵ And he thereupon read his ministers a letter addressed by him to the King of England: “my duty compels me,” it went, and continued: “the mission which I have assigned myself. . .”¹⁵⁶ Pierlot was to comment in after years: “‘The mission which I have assigned myself’: is this expression striking enough?”¹⁵⁷ It is the more striking since, as Pierlot indicated, it conveyed the very spirit in which the King had conducted his neutralist business from the first.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, Leopold’s manner at Wynendael — his self-enclosure, his imperviousness to all argument, his long silences followed by peremptory pronouncements — was only the ultimate in his seasoned neutralist style. “The reticence surrounding his thought and his intentions,” Pierlot

150. This “set idea” first registered in his 18 May 1940 brief of his 17 May 1940 arguments against his ministers.

151. His thwarted intention of negotiating an armistice tended further in this direction.

152. *Rapport, note complémentaire*, 125.

153. *Contribution*, 153-154. (The Minister of Justice interjected: “It was absolute, constant, and without any reserve.”)

154. Already on 11 May 1945 the Prime Minister told him: “In sum, the Flemish part of the country . . . is for the King, the rest of the country is against him. The King’s return threatens to cause a schism within the country” (*Rapport, Annexe 43*). He finally abdicated not because civil war was threatening, but because his last political support was withdrawn.

155. *Contribution*, 138 (Pierlot on Wynendael).

156. Kennedy and Landis, 56, 57; *Rapport, Annexe 33*.

157. Pierlot, 71.

158. But Pierlot was concerned only with its explicit unconstitutionality: the royal function, subordinated to personal conscience alone, “in no way differs from personal power” (*ibid.*).

held, "was a permanent danger."¹⁵⁹ But when Pierlot once confronted Leopold in a showdown mood during the phony war, he was himself disarmed by Leopold's consternation, earnestness, and awesome solitude.¹⁶⁰

Well then, what was that deep, dark determination by reason of which Leopold, otherwise a highly constitutional monarch with no special calling for affairs of state, took over the direction of foreign policy behind the scenes as of October 14, 1936, and steered Belgium and himself head-on to disaster?

VI

Let us seek that determination in and around the fact that there was an obvious precedent to the German attack of May 10, 1940, on a neutral Belgium: I mean, of course, the German attack of August 5, 1914, on a neutral Belgium. As I have pointed out, Leopold was already only too attentive to this precedent as of 1936. During the invasion of May 1940 he invoked it incessantly,¹⁶¹ and in terms modeled on Albert's wartime proclamations and orders of the day.¹⁶²

Thus, in leading Belgium back to neutrality, Leopold was putting himself into the position in which Albert had found himself a quarter century before. Moreover, in scrupulously observing that neutrality both before and after its violation, Leopold did just as his father had done before him. So, in fact, he told all America by radio on October 27, 1939, when he affirmed Belgium's neutrality "from which, following the example set by my beloved father, I am resolved never to swerve. . ."¹⁶³ That example comprised Albert's opposition to staff talks with the Franco-British before Germany actually invaded, Albert's insistence thereafter on Belgium's independence with respect to her guarantors' war aims,¹⁶⁴ and Albert's refusal to evacuate his army abroad at

159. *Ibid.*, 53.

160. *Ibid.*, 54. But cf. Clive, 7: "no one in his entourage ever dared stand up to him" because "his temper, never easily controlled, at times became violent."

161. See e.g., *Contribution*, 125, 141-142. Cf. Cammaerts, *Prisoner*, 137: "The constant references to King Albert and to 1914 in every speech or proclamation made by his son during the crisis should not be lightly dismissed."

162. And on the speech Albert delivered to the Belgian parliament on 22 November 1918 in Leopold's presence following the triumphal entry into the capital: "What were the principles which governed my conduct during this long war? On the one hand to fulfill, as far as was practicable, all our international obligations . . . ; on the other hand to spare the blood of our soldiers, to ensure their material and moral well-being and to alleviate their sufferings" (*The War Diaries of Albert I King of the Belgians*, ed. by General R. Van Overstraeten [London, 1954], 224).

163. *Contribution*, 101.

164. Albert read Belgium's war aims entirely out of his constitutional oath to maintain Belgium's "national independence and territorial integrity," and he saw to it that the Allies undertook to restore that independence and integrity after the war while

the Allies' injunction¹⁶⁵ or again to take refuge abroad himself at his government's injunction when, on two occasions, his army was threatened with capture.¹⁶⁶ Leopold identified himself with Albert retroactively so far as to reason as if the status of neutrality were binding on Belgium the second time as it had been the first and moreover as if he personally were bound, like Albert the time before, by a "pledge of honor . . . to maintain a strictly impartial neutrality as between [Belgium's guarantors] . . . come what may."¹⁶⁷ This tacit double assumption underlay all his misunderstandings with his ministers.

Leopold did not identify himself with Albert in respect to the earlier German aggression alone. A careful historian of the Belgian dynasty observed in 1941: "The key to every word and action of the son can be found in his father's words and actions."¹⁶⁸ And a journalist who in 1946 spent a day with Leopold in Switzerland related: "While passing some remark or other I am struck — for the twentieth time since our talk began — by the King's aspect in listening: his forehead, bent forward pensively with a nuance of worriedness, conjures up, through an extraordinary likeness, an august countenance no longer with us. . . . Interrupting myself, I say with a slight interrogative intonation: 'The King loved his father greatly,' This time he does not pause as usual to reflect before speaking. . . . 'Oh! yes,' he exclaims. 'And not only did I have great filial affection for my father, but admiration too, deep admira-

according Belgium the privileges due to a neutral state: none of this precedent was lost on Leopold. In this specific connection Liddell Hart, II, 206, called it an "irony of history that the son should have suffered such sweeping criticism, and eventually the loss of his throne, by closely and loyally attempting to carry out the teachings of his father, so universally admired as the heroic symbol of 1914 resistance to Germany."

165. He declared he would sooner die with his army on the spot (quoted in *Le Soir*, 22 February 1934, 2). Yet he spared lives wherever possible: "What I am proudest of," he was to remark, "is never having needlessly spilled a drop of blood" (quoted *ibid.*; cf. above, n.162) — and sure enough, Spaak remarked at Limoges concerning Leopold: "We all had the feeling in the course of this war that he had a single preoccupation: not to let men be killed or cities destroyed" (*Contribution*, 156).

166. Albert Chatelle, *L'Effort belge en France pendant la guerre (1914-1918)* (Paris, 1934), 60 (concerning 2 October 1914) and 264, facsimile (concerning 29 March 1918); both paraphrased in *Annales, Chambre. Session ordinaire de 1944-1945*, 552-553 (De Vleeschauwer, 24 July 1945), and quoted in *Rapport, note complémentaire*, 33.

