

and protests against the introduction of Dutch as the language of government grew. It was perceived as a restriction on the freedom of language and was a source of annoyance in Wallonia in particular.

The authoritarian regime of William I and the series of controversial measures that he issued increased the unrest in the South of the United Kingdom. On August 25 1830, rioting broke out in Brussels after a performance of the opera *La Muette de Portici*. The fact that this led eventually to the independence of Belgium had to do with a number of coincidences, and the revolt was certainly not upheld across the whole country. Although an independent kingdom of Belgium was never really the main issue of the uprising, nevertheless independence was declared on October 4, and a provisional government appointed. In June 1831, Leopold, Prince of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, took up office as the first King of Belgium. The Netherlands continued to make claims on the lost territory until 1839, when, under pressure from the European powers, King William I was finally forced to recognise the situation.

Was the United Kingdom of the Netherlands a political experiment doomed in advance to failure? Historical writing that has emerged since independence confirms this idea, but there are many counterarguments. The fact remains that King William I and the executors of his policies failed to seize many opportunities to form the United Kingdom into a real nation.

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*Translated by Rebekah Wilson*

A book about the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, published by Ons Erfdeel vzw, is due out in 2015. This article is based on a number of texts from this book.

### **'A Thankless and Vexatious work'** **One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the** **'Fat Van Dale'**

Language-lovers in the Netherlands and Flanders have been in conspicuous high spirits recently. The year 2014 saw the celebration of the best-known defining dictionary of Dutch: the *Van Dale Groot Woordenboek van de Nederlandse Taal* (Van Dale's Large Dictionary of the Dutch Language), also known as the *Grote Van Dale* (Large Van Dale) or, more fondly, as the 'Fat Van Dale'. Its popularity is apparent from the book *Verhalen over taal* (Stories about Language), a hefty volume of columns, anecdotes and short stories revolving round the Van Dale and Dutch in general<sup>1</sup>. It was published by the Van Dale company which, in addition to the 'Fat Van Dale', also publishes some more slender versions of the same dictionary, as well as translating dictionaries. A poll was also organised, with voting open for almost a month, to find the best of one hundred and fifty so-called 'Van Dale Jubilee Words', Dutch words that first appeared or became common between 1864 and 2014. The most votes went to the word *bolleboos*, which means 'someone who is very gifted, who excels in something'.

The climax is still to come, however. In September 2015 a new paper edition of the 'Fat Van Dale' will be published (including a CD-ROM, of course). The previous paper edition was published in 2005. It has however been updated digitally every six months. By tradition, the editors of the new edition will again be both Dutch and Flemish. One of their most delicate tasks is the choice of words that have never previously appeared in this dictionary, but which now do have the right to an entry. This usually puts them to a severe test and in recent years pressure has been exerted from outside to include certain words.

The Van Dale dictionary owes its name to Johan Hendrik Van Dale (1828-1872), a teacher in Sluis (a small town in Zeeland-Flanders, just north of the Dutch-Belgian border). His parents

originated from Meetjesland, a rural area north-west of Ghent, from where they fled at the outbreak of a smallpox epidemic. Johan Hendrik soon acquired a taste for language and wrote textbooks on linguistic purity, grammar and parsing. In 1867 he was asked to revise the *Nieuw Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (New Dictionary of the Dutch Language), which the brothers Isaac Marcus and Nathan Salomon Calisch had published three years previously.

It took Johan Hendrik four years to complete his revision. His work as a teacher was a substantial help in his lexicographical labours. He always tried to keep his pupils in mind and to avoid any form of vagueness. The definition of the meaning of a word had to be as clear and precise as possible. Unfortunately, Johan Hendrik died - from smallpox, would you believe? - just after the first instalments of the revised dictionary were published. In the preface to the 1872 edition he had written: 'Writing a dictionary is a thankless and vexatious work'.

Van Dale's dictionary was written using the De Vries-Te Winkel spelling of Dutch, which was already accepted as the official spelling system in Flanders, but not in the Netherlands<sup>2</sup>. It is apparent from the figures that the later nickname of 'Fat' Van Dale was well deserved. The first two editions contained about 1,400 pages. The third, which appeared in 1884, was a doorstop of almost 1,800 pages. Apart from the Bible, it was just about the thickest book that most Dutch speakers would have in their bookcase. The figures for the most recent edition are of course considerably higher again. This fourteenth edition comes in at about 4,500 pages in three volumes.

Yet the 'Fat Van Dale' is still not the most impressive defining dictionary of Dutch. This honour goes to the *Woordenboek der Nederlandse Taal* (Dictionary of the Dutch language) or WNT for short. The driving force behind what was to become the 'largest dictionary in the world' was the nineteenth-century Dutch language scholar Matthijs de Vries. The first instalment of the WNT



The statue of Johan Hendrik Van Dale in Sluis (Zeeland-Flanders).

was published in 1864, but for the last we had to wait until...1998. Three years later another three volumes of 'Additions' appeared that had not previously been included; these were mostly twentieth-century words. The complete WNT, which is also available on CD-ROM, consists of 43 volumes and has roughly 400,000 headwords. Altogether, this requires about three metres on that already overfull bookcase.

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[www.vandale.nl](http://www.vandale.nl) and [www.vandale.be](http://www.vandale.be)

1 Compiled by WIM DANIELS and published by Van Dale Uitgevers, Utrecht/Antwerp (ISBN 978 94 60771 7 50).

2 The De Vries-Te Winkel spelling system was officially introduced in the Netherlands in 1883. This was the first time the Netherlands shared the same spelling with Flanders.