

Fiction

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Dutch Classics

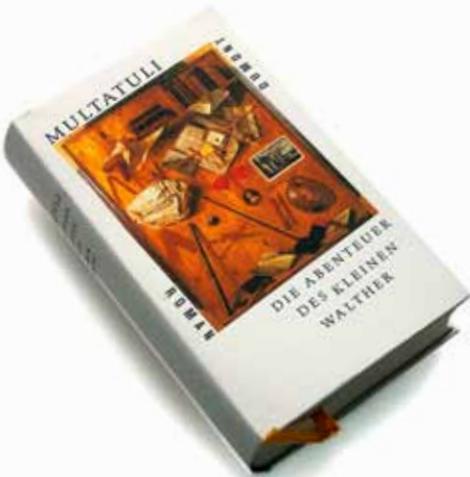
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# Multatuli

## Little Walter Pieterse

### Revolutionary portrait of a boy in the 19th century

Often recognised as the greatest nineteenth-century Dutch writer, Multatuli (Latin for 'I have borne much') was the pseudonym of Eduard Douwes Dekker (1820-87). In 1838 he went to the Dutch East Indies, where he joined the civil service. His abilities were soon recognized and he rose through the ranks, but he became repelled by the brutality of colonial rule and resigned. *Max Havelaar*, his powerful indictment of colonialism, caused a sensation when it was published in 1860, so far it has been translated into over forty languages.



*Woutertje Pieterse* (1890, most recent edition 2011)  
500 pages, 275.000 words

**Rights**  
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**Publisher**  
Athenaeum-Polak & Van Gennep  
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**Translations**  
German (DuMont, 1999),  
English (Friderici & Gareis, 1904)

An imaginative boy growing up in a narrow-minded middle-class household, twelve-year-old Walter Pieterse is the first psychologically complex child protagonist in Dutch literature. The boy wants to meet the expectations of the people around him, but they make demands he can't fulfil.

It becomes clear Walter is an artist in the making, struggling to rise above his origins. He would like to learn, but his teacher is interested only in classification. He wants to be a true Christian, but his pastor can't explain how best to read the Bible. An adventure novel sets his imagination ablaze and inspires him to write stories of his own.

Multatuli shows how stifling an unimaginative environment can be. The message of the story is diametrically opposed to that of most nineteenth-century children's books. The author questions received wisdom, pokes fun at religion and urges his readers not to bow to the wishes of their families or any other type of community.

- When Sigmund Freud was asked to name his favourite books he put Multatuli's Letters and Works at the top of his list.
- In 2007, *Little Wouter Pieterse* was successfully turned into a large-format graphic novel by cartoonist Jan Kruis.
- A full English translation can be found online at the Gutenberg Project.

'If it weren't for Multatuli, literature would simply be not done in the Netherlands, like deep-sea fishing in the Alps or coffee-growing in Newfoundland. *Max Havelaar* is his most famous book by far, but I personally think some parts of *Little Walter Pieterse* are far more beautiful.'

Willem Frederik Hermans

'I don't know the year; but, since the reader will be interested to know the time when this story begins, I will give him a few facts to serve as landmarks. My mother complained that provisions were dear, and fuel as well. So it must have been before the discovery of Political Economy. Our servant-girl married the barber's assistant, who had only one leg. "Such a saving of shoe-leather," the good little soul argued. But from this fact one might infer that the science of Political Economy had already been discovered.

At all events, it was a long time ago. Amsterdam had no sidewalks, import duties were still levied, in some civilized countries there were still gallows, and people didn't die every day of nervousness. Yes, it was a long time ago.'