167. Joseph E. Davies, in *The Belgian Campaign*, 77, citing "a personal letter from [Leopold] dated three days before the German attack" (Albert's pledge was his constitutional oath). The guarantees accorded to Belgium in 1937 were non-reciprocal: Belgium was entitled to renounce her neutrality toward any of her guarantors at any time, though this of course at the cost of the corresponding guarantee(s). In fact, taken literally, the German guarantee was contingent only on Belgium's not cooperating in any military action directed against Germany, while the Franco-British guarantee was unconditional. In practice, then, "the King's policy of neutrality at any price" (Clive, 7) was the very reverse of a policy of "independence" — or of "free hands" as in Leopold to Spaak, 27 October 1936 (Van Overstraeten, 239).

168. Cammaerts, *Prisoner*, 46.

tion. . . More than that: veneration. So much so that I constantly look to him for inspiration in the most diverse matters, not only in my political life but in my private life as well. . . ’”¹⁶⁹

Actually the veneration was more marked than the inspiration until Leopold's accession. Earlier he did marry at the same age as his father before him — and manage to have two boys and a girl like his father before him. He did climb mountains too. And he took his cues from his father in public life. Beside majestic King Albert, however, he cut the figure of a wistful Prince Charming. Then Albert's sudden death, after simply overwhelming Leopold with mingled grief and dread, “wrought a deep change” in him by the time of his coronation. Or so a court personality then related, adding: “All those who come close to him now discover in him already the serenity and the prudence that characterized his father.”¹⁷⁰ At his coronation he declared in the context of a moving tribute to his father: “My most ardent desire . . . is to follow the path he so clearsightedly traced.”¹⁷¹ And in October 1936 he gave the impression of having found that path at last.¹⁷²

We may perhaps suppose that the immense bereavement Leopold felt in common with all Belgium in February 1934 raised his aspiration to be like his father to the level of a felt duty. And we may conjecture further — Freudianly — that Albert's grisly death revived Leopold's unconscious guilt over his childhood death wish against his father, therewith reactivating his whole Oedipus complex. For Freud taught us that the basic sense of a boy's — even a big boy's — imitating his father is to be found within the Oedipus complex: in his desire to usurp his father's place at his mother's side. Leopold's Oedipal guilt would have been intensified, eighteen months after his accession, by his wife's accidental death at his hands, for this left the queen mother alone as queen beside him. Thenceforth especially would he have striven to relive

169. Pierre Goemaere, *Une Journée avec le Roi des Belges* (Brussels, 1946), 14-15 (Goemaere's ellipsis in the first two cases); also *ibid.*, 6, on Leopold's always pausing “just the way King Albert did” before replying in conversation.

170. Quoted in *Le Soir*, 23 February 1934, 3. Cammaerts, *Prisoner*, 225, also noted this change, if less emphatically: “The Prince's affection for his father was akin to hero-worship. His most ardent wish was to follow in the hero's footsteps. This attitude is maintained and strengthened after the accession. It shows itself in every word, in every action. It pervades everything.”

171. *Annales, Sénat. Session ordinaire de 1933-1934*, 555 (literally: “so clairvoyantly”). Leopold's private secretary bore him out in retrospect: “Called upon in February 1934 to assume the constitutional charge of Chief of the Belgian State, King Leopold III has a single preoccupation: to seek inspiration in all circumstances from the precepts of government that King Albert taught him” (Léon Capelle, *Au Service du Roi 1934-1940* [Brussels, 1949], 13).

172. Which way he was seeking it can be read out of the far-fetched connection he drew in a speech of 12 May 1935 between the paternal precedent and the unprecedented depression: “In a war imposed upon us, he liberated our country. His example should guide us in the economic battle we are waging today” (*Contribution*, 33).

Albert's triumphant life — with defeat, captivity, and disgrace as the expiatory outcome: as the tragic finale to his royal mother-romance. At bottom, moreover, that guilty project of his, the destruction of Belgium, would also have been his death wish against his father, the personification of Belgium. And it would have subserved his incestuous design on his mother, for in accomplishing it he brought the guilt-ridden solitude his mother shared with him to a new extreme. Like Oedipus' own guilty project, Leopold's would even have taken the form of a prophetic vision of a fate he was to accomplish through his very efforts at eluding it — only the project that was uncensored for Oedipus in the oracle's prophecy would have been concealed from Leopold behind his premonition of the punitive disaster to be visited upon his realm. On this Theban construction, Leopold's forced abdication itself was in the books.

So much for Leopold as Oedipus. Or, rather, *too* much, for this construction just doesn't hold up. The trouble with it is that Leopold as neutralist was precisely *not* following the path Albert had so clear-sightedly traced. For Leopold's policy of neutrality countermanded Albert's eager repudiation of Belgium's neutrality,¹⁷³ and in putting that policy across Leopold was the reverse of the correct constitutional monarch that Albert had been.¹⁷⁴ This is not to deny Leopold's Oedipus complex: there is no denying anyone's Oedipus complex, let alone Leopold's. It is, though, to deny that his guilty project alias "the King's policy" arose out of his Oedipus complex.

Out of what, then, did it arise?

VII

It did arise directly out of Leopold's felt need to repeat a prior experience while modifying its outcome. Only this determinative prior experience was not his father's in facing the German aggression, but one of his own: his

173. See Albert's speech of 22 November 1918 from the throne. Cammaerts, troubled by this anomaly, argued — spuriously — that Albert would have favored the reversion to neutrality in that the break with France was the precondition for parliamentary approval of the needful defense credits (*Prisoner*, 46 and 232).

174. Even Cammaerts owned that Albert would at all odds have managed to avoid Leopold's misunderstanding with his ministers (*ibid.*, 232ff.). Notorious among Leopold's lesser neutralist deviations from the paternal precedent was his failure to appear before parliament following the invasion. "To be sure, the King can try to justify his omission by pointing out that King Albert had some days but he only some hours at his disposal. In fact, though, what is at issue here is not time, but the King's unwillingness to appear before parliament despite the request addressed to him" (Prime Minister Achille Van Acker on 20 July 1945: *Annales, Chambre. Session ordinaire de 1944-1945*, 532). Moreover, it is hard to imagine that Albert would have surrendered when Leopold did (cf. Dennis Wheatley, *The Black Baroness* [London, 1940], 275: "He knows perfectly well that he ought to fight on, and the memory of his father seems to haunt him").

experience of August 29, 1935, when he accidentally drove his wife, Queen Astrid, to her death.¹⁷⁵

He was then vacationing incognito with Astrid at their villa beside Lucerne. His car was in perfect order that morning; its speed was low; the sun was out; the road was clear. Just short of Küssnacht he glanced an instant too long at a road map that Astrid was holding for him. Another instant and the right wheels of his roadster had passed through a break in the stone curb bordering the road. Thereafter the curb blocked the car from regaining the road even as the slope of the bank impelled it toward the lake. A first, huge jolt along its rough course hurled Astrid against that deadly tree.¹⁷⁶ Leopold himself was ejected some moments later by a collision with a second tree, whereupon the vehicle swerved into the lake, with the chauffeur still lodged in the rumble seat. While the chauffeur dislodged himself, the King rushed to the Queen.¹⁷⁷ He found her in a coma, her face and clothing bloody. The Küssnacht police arrived with a doctor in a matter of minutes, but by then Astrid was dead in Leopold's arms. As for Leopold, he was in a state of shock¹⁷⁸ such that he was unable to talk. His identity having been established,¹⁷⁹ he was taken in hand by the doctor while Brussels was notified. His Prime Minister and his private secretary flew in at once to escort him home along with Astrid's body. By all accounts, his suffering was "dreadful to behold."¹⁸⁰ The worst of it was that before he could even begin to assimilate this private tragedy it was already a public event; indeed, *his assimilating it was*

175. The following relation of the Küssnacht accident and of its immediate aftermath is based on the reports on file at the Bezirksamt Küssnacht, Kanton Schwyz (Untersuchungsakten i. S. Autounglück des Königs von Belgien vom 29. August 1935, Nr. 197), supplemented by *L'Illustration* (a Paris weekly) of 7 and 21 September 1935, by the eyewitness statements quoted in *Le Temps* (a Paris daily) and *Le Soir* of 30 August-1 September 1935, by Leopold's own account to Capelle as rendered by Van Overstraeten, 172, and by oral communications from Wilhelm Rogg, one of the Küssnacht police officials who first drove to the scene of Queen Astrid's death. It is restricted to those basic material facts about which there can be no reasonable doubt.

176. Presumably the car sideswiped the deadly tree as the left wheels suddenly jumped the curb in their turn (Bezirksamt, No. 3). The one close eyewitness testified concerning the decisive moment: "The driver must have then stepped on the gas, for the left rear wheel began spinning. The car was then jolted, struck against the tree that was on the other side of the curb, and rode down the slope. Before the driver stepped on the gas, the lady opened the door; presumably she meant to jump out. The lady was then thrown onto the grass . . ." (*ibid.*, No. 8).

177. After some quick words with a couple in a second Belgian car, which then sped to Küssnacht (*ibid.*).

178. Bezirksamt, No. 3 (police report): "ganz geistesabwesend"; No. 32 (medical report): "*commotio cerebri* (Gehirnerschütterung)."

179. See below, n.231 (his entourage refused to identify him).

180. *Le Soir*, 31 August 1935, 2; cf. *Le Temps*, 30 August 1935, 6, and 31 August 1935, 3.

a public event.¹⁸¹ A silent crowd watched him board the train that evening at Lucerne while his Prime Minister acknowledged the official Swiss condolences. At 5:00 A.M., when the train entered Belgium, his other ministers were there waiting. "Must I receive them?" he asked — then, checking himself, added: "Tell them I am expecting them."¹⁸² And hardly had they left him when all Europe learned that "King Leopold — who, despite a superhuman effort at surmounting his pain, is living through frightful hours — let his distress transpire in speaking with his ministers."¹⁸³ Confronting his compatriots at large was still more trying for him, especially as Astrid had herself been his perpetual go-between with them. Fast upon her arrival in Belgium nine years earlier Astrid had acquired both national languages and with them the nation's idolatrous love, to which she had eagerly responded. When Leopold had declared to parliament upon taking his oath of kingship: "I give myself entirely to Belgium," it had sounded oddly matrimonial. And at those words — to quote *Le Soir* — "the assembly . . . rises as if by a secret impulse . . . and clamors tireless bravos in which the names of the King and the Queen are intimately linked."¹⁸⁴ Now at Astrid's death *Le Soir* commented: "No blow of fate could affect the country more deeply"¹⁸⁵ — which was as much as to say: not even Leopold's own death in her stead. The final horror of it for Leopold was that Astrid's death — that "national catastrophe," as it was called¹⁸⁶ — was a national catastrophe for which he was responsible, even culpable. He must have felt the incrimination behind the myriad compassionate gazes directed at him as he left the train in Brussels; he must have overheard the public rumor thereafter even from his great remove. Throughout the funeral procession all eyes were upon him, while his own eyes remained fixed upon the coffin. "His jaws [were] contracted in an effort of will power," *Le Temps* related. "He was, one could feel, at the end of his strength, and pain was ravaging his face."¹⁸⁷ Two days later he was re-

181. *Le Temps*, 31 August 1935, 3, quoting a Swiss Telegraphic Agency dispatch: "It is confirmed that the Sovereign suffered a nervous shock that he is having some difficulty in overcoming."

182. Luc Hommel, *Paul Van Zeeland. Premier Ministre de Belgique* (Paris, 1937), 72. Fabre-Luce, 15, commented: "He dislikes having to 'stage' his private life before official witnesses."

183. *Le Temps*, 1 September 1935, 3, quoting *Dernière Heure*. (Allegedly he clasped their hands lengthily while repeating over and over: "We were so happy . . . Why? . . . Why?")

184. *Le Soir*, 24 February 1935, 3; cf. *Annales, Sénat. Session ordinaire de 1933-1934*, 555.

185. *Le Soir*, 30 August 1935, 1.

186. Jean du Parc, "Jeudi, 25 [sic] août 1935," in *Léopold III. Album d'hommage consacré à notre Roi bien-aimé*, édition hors-série de la *Revue militaire belge* (Brussels, 1950), 124.

187. *Le Temps*, 4 September 1935, 6.

ported incommunicado for some time to come.¹⁸⁸ Another two days and he had appointed a new army chief of staff.¹⁸⁹ Then, after one more day, it was announced that, “surmounting his moral suffering, the King has resumed his regular occupations. . .”¹⁹⁰