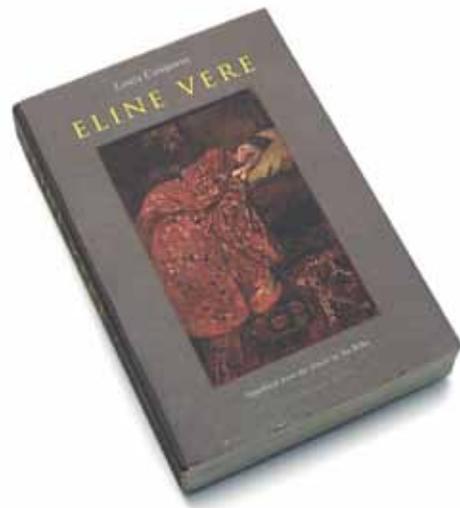
From: *Little Walter Pieterse*

# Louis Couperus

## Eline Vere

The tragic portrait of a woman, in the spirit of Anna Karenina and Emma Bovary

Louis Couperus (1863-1923) spent much of his younger life in the Dutch East Indies (modern Indonesia), and many of his novels and stories are set either there or in The Hague where he was born, though his work also contains impressions of Italy, Africa and China. Couperus was the greatest Dutch novelist of his generation, and he is still internationally renowned.



*Eline Vere* (1889)  
561 pages, 195.000 words

**Rights**  
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**Publisher**  
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**Translations**  
English (Pushkin Press, 2010; Archipelago, 2011), Macedonian (Ikona, 2012), Urdu (Ferozsons, 1986)

This story of a tragic female misfit ranks with similar portraits by Flaubert, Tolstoy and Ibsen. It is a subtle psychological novel set against a dazzling panorama of Hague society, where the life of a group of leisured families, with its succession of balls, dinners, entertainments and excursions acts as a foil to the heroine's increasing isolation.

The author introduces us, sensitively and subtly, to a gallery of men who impact on her life in various ways. That gallery includes her father, the failed artist, the opera singer Fabrice, by whom she is briefly dazzled, her well-meaning fiancé Otto, her fatalistic cousin Vincent and the energetic, optimistic American Lawrence St Clare. Sadly, none is able to offer her the support and sustenance she needs.

A very popular and widely read author in the Netherlands, Louis Couperus won the admiration of readers and writers in Britain and America: Oscar Wilde complimented him on his handling of sexuality in *Footsteps of Fate*, D.H. Lawrence admired *Of Old People and the Things that Pass*, while Katherine Mansfield praised *The Books of the Small Souls*.

Sadly, his international popularity did not survive the First World War, which confined him within the borders of the neutral Netherlands and prevented him from capitalizing on his reputation. However, enough of his output remains available to show what a compelling read he can be. To this day, Couperus is known for narrative flair, plotting, perceptive characterization and vivid dialogue, *Eline Vere* being a prime example.

- Like Dickens, Couperus was a famed reader of his own work and the dandy in him liked to orchestrate every aspect of the event, insisting on having the onstage flowers replaced during the interval, and even changing his tie and socks to reflect a shift in mood.
- Though he did not publicize the fact, Couperus's colonial family, which included more than one governor general of the Dutch East Indies, also included several Eurasian relations. This may help explain the perceptiveness with which he writes about mixed-race characters in *The Hidden Force*.
- Shortly before his death in 1923, Couperus sold the film rights to *The Hidden Force* to an American company but the picture was never made. Film director Paul Verhoeven has announced his intention to film Couperus' novel.

**'His insight into the tragedy of European colonialism made Couperus a great writer. And his sympathy for the hybrid, the impure and the ambiguous gave him a peculiarly modern voice. It is extraordinary that this Dutch dandy, writing in the flowery language of fin-de-siècle decadence, should still sound so fresh.'**

Ian Buruma

# Nescio

## Amsterdam Stories

Bittersweet accounts of dreaming, scheming young men and their ruin

J.H.F. Grönloh (1882-1961), the writer who went by the pseudonym Nescio (Latin for 'I don't know'), had a career as co-director of the Holland-Bombay Trading Company in Amsterdam. For many years Nescio was a one-book author, with a collection of short stories to his name – recently published by New York Review of Books Classics as *Amsterdam Stories*. In 1961, just before his death, the collection *Boven het dal en andere verhalen* (Above the Valley and Other Stories) appeared.