The next few years he ruled increasingly instead of just reigning; yet he ruled as if distractedly, visibly tormented by the memory of Küssnacht. Two close observers stressed this last point in connection with the events of May 1940, sensing its relevance. Hard upon Leopold’s surrender the former British ambassador to Belgium depicted him as “a very sad man,” then recalled “the tragic death of his consort,” by way of building up to the contention that “through his blindness to see the danger which threatened his country . . . King Leopold must bear the chief responsibility for the present tragedy.”¹⁹¹ And the American ambassador in turn, by way of exonerating Leopold, recalled that at their first meeting, in January 1940, “I was struck by his . . . air of deep melancholy . . . his whole bearing stamped by sorrow, as if the pith had gone out of him in grief beyond his capacity to support. . . . The insupportable grief came to Leopold III when his Queen, the lovely Astrid of Sweden, was killed on a Swiss road with her husband at the steering wheel of the automobile.”¹⁹² Here, finally, is how it all looked to members of the Royal Household beginning with that summer vacation which ended at Küssnacht: between Alpine climbs Leopold “lost that worried look which he had worn since the news of King Albert’s death had reached [him and Astrid] in February the year before; . . . she heard again with delight his old boyish laughter. . . . Well, that drive at Küssnacht put an end to it. He never recovered it.¹⁹³ . . . Astrid gone, work remained his only passion. Duty, an exacting sense of duty, filled all his life and followed him after he left the [town] Palace [evenings] for Laeken. He was and remained a widower. He mourned for the Queen . . . haunted by the presentiment that Belgium might one day share [her] fate and perish also in some terrible catastrophe. . . . He became tense, oppressed by his responsibilities, his eyes fixed on the danger ahead. . .”¹⁹⁴

Thus he did not work *off* his grief and guilt over Küssnacht: he worked them *up*. He relived them on the level of his sovereign charge. His private tragedy having been nationalized and internationalized at Küssnacht al-

188. *Ibid.*, 6 September 1935, 3.

189. *Ibid.*, 8 September 1935, 2.

190. *Ibid.*, 9 September 1935, 2. About this time Astrid’s death car was sunk in the deepest waters of Lake Lucerne “at the King’s special request” (Bezirksamt, No. 35).

191. Clive, 7.

192. Cudahy, *Case*, 5.

193. Likewise Clive, 7: “I have never seen him laugh. I doubt if he has ever laughed since the tragic death of his consort . . .”

194. Cammaerts, *Prisoner*, 44-45 (last ellipsis Cammaerts’).

ready, he now re-enacted it nationally and internationally. In the back of his mind, his realm stood for his sometime Queen. The Küssnacht catastrophe would be repeated when Belgium would be “hurled all at once into a war of unheard-of violence.” He was himself to drive Belgium to that catastrophe by taking over irregularly from his responsible ministers, who yet went along with him — just like his chauffeur before them. He was to drive Belgium that way incognito: in the name of Paul Henri Spaak.¹⁹⁵ And he was to draw the same ignominy upon himself after the new mortal catastrophe as after the old. Here, then, was the “mission” he nominally assigned to *Belgium* on October 14, 1936, but actually assigned to *himself*, as he expressed it at Wynendael after the fact. This was the inside story of his insisting that the catastrophe would not, could not, must not come to Belgium — while half-consciously expecting it and unconsciously contriving it. Now at last, in this perspective, the King’s policy — his guilty project — is illuminated in its every hitherto perplexing particular.

Reconsider in this perspective his maiden statement on neutrality, delivered on October 14, 1936. His prevision of the sudden, unprecedented, “staggering” mechanical violence of a blitzkrieg went back to that first, fatal jolt at Küssnacht, which, from his vantage, *befell* the car all at once in a dizzying swirl. His very word for the prospective impact of aggression¹⁹⁶ was the one he had presumably used for that first jolt of the death car in the account of the accident: the word “*choc*”¹⁹⁷ — which of course also recalled his nervous shock that ensued. Küssnacht was furthermore his reason why, however promptly help might come to Belgium, it would perforce come too late: why “we would in *any* case have to meet this *choc* alone” — and why he subsequently saw to it that this *was* the case.

Now we can grasp the personal sense of Leopold’s characteristic neutralist utterances in those years of waiting that followed: “There is no danger but immediate danger”; a peaceable nation in the Europe of 1938 is like “a motorist who is calmly driving along a road, but is exposed to the possibility of an accident produced out of a byroad”;¹⁹⁸ “if the catastrophe comes, . . . streams of blood will flow”; and this one dating from the aftermath of Munich:

195. Likewise, Belgium’s neutrality of 1936-1940 went under the false name of “independence.”

196. Rendered “blow” above, and in n.145 (where “invasion” renders “*irruption*”).

197. Van Overstraeten, 172 (“*un premier choc*”).

198. *DGFP*, Ser. D, II, No. 310, 511 (newly translated to preserve the indefiniteness of the original: “Autofahrer, der ruhig seine Strasse verfolge, aber der Möglichkeit ausgesetzt sei, dass von Seitenstrasse her ein Unfall herbeigeführt werde”) — an indirect quotation by the German minister in Belgium (23 July 1938) of words spoken in “deep concern” (p. 510) and “pessimism” (p. 511) over the mounting Sudeten crisis: nominally the motorist was Germany, the minister having just represented German policy as peaceable.

“we are still at the mercy of an accident.”¹⁹⁹ Now it will be obvious why Leopold made such a show of seemingly doing everything possible to avert the impending disaster: he was thereby arguing his blamelessness for Küssnacht. Thence his typical remark: “Our country’s fate will be terrible, but never will it be possible to say that we failed in our duty.” All told, he was out for ostensible blamelessness in the face of calumny. As he told the American ambassador two days after surrendering his army: “He knew that his action would be misunderstood and . . . that he would be overwhelmed by opprobrium. . . . It was a hard role to accept, yet he did so without hesitation. . . .”²⁰⁰

Reconsider now Leopold’s resigned assurance, following the German breakthrough, that his army would be driven to the sea, that there was no maneuvering out of this fatality: he was then figuratively back in the driver’s seat of that Küssnacht car impelled along its course toward the water after that first, deadly jolt without his being able to control it beyond slight turns this way or that, much less steer it to safety across that impassable curb — which in May 1940 was the border he *would* not cross. In the wake of his battered army, Astrid died a second death in his arms. Or again, the nation — signifying Astrid — succumbed with its army.²⁰¹

Reconsider still further how, with the surrender approaching, Leopold thoughtlessly envisaged returning to Laeken afterwards and resuming his royal function as in the aftermath of Küssnacht. Again, Küssnacht was why, at Wynendael, Leopold was so set on “fulfilling his role as Chief of State and as commander in chief” by impressing a personal and national character upon the military catastrophe. Küssnacht was likewise the source for his detachment in respect to Belgium’s would-be rescuers and for his dazed, aggrieved, aloof removal from his ministers. He treated the eighteen-day event as a

199. Quoted by Cammaerts, *Keystone*, 355, from an interview of December 1938— from which otherwise only Leopold’s closing remark is quoted directly: “There is nothing to do but to go on” (*ibid.*, 356).

200. Cudahy, “Did Leopold Betray Us?” 190; *Case*, 33; cf. “Did Leopold Betray Us?” 185-186; *Case*, 11, 34. Of the Italian ambassador he asked that same day how the world was judging him: *DGFP*, Ser. D, IX, No. 358.