*De uitvreter; Titaantjes; Dichtertje* (1911-1918)  
159 pages, 48.300 words

**Rights**  
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**Translations**  
German (Amman, 1993), English (New York Review of Books Classics, 2012), French (Gallimard, 2005), Hungarian (Gondolat, 2007), Indonesian (Penerbit Djambatan, 1976), Italian (Iperborea, in preparation), Polish (P.I.W., 1980), Slovakian (Európa, 2009), Swedish (Malexis, 2010)

These classic stories paint a vivid picture of Amsterdam in the early twentieth century and testify to a great love of the Dutch landscape. But the most extraordinary thing about them is the style, simplicity going hand in hand with a perfect command of humour, irony, plain speaking, understatement and emotion, and all superbly balanced.

Nescio's subject matter is best expressed in contrasts: freedom versus confinement, mortality versus a longing for eternity. The stories demonstrate that the individual is no match for the world and inevitably comes to grief if he tries to resist or becomes engrossed in big existential questions. As the final sentence of 'Young Titans' puts it, 'And so everything takes its little course, and woe to those who ask: Why?'

Nescio is essentially a lyricist, a poet writing in prose. But he's a cynic, too, as well as a mystic in his own way. Like Chekhov or Turgenev, he expresses complicated matters in simple language, yet his work remains light and playful, tender, moving and outrageously funny – an achievement nothing short of miraculous.

'The Freeloader' and 'Young Titans' describe a circle of young bohemians in the years leading up to the First World War. The former is the story of bon vivant Japi, who tries 'to overcome the body, to no longer feel hunger or exhaustion, cold or rain', but who can also fully enjoy the good things in life, especially if somebody else is paying the bill. He's unable to maintain this footloose lifestyle, however, and the story ends in his suicide. 'Young Titans' involves the same circle of friends, minus Japi. In scene after scene we watch the decline of the five boys. All are forced to abandon their vague ideals, while the artist Bavink is defeated by his ideas for paintings, those 'goddamned things', and goes insane.

'Little Poet', the story of a marriage, also has an unhappy ending. The main character loves his wife, but 'if you're a little poet the prettiest girls always walk on the other side of the canal'. He falls under the spell of his sister-in-law. It is the most literary story of the three: as in Goethe's *Faust*, God and the Devil become involved in the poet's life.

- Nescio wrote two of the most famous opening sentences in Dutch literature, including the often quoted: 'We were kids, but good kids.'
- Only twenty years after his debut, and under sustained pressure, did Grönloh admit he was the author of the famous stories published under the name of Nescio: 'I have always kept as quiet as possible about my writing, because I worked in an office all my life, and if people in those circles find out you have such tendencies, they'll just think you're not fit for your job.'

**'The comic note is an element of the famous Nescionic voice, which has within it wryness, lightness, simplicity, and daring vulnerability.'**

Joseph O'Neill, author of *Netherland*

**'Nescio is the greatest Dutch writer.'**

Tommy Wieringa

# F. Bordewijk

## Blocks; Growling Creatures; Bint

### Futuristic modernist tales in a cool, hard-edged style

Ferdinand Bordewijk (1884-1965) made his prose debut with three collections of *Fantastische vertellingen* (Fantastic Tales). The subsequent novels *Blokken* (Blocks), *Knorrende beesten* (Growling Creatures) and *Bint* secured his reputation forever as an author of exceptionally original prose.

*Blokken* (1931), *Knorrende beesten* (1934), *Bint* (1935)  
155 pages, 35.000 words

**Rights**  
Nijgh & Van Ditmar

**Translations**  
*Blokken* – German (Steidl, 1991), Italian (Bompiani, 2002) *Bint* – German (Beck, 2012)

Bordewijk was associated with the New Objectivity movement because of his cold-blooded style, but the graphic imagery and magical quality of his stories consistently marked him as a great man of letters. He outdid himself with the character of headmaster Bint, who demands iron self-control and discipline from his pupils.

Contrary to its author's intentions, *Bint* became notorious, reaping both praise and moral condemnation. Was Bordewijk's tale a parable of the failure of human discipline or a plea for totalitarian education? With fascism on the rise, readers felt uncomfortable with Bint's philosophy of submission to pain and the subjugation of the will.

Verbal artistry with a veneer of objectivity also characterized his novels of the early 1930s. *Blocks* is a nightmare vision of a future state in which communist ideals are pursued to the point of madness. In *Growling Creatures*, cosmopolitan automobiles seize power from their owners.

- Bordewijk's style is often described as 'reinforced concrete'.
- When speaking of himself as a writer, F. Bordewijk always used the third person.
- The film based on *Character* won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film of 1998.

# Maria Dermoût

## Days Before Yesterday

### A colonial coming-of-age novel in a sensual style

Maria Dermoût (1888-1962) was born on a sugar plantation in Java, in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). *Days Before Yesterday* and *The Ten Thousand Things* are among the classics of Dutch East Indies literature.

*Nog pas gisteren* (1951)  
85 pages, 20.000 words

**Rights**  
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**Translations**  
German (Marion von Schröder, 1957), English (Secker & Warburg, 1960)

Evoking bygone days, putting memories into words that bring a lost world within reach, Maria Dermoût is in full command of the art of storytelling. She made her debut with *Days Before Yesterday*, which tells the simple story of a Dutch girl growing up in Java.

Living with her parents in a large, white house near a sugar plantation, she adores the tales told by her servant Oerip, which are permeated with the mysterious atmosphere of the Orient. One day her uncle and aunt pay a visit and she finds herself falling in love for the first time. At the same time, a new age is beginning; paradise is becoming a thing of the past.

The book was written at a historical turning point between the colonial regime and the emergence of an independent nation. Amid the upheavals, Riek tries to preserve her love for the landscape of her youth, but in the end she has no choice but to leave: 'She would need time to lose it all.'

**'Mrs. Dermoût, in the manner of Thoreau and the early Hemingway, is an extraordinary sensualist. Her instinct for beauty results, again and again, in passages of a startling, unadorned, three-dimensional clarity; often one can almost touch what she describes.'**

The New Yorker

# J.J. Slauerhoff

## Life on Earth

### A spectacular adventure novel set in Shanghai

J.J. Slauerhoff (1898-1936) grew up in the province of Friesland but spent most of his childhood on the island of Vlieland with relations, many of whom were captains or marine pilots. The love of islands, of the sea and of ships determined Slauerhoff's literary future. His poems, stories and novels are still in print and read, Cees Nooteboom being one of his greatest admirers.

*Het leven op aarde* (1934)  
217 pages, 63.000 words

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**Publisher**  
Nijgh & Van Ditmar

Slauerhoff drew from his experiences as a ship's doctor in the 1920s when he wrote this spectacular novel set in China. Cameron, an Irish naval radio operator, meets a lieutenant who turns out to be an opium smoker, as well as a mysterious European woman in a Chinese dress, 'like an overladen fruit tree'. He becomes infatuated by both the woman and opium.

The love story is framed by an exciting narrative concerning Cameron's involvement in arms smuggling, masterminded by the criminal Hsiu. With bold and firm strokes, Slauerhoff paints the life of a European in China who is in search of a purpose, which he ultimately finds in life itself.

Slauerhoff wrote the book in 1933 and 1934, by which time he had gained sufficient distance from his own personal experiences (including the opium use) and was able to revisit the intoxicating romanticism of his adventure.

- Cees Nooteboom presented a television documentary about Slauerhoff and wrote introductions to the Spanish and Italian editions of his work: *La révolte de Guadalaja* (Circé, 2008) and *La rivolta di Guadalajara* (Milan, 1999).
- Translated into German by Albert Vigoleis Thelen.