201. With the surrender—which, to quote a drastic forewarning to Leopold from his ministers, “would be the end of our national existence” (*Contribution*, 131)—the army itself of course “ceased to exist” (communiqué from the Führer’s headquarters: *The Daily Telegraph* [London], 29 May 1940, 8). Incidentally, record upon record of Leopold moving toward that surrender has him incessantly consulting maps: thus Pierlot, 60 (on 15 May 1940 “the King showed me a map”; “indicating on the map”); *Rapport*, Annexe 36 (King’s notes on 21 May 1940: “a glance at the map suffices”; “with the help of maps, I showed him”); *ibid.*, Annexe 34 (King’s notes on 21 May 1940: “the King explained by showing them on the map” and on 22 May 1940: “maps in hand, the King set forth”); Roger Keyes, in the Preface to Cammaerts, *Prisoner*, xii (on 25 May 1940 “King Leopold showed General Dill on the map”); etc.—plus all the photos I have seen of him taken during the invasion.

private one between Belgium and himself that he would have preferred keeping private. And even as he called the war over for Belgium and himself, he withdrew into tormented self-enclosure as after Küssnacht. The American ambassador, who approached him just then, related: "Never have I seen upon a human countenance a more poignant portrayal of grief. . .²⁰²

One party to the re-enactment of Küssnacht did not quite follow through under Leopold's sway: the chauffeur's substitutes, the King's ministers, who, despite the King's running strictures against official desertion, got out of the royal rumble seat in the nick of time — or, as Leopold acidly put it, "quit the King in all haste on May 25."²⁰³

In Leopold's set idea to share the fate of his army as well as his nation, his army doubled for his nation alias Astrid.²⁰⁴ Even as he re-enacted Küssnacht straight, then, he also acted to revise the denouement so that he might share Astrid's fate. He sought to revise the denouement further so that he might partake of her attendant suffering, and again so that he might assuage her agony, and finally so that he might save her *in extremis*. These variant revisionist purposes commingled in conjunction with his constant revisionist purpose of constituting himself a prisoner after her death. They will emerge by turns from the following brief sequence of quotations relating to his self-surrender. Upon capitulating, he announced to Hitler's envoys charged with conducting him back to Laeken: "I mean to be a prisoner like my army and to share its fate."²⁰⁵ After his surrender, his political secretary explained on his behalf: "The King wished, by remaining on the national soil, to take his part in [his compatriots'] anguish and suffering."²⁰⁶ When asked at Wynendael

202. Cudahy, "Did Leopold Betray Us?" 190; *Case*, 34.

203. *Contribution*, 182 (Leopold to American and Italian embassies, 2 June 1940).

204. The Küssnacht referents for the principal parties to Leopold's repeat performance were invariable (Leopold the neutralist was always Astrid's involuntary murderer; neutralized Belgium was always Astrid herself)—but not vice versa (Astrid appeared collaterally as Belgium's army in May 1940, and so in fact did the Leopold of Küssnacht inasmuch as the army was then preserved from destruction). At the same time, equivalences between the accessories to Küssnacht and to its re-enactment were variable both ways: thus the 1935 chauffeur was the 1936-1940 governments, which also stood for the intrusive 1935 ministers, who also appeared in 1936-1940 as Belgium's would-be helpers bound to come too late.

205. Quoted in *Contribution*, 518; cf. Wullus-Rudiger, 376. (De Man, *Cavalier*, 244-246: Leopold was finally conveyed to Laeken as if provisionally on urgent business.) Further: above, n.66; *Contribution*, 138 (Leopold at Wynendael, quoted by Pierlot: "to quit my army would be a desertion"); above, ("would be to desert"); *Rapport*, Annexe 33 (Leopold to George VI, 25 May 1940: "would be a desertion"); *FRUS*, 1940 I, 212, and *Contribution*, 181 (Leopold to Roosevelt and the Pope, 28 May 1940: "would have meant desertion"); *ibid.*, 182 (Leopold to the American and Italian embassies, 2 June 1940: "would have been a desertion")—and above, ("I am not leaving you").

206. *Rapport*, Annexe 77 (letter of 1 June 1940); cf. *Contribution*, 184 (pastoral letter of 31 May 1940 by the Archbishop of Malines: "he preferred to share the fate of his soldiers and the sufferings of his people"). Also *FRUS*, 1940 I, 212, and *Contribu-*

what role he meant to play under the Occupation he replied: "I hope to be able to sustain a minimum of economic life in the country, help supply its vital needs, spare my compatriots the worst sufferings."²⁰⁷ When, capitulating, he proclaimed to his troops: "Tomorrow we shall go to work with the firm will to raise our homeland from its ruins."²⁰⁸ An authorized explication followed: "This sentence is to be understood in the sense that the work apt to assure the life of the Belgian people is to be resumed."²⁰⁹ And over five years later he proclaimed to the Belgian people concerning that capitulation: "Only those who are insensitive to human misery and who do not know how much pain the death of a beloved person entails will condemn me."²¹⁰

Before May 1940, Leopold had departed from the Küssnacht scenario only to the extent of the issue he had made of his neutralist blamelessness for the

tion, 181 (Leopold to Roosevelt and the Pope, 28 May 1940: "Whatever happens, I propose to continue to share the fate of my army and my people"; according to de Man, *Cavalier*, 241, this letter was drafted by collaborators of Leopold, de Man himself foremost—but de Man, *ibid.*, 232, quotes Leopold as of the day before Wynendael: "I am determined to remain on Belgian territory . . . so as to share the fate of the country and of my army"), 182 (Leopold to the American and Italian embassies, 2 June 1940: ditto), 156 (Leopold at Wynendael, quoted by Spaak at Limoges: "I am remaining amidst my army and my people"); Churchill, *Finest*, 91 (Leopold told Keyes on 27 May 1940 "that he must stay with his Army and people"); *DGFP*, Ser. D, IX, 487 (according to the Italian ambassador, who saw him on 30 May 1940, "he hoped that Germany would do nothing to separate him from his people"). Also *Contribution*, 139 (Leopold at Wynendael, quoted by Pierlot: "I am convinced that, if I do not stay in Belgium, I shall never return there"), and *Rapport*, Annexe 38 (King's notes on Wynendael: "if he quit the country, he would not return to it again").

207. Quoted in *Contribution*, 139 (Pierlot on Wynendael); cf. *FRUS*, 1940 I, 212, and *Contribution*, 181 (Leopold to Roosevelt and the Pope, 28 May 1940: "By remaining on Belgian soil I wish to support my people in the trial which it is passing through"); *ibid.*, 182 (Leopold to the American and Italian embassies, 2 June 1940: ditto); *Rapport*, Annexe 71 (Leopold to Belgian diplomats, 2 June 1940: ditto); *Contribution*, 169-170 (de Man memoir 1945: Leopold's most heartfelt consideration in surrendering with his troops was to prevent a subsequent increase in his people's sufferings); de Man, *Cavalier*, 233n. ("it emerged clearly from the King's remarks that he was tormented by the concern not to abandon his people any more than his army; he did not cease believing that he would be able to do something to mitigate their fate after the capitulation").