**'His restless soul still shivers through in Dutch literature, incomparable to anyone.'**

Cees Nooteboom

# E. du Perron

## Country of Origin

### Multi-layered novel about the decline of the West

Eddy du Perron (1899-1940) was born to a Dutch patrician family in Java and died of a stroke in Holland four days after the German invasion. After moving to Europe in 1921, he published prolifically in all genres, but his main work remains *Country of Origin* (1935).

*Het land van herkomst* (1935)  
502 pages, 187.000 words

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**Publisher**  
G.A. van Oorschot

**Translations**  
English (Periplus, 1999), French (Gallimard, 1980), Spanish (Ediciones del Ermitaño, 2012)

In this autobiographical novel, Eddy du Perron probes his own psyche, alternating and contrasting memories of a childhood in the Dutch East Indies with the perspective of a Paris intellectual reflecting on his identity in a radically changing world.

Du Perron was unsentimental about colonialism and rejected it. His colonial upbringing, however, deeply influenced his innermost values, which hark back to romantic ideals of honour and unwavering loyalty and fidelity. These concepts conflicted with beliefs held by his contemporaries in Europe, who were living in a world adrift.

*Country of Origin* is a multi-layered modernist novel that combines various types of narration: memoirs, conversations, letters, essays and diaries. A stream-of-consciousness novel, like Joyce's *Ulysses*, Svevo's *Confessions of Zeno*, Gide's *Les faux-monnayeurs* and Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, it is filled with echoes and antitheses.

- French writer André Malraux appears in the novel in the guise of Luc Héverlé, a leftwing activist. After the Second World War, as a minister under De Gaulle, Malraux seems to have discouraged any attempt to publish the existing French translation of the novel, which portrayed him in a explicitly political way.

## A. Alberts

### The Islands

An archipelago of mysterious and evocative stories

Writer, journalist and civil servant A. Alberts (1911-1995) worked in Paris and the Dutch East Indies as a civil servant. Other important works include *De Vergaderzaal* (The Meeting Room; 1975) and *De honden jagen niet meer* (The Dogs No Longer Hunt; 1979).

*De eilanden* (1952)  
180 pages, 30.000 words

**Publisher**  
G.A. van Oorschot

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**Translations**  
English (University of Massachusetts Press, 1983; Periplus, 1999), German (Suhrkamp, 2003)

When published in 1952, *The Islands* introduced a unique writer. It was the only piece of colonial fiction to celebrate the Indies as an imaginative realm. These interrelated stories form a literary archipelago, as if in imitation of the islands which, strung along the equator like beads, grace the Indian Ocean.

Alberts' fiction resembles a kind of magic. He presents a world that seems to imitate reality and then, with an artistic sleight of hand, transmutes it into something different: a treacherous, eerie and mysterious place. His tales are brief and sober, their syntax plain. Yet the dramatic tension is overwhelming.

Alberts' prose seems to have been carved out of silence. A great deal remains unspoken, as if for some desperate reason. Most of the characters are people who feel out of place in their native Europe and will never fit into their new tropical surroundings. They shy away from contact, even at the price of madness, as in 'The Swamp', a story of endless melancholy and alienation.

**'Alberts must have been more aware than anyone of the unknowability of people and the fundamental mysteriousness of their lives.'**

Trouw

## F.B. Hotz

### Men Play, Women Win

Bittersweet short stories from the jazz age and after

The life of F.B. Hotz (1922-2000) falls into distinct periods: his childhood, overshadowed by his parents' divorce; a long convalescence from tuberculosis contracted during the war; twenty years as a professional jazz musician; and finally his career as the celebrated author of several collections of perfectly balanced short stories.