208. Cf. *Rapport*, Annexe 46 (draft speech from the throne, shown to Prime Minister Van Acker on 15 June 1945: "petitions for grace, the liberation of our prisoners of war or at least the easing of their fate, the sustenance of our population, were the constant objects of my attention").

209. *Contribution*, 191.

210. *Contribution*, 607 (proclamation of 30 September 1945); a few lines later he echoed the "pain" in recalling "the painful hours I experienced after our defeat in 1940"—a reminder that the national tragedy was a straight re-enactment of Küssnacht in the first instance. Cf. *FRUS*, 1940 I, 212, and *Contribution*, 181 (Leopold to Roosevelt and the Pope, 28 May 1940: "no one has the right to sacrifice uselessly human life"); *ibid.*, 182 (Leopold to the American and Italian embassies, 2 June 1940: "the command sought to avoid a pointless extermination").

catastrophe-to-come. The revisions of late May 1940 were similarly all moralized, all construed as duty, for they too came of his guilt over Küssnacht. Thus he declared at Wynendael, with an apposite metaphor: "The decision I am taking is frightfully painful . . . but I think that, when two ways open before us, the way of duty is always the harder. I have chosen that way."²¹¹

It might appear that those moralized modifications of the Küssnacht scenario as re-enacted enabled Leopold to surmount his morbid fixation on Küssnacht. He shockingly remarried while a putative prisoner of war. He turned unrecognizably self-important, self-righteous, and self-interested thereafter. And an interviewer reported him in 1946 to have smiled repeatedly a whole day through.²¹² But these appearances were deceptive. His defiance of his ministers in May 1940 had been his point of departure for a final rectification of Küssnacht whereby *Astrid* ejected *him* from that car he had no business driving. Belgium forced his abdication, that is, as a result of the constitutional conflict that he opened through his self-surrender,²¹³ then reopened on January 11, 1944, through his unconciliatory rejoinder to his government's conciliatory message urging him to deny his impolitic neutralism as soon as Belgium would be liberated.²¹⁴ He reopened the conflict on the ground on which he had opened it, that of his neutralism, even though Germany's defeat was then foreseeable. He had in fact foreseen England's eventual victory as early as the night in which he surrendered,²¹⁵ just as previously he had foreseen the German invasion when he had launched his policy of neutrality—and the reopening followed the surrender by *exactly* the three years, seven months, and thirteen-and-a-half days by which the surrender had followed the launching.²¹⁶ It was as true of his forced abdication

211. Quoted in *Contribution*, 319 (Pierlot on Wynendael); cf. above (his decision "was dictated to him by his conscience" and "my duty commands me").

212. Goemaere, *passim*; cf. n.193, and Cammaerts, *Keystone*, 356 ("one of his rare smiles").

213. The constitutional conflict was not quite yet engaged at Wynendael, where Pierlot merely warned him of this "catastrophe in the offing" (*Contribution*, 141). Thus Spaak to Leopold, 26 May 1940: "it is still not too late. I therefore implore the King . . ." (*ibid.*, 144).

214. Leopold's rejoinder took the form of a note that was "absolutely impersonal. Can it even be called a reply? It is rather a refusal to reply—*une fin de non-recevoir*" (Pierlot, 95).

215. To Roger Keyes, who quit him at 10:00 P.M. on 24 May 1940, he declared that England would win after going "through a hell for a time" (quoted in *Recueil*, 58, and Wullus-Rudiger, 255, 288; see also *ibid.*, 288-289); an hour later he accepted the unconditional surrender, set for the following 4:00 A.M.

216. True, he had received the government's message of 21 November 1943 only six days before penning his rejoinder—but that message required no answer, and he had left a less conciliatory one of October 1942 (*Contribution*, 282) unanswered. A sudden inspiration, the rejoinder was ten days old before he thought of transmitting it to London (Pierlot, 95—where, however, it is misdated). By then his "political testament" was underway.

as previously of the German invasion that — as a journalist recently remarked — “Leopold III contrives to bring on the event he dreads.”²¹⁷ His political testament was provocatively imperious in tone as well as contents: as Pierlot echoed it, “the King requires that . . . expects that . . .”²¹⁸ He apparently welcomed his deportation in 1944²¹⁹ — and certainly passed up the chance of returning to Belgium in 1945 before his adversaries could organize. But what compromised his future decisively was his remarrying. The remarriage was unconstitutional for want of ministerial approval and illegal in that the religious preceded the civil ceremony.²²⁰ More to the point, a British correspondent reported after the liberation of Brussels: “The public . . . had built in their minds a romantic picture of the King as an inconsolable widower. . . . His second marriage came as a tremendous shock to them . . . and made them more inclined to criticize all his actions, including his decision to stay in Belgium.”²²¹ Worse, Leopold — again irregularly — conferred upon Astrid’s successor the title borne by Astrid herself.²²² At demonstrations against his return, pickets carried signs reading: “Our Queen Astrid did not deserve this.” Leopold meanwhile had three children again by his new wife — and has had some motor accidents at her side.

If Leopold the neutralist was reliving Küssnacht, why did he ostensibly imitate Albert? The simple answer is that, as King, Leopold had already been imitating his predecessor in all things; he just continued as best he could while reliving Küssnacht. He continued most self-consciously, given the break with Albert that his neutralism involved — or, deeper down, given his guilt

217. Jacques de Launay, in *Le Spécial* (Brussels), 14 October 1965, 38.

218. Pierlot, 97.

219. This much emerges from the supposed evidence of his having contrived it, notably from one Van Straelen’s memorandum on an interview of 15 May 1944 with Leopold: “At every turn of the conversation reappeared the King’s design, long since fixed, of being absent from the country during the application of measures that will have to be taken against all those who favored the enemy’s enterprises against Belgium” (*Contribution*, 321). Counter-testimony by the Archbishop of Malines quotes Leopold as of that time: “Absentees are always in the wrong” (*ibid.*, 322)—which, though, was just the fatal lure of deportation in his case. Further, on 8 May 1949 “King Leopold asserted that the present political problem connected with his status would never have arisen had he not been forcibly removed from Belgium by the Germans in 1944” (*The New York Times*, 9 May 1949, 1).

220. On the day of the civil ceremony (6 December 1941) the Archbishop of Malines announced that he had performed a religious ceremony already on 11 September 1941 (*Contribution*, 273). A first child was born on 18 July 1942.

221. Eric Wigham, in *The Observer*, 10 September 1944, quoted in *Contribution*, 335.

222. According to the pastoral letter of 6 December 1941 by the Archbishop of Malines (*Contribution*, 273). Besides, documents in her name were so signed: Princess de Rethy (e.g., *ibid.*, 325). But the Minister of the Interior told the Chamber on 25 July 1945: “The King’s civil marriage certificate . . . mentions no such title of nobility” (Van Glabbeke in *Annales, Chambre. Session ordinaire de 1944-1945*, 586). De Rethy was an incognito used by Belgian sovereigns: at Küssnacht Leopold’s identity had been

over Küssnacht: he acted like admirable Albert in re-enacting Küssnacht. Once he had linked the sudden violence to which Astrid had succumbed with the sudden violence threatening Belgium from the renascent German army, the further association with 1914 was automatic. To neutralize Belgium anew would be to deprive her anew of all military assistance until she were actually invaded, which under blitzkrieg conditions meant: until too late. Blitzkrieg conditions apart, Leopold's policy put him back into his father's place as of 1914, so that it implicated his father complex. Or reimplicated it: it was implicated already in that he associated Küssnacht from the first with the unhappy circumstances of his accession. This association was natural enough, for Albert's death, before Astrid's own, had brought him back to Brussels by train from a Swiss holiday with Astrid.²²³ Besides, he was heading to climb a mountain when Astrid was killed — and he told his private secretary afterwards: "She struck the tree with the nape of her neck, at the very same place as my father."²²⁴ But Albert's death had not prostrated him a single moment: shaken as he was when the news woke him in Adelboden on February 18, 1934, he arranged accommodations for his children at a local institution, figured out the best train connections for Brussels, and then departed with Astrid, all in an hour's time.²²⁵ And he got over Albert's death in the normal course: for the first anniversary of his kingship an elder Belgian statesman noted that, no longer the troubled, anxious, uncertain King in spite of himself, "he smiles quite often and even laughs gayly sometimes, as a young man laughs."²²⁶ Finally, whereas he recalled King Albert blatantly ever and again, he invoked his dead Queen only ever so discreetly when he declared, upon receiving the King of Sweden in 1937: "I wish to tell you how much I appreciate it that you should be my first guest since the irreparable misfortune that has stricken me"²²⁷ — and just that once in public except for his postwar mention, in self-excuse for the capitulation of May 1940, of "how much pain the death of a beloved person entails." The Küssnacht misfortune was alone irreparable of the two; the pain it entailed was incalculable twice over.

The skill with which Leopold III, haunted by the private tragedy of Küssnacht, unconsciously contrived its repetition as a Belgian national tragedy was downright uncanny. Unobtrusively he imposed his purposes on successive

verified through a membership card issued in that name by a local Alpinists' club (though his passport then bore the pseudonym of Louis Lambert).

223. One likewise spent under the name of de Rethy.

224. Quoted by Van Overstraeten, 172. In both cases the death wound was indeed a big hole in the right occiput.

225. *Le Soir*, 19 February 1934, 4.

226. Paul Hymans, *Memoires*, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1958), 832. According to Cammaerts, *Prisoner*, 44, he first resumed "his father's laughter" in Lucerne the following summer.

227. *Contribution*, 47: point made by Cammaerts, *Keystone*, 328.

governments until May 25, 1940—and even then his failure served his further purposes. His assets were considerable: the prestige of the crown, which held Belgium together; the implicit threat of a constitutional crisis if his neutralist will were crossed; the fact that Belgium's nonalignment was at diverse crucial junctures the neatest expression of the general will. These assets were negligible, though, as against the craft with which, beginning on October 14, 1936, he maneuvered Belgium into a position of vulnerability, then got that position to look legally and morally binding. And yet his political endowment was unremarkable.

VIII

Now I am ready to conclude — if I am allowed one further, brief quotation beforehand for ironic effect. It is this one drawn from a distinguished study of my very subject: “Under the Belgian Constitution, the Sovereign has a minimum of authority and a maximum of responsibility. No private misfortune can affect his work. Even the ghastly tragedy of Küssnacht is not allowed to interrupt the course of Belgian history.”²²⁸

I have argued that Küssnacht was in fact behind the King's policy of 1936-1940 and that this policy was decisive for the course of Belgian history — indeed, that it was integral to the prehistory of Hitler's war. Here, then, is a clear-cut, solid example of how, even in history, great effects can follow from small causes: of how *la grande histoire* can follow from *la petite histoire*. And yet our professional histories are generally written as if all big events followed from other big events. Some historians, it is true, object to this view in respect to one specific big event after another; only they themselves ignore their own objections in the last resort. The going conception of how history works allows that individuals may indeed act out of private motives to public effect; the catch is the corollary that their historical efficacy comes of their doing the work of their times. The classic statement of this conception is Hegel's. For Hegel, *la grande histoire* ran a logical course, with historic individuals serving its purposes more or less unwittingly while also serving their own purposes on the level of *la petite histoire*. Leopold, however, was not reacting to the general European situation at the same time as he was abreacting Küssnacht; he was abreacting Küssnacht within the context of European politics, which is quite another matter. In his own ever so apt words: “As against the most solid logical or political considerations, there are reasons of sentiment that cannot be got around.”²²⁹ Again, we may consider that little events are so

228. Cammaerts, *Prisoner*, 226.

229. In a like vein, Belgium's number two neutralist of 1936-1940, Spaak, appears to have been primarily motivated toward the King himself from the first—and right down

many intermediate links between big events and that they can therefore be ignored for all practical purposes — like, say, the subtle play of muscle and nerve between a blow received and the pain felt in consequence; Küssnacht, however, was caused by no big event. Or again, we may imagine that *la grande histoire* is all too big to be bothered by Belgium's neutrality, that its causal logic holds only for superevents the size of mass wars or great revolutions. But then we get bogged down in the problem of how superhistory relates to mere history. In any case, an argument can be made that sage scientific procedure — and here I am drawing Occam's razor — calls for excluding the problematical explanation in favor of the single, simple, sufficient explanation. If the King's policy, and hence Belgium's neutrality of 1936-1940, followed from Leopold's accident at Küssnacht, that neutrality did not follow from the failure of Locarno or the remilitarization of the Rhineland or the contest between Fleming and Walloon, let alone from the world spirit's dialectical self-development. But observe: if we apply Occam's razor at this (or any) juncture of *la grande histoire*, we cut the whole thread of it, which then falls away at both sides: ever since, and ever after.²³⁰

So, having done with the higher explanations for Belgium's neutrality of 1936-1940, I return to what I contend is *the* explanation — to *la petite histoire de Léopold* — for my remaining conclusions. And these go farther in the same direction as my conclusion against *la grande histoire*, however slightly and tentatively. For the notion that big events are causally related among themselves to the exclusion of little events — even if it now pervades historical thinking — is bound to succumb to its very inanity in due course. The historian's job for the future begins, therefore, with the exacting analysis of just such specific cases of historical determination as the one here at issue.

The way to that future passes *through* Freud. For Freud, adult thought and conduct came of infantile motives transferred to actual situations — except, that is, in traumatic neuroses, which he accordingly regarded as anomalous

through his offer to resign at Wynendael (which Pierlot overruled: King's notes in *Rapport*, Annexe 38) and, during his six-year campaign for Leopold's abdication, his talk of his disappointed "affection" for Leopold (*Annales, Chambre. Session ordinaire de 1944-1945*, 558: 24 July 1945).

230. If there are sufficient causes in human relations, they include par excellence the initiatives of some men with which other men willy-nilly comply. The sufficient cause for Belgium's policy of neutrality 1936-1940 was Leopold's sustained initiative in its behalf forasmuch as his compatriots did in fact cooperate. To say that the national and international circumstances within which he took and sustained that initiative were propitious, as I do say, is not to qualify the sufficiency of the cause. And psychologically Küssnacht was sufficient cause for Leopold's initiative—given his emotional constitution, to be sure. But even if Küssnacht was only a necessary cause of Leopold's initiative, and Leopold's initiative only a necessary cause of Belgium's neutrality 1936-1940, the working distinction between *la grande histoire* and *la petite histoire* falls—and history is forever "at the mercy of an accident."

and for which he saw no counterpart in normal psychology.²³¹ However, a shock suffered in adulthood underlay the dominant purpose that was Leopold's as of October 1936. The traumatic neurosis consists in the repeated simple recall of a horrendous experience. Leopold, though, relived his horrendous experience in disguise with amendments designed to render it more tolerable to himself. These amendments were manifestly prompted by his guilt toward Astrid. Even so, they come under the same three incompatible heads as do those involved in other cases I have studied of an unconsciously re-enacted adult trauma involving a drastic loss of a love object as a result of

231. Freud did originally derive adult neuroses from adult traumata, but between 1893 and 1897—in the course of his incipient self-analysis—he referred them back to the Oedipus complex instead. In this he may have been evading recognition of a shocking Oedipal experience out of his own youth (likeliest a shocking impulse of his: see Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke chronologisch geordnet*, 17 vols. [London, 1940-1952], I, 69-71)—“screening” it with memories out of his earliest years, that is, while also playing it down as a mere aftereffect of a pan-human complex at the heart of innocent childhood. “Perhaps just because of its innocuousness” is at all odds his own explanation of 1899 (*ibid.*, 547) for why childhood was the source of a pseudomemory of his that “occupied” him pending his self-analysis (*ibid.*, 542) and that he associated with two events of his youth (*ibid.*, 542, 544): a stay with a prosperous friend of his father's in his native village during which he raged against his father for having failed in business there, as otherwise he would have grown up robust like his host's sons, taken over his father's business, and married his host's daughter; and a subsequent visit abroad to his prosperous half brother during which he suspected his father and his half brother of scheming for him to marry his half niece and go into business. By his account, the pseudomemory “screened” a thought that, out of “juvenile bashfulness” (*ibid.*, 547), he did not dare think outright on either occasion: that of deflowering his host's daughter and his half niece respectively (*ibid.*, 547-548). However, he himself dated the pseudomemory (*ibid.*, 544-545) from a time when, well past his juvenile bashfulness, he was hardly apt to have indulged an old unconscious deflowering fantasy in disguise for its own sake. It appears rather to have “screened” a disenchantment with his marriage owing to financial hardship (cf. Freud, *The Origins of Psychoanalysis. Letters, Drafts and Notes to Wilhelm Fliess* [1887-1902], ed. Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud, Ernest Kris; trans. Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey [New York, 1957], 307—below the irksome ellipsis). But in any case it was no “screen memory” by the terms of his own general discussion of “screen memories,” according to which they “screen” repressed outer experiences (Freud, *Werke*, I, 531-538, 551-552). The psychoanalytic indication is that his memory of the two experiences he associated was itself the missing “screen memory”—in which case the experience they “screened” must have been Oedipal, for their latent Oedipal content is evident when it is considered that his father was old enough to have been his mother's father and that his half brother was old enough to have been his father. This presumable “screened” experience may well have underlain the travel anxiety for which he was treating himself in the latter 1890's, as his Oedipus-style return to his birthplace seems to have been his first big trip since infancy. See further *ibid.*, 84, 163-251, 273-280, 380, 392-401 (noting how the pathogenic traumata receded progressively into childhood from case to case); II/III, 202-203, 267-271; IV, 245; XVII, 9-13; *Origins*, 74, 129, 218-220, 222-223 and 226-227, 274; Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, I: The Formative Years and the Great Discoveries 1856-1900* (New York, 1953), 13, 20, 24-25, 32-33, 33n, 173, 304-305, 307. But this line of inquiry cannot be pursued very far so long as Freud's private papers are sequestered—or published only in expurgated form.

conduct much less guilty than Leopold's: *reversal of roles, expiation, and undoing*. But this classification is disappointingly uninformative as to the single, final sense of disguised repetition with modification.

If disguised repetition with modification is the normal way of shock absorption, it is no more effective than the neurotic way: thus Leopold is still accident-prone. Whether a shock is abreacted neurotically or nonneurotically would seem to depend on its intensity in respect to the emotional constitution that has undergone it. Küssnacht was a severe enough shock for neurotic after-effects, but Leopold was preconditioned by Albert's grisly death — and, rumor has it, by a pregnant girl friend's suicide in his youth. However, my other cases involved preconditioning too — and shocks so slight by comparison that the question arises whether even the slightest shock might not set off the abreactive mechanism of disguised repetition with modification.

And how, finally, did Leopold's imitation of his father accord with this mechanism of disguised repetition with modification? Leopold consciously imitated his father at the same time as he unconsciously re-enacted Küssnacht, except when he could not do both; then the re-enactment prevailed. It would seem that these two tendencies of repetition and imitation together account for his entire performance as neutralist, repetition having been the underlying, imperative one of the two. But the use of two different terms here is misleading. Imitation is after all a variant of repetition: Leopold undisguisedly repeated an experience of his father's as best he could while disguisedly repeating an experience of his own. The undisguised repetition served to screen the disguised repetition — yet it was no mere screening device, as it was continuous with his prior imitation of his father. It tended primarily to help him assimilate the experience of his own which he was repeating for that purpose. That is, the better to assimilate his Küssnacht experience, he relived it as far as possible in an otherwise normal way of living. For to relive others' experiences is the easy, ordinary way with us, perhaps the only way so long as we can control the effect events have on us. When, however, events affect us beyond our control so that an experience all our own befalls us, we relive it uneasily, extraordinarily, in a futile attempt to live it down.

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