*Mannen spelen, vrouwen winnen* (2011)  
384 pages, 134.400 words

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De Arbeiderspers

**Translations**  
German (Arche, 2003)

F.B. Hotz was one of the Netherlands' greatest short-story writers. After his late literary debut in the mid-seventies, he quickly garnered acclaim for his meticulous and polished style.

The stories reflect details of his own life: a childhood overshadowed by his parents' separation, the German occupation and his struggle to support himself as a jazz musician in the 1950s. The theme of strained relationships between the sexes runs throughout the book.

'Women Win', in which a gig at a provincial school dance degenerates into open warfare between teenagers and big-city musicians, is full of comical moments, but is ultimately downbeat, with the protagonists recognizing their that life-style is unsustainable. Conversely, 'The Travelling Salesmen', about the main character's alienation from his father, is full of wry and witty lines.

Although they convey the atmosphere of a particular time and place, these stories are timeless. Essentially, Hotz is a classic artist for whom form is paramount, constantly in search of 'the magic that can give an ordinary word in a calm sentence the power of a stranglehold.'

**'Hotz is one of those exceptional authors who get you right where they want you without revealing how they do it.'**

NRC Handelsblad

## Hella S. Haasse

### The Black Lake

### The Ways of the Imagination

Two classic novels displaying the versatility of this grande dame of Dutch letters

Hella S. Haasse (1918-2011) was born in Batavia, capital of the Dutch East Indies. Her mother was a concert pianist, and after her father retired from the colony's finance ministry he wrote detective novels under a pseudonym. Haasse produced an enormous body of writing: novels, plays and essays.



*Oeroeg* (1948)  
116 pages, 26.000 words  
*De wegen der verbeelding* (1983)  
149 pages, 30.000 words

**Rights**  
Querido

**Translations**  
*Oeroeg* – English (Portobello, 2013), French (Actes Sud, 1991), German (Rowohlt, 1994), Hungarian (Magvető, 1987), Indonesian (Gramedia, 2009), Italian (Lindau, 1992), Serbian (Prometej, 1994).  
*De wegen der verbeelding* – French (Actes Sud, 1998), German (Bertelsmann, 1999), Italian (Iperborea, 2000), Polish (Noir sur Blanc, 2004)

'Oeroeg was my friend' are the opening words of Hella S. Haasse's short debut novel which examines friendship, betrayal and social engagement. It is easy to understand why its political and cultural subtexts have fuelled controversy from the time of its first publication to the present day. Discrimination, inequality and the struggle for independence are universal themes of worldwide relevance in our own time.

The narrator is a young Dutchman, son of a manager of a Java plantation; Oeroeg is his Javanese friend. As children, they play among the ferns, canna flowers, dogs and chickens in 'the overgrown garden of Kebon Djati, the trampled, red-brown mud paths through the paddies, deep in the mountain lands of Preanger'.

One night at a party on the shores of Telaga Hideung – the Black Lake – Oeroeg's father drowns. This incident brings dramatic changes. The friendship between the boys, who come from opposite ends of the social spectrum, does not stand the test of time. Life in Java changes: religious and social tensions mount, and the indigenous population rises up against the colonial regime to fight for its independence.

Another dimension of Haasse's talent is on display in *The Ways of the Imagination*, an impressive product of her creative powers in which her evocative prose shimmers with hidden meanings. A truck driver gives a stranded Dutch family a lift to the south of France and, as they drive through the night, tells them about his adventures on the road. Many of the characters are caught up in uncanny events; others are enigmatic figures, powered by passions they choose not to explain. This casts the reader in the role of detective, requiring us to collect the clues, tie together the loose ends and reconstruct the story of a life.

We never see the big picture – another recurring theme in Haasse's work. What she shows us are mere snippets of Ariadne's thread in the labyrinth. In this classic novel, Haasse explores the timeless literary theme that we never really know another person; however hard we try, we cannot uncover another's true motives. All we can do is weave circles around the mystery and follow its trail down the paths of the imagination.

**'Hella S. Haasse's novels have been familiar to her Dutch readers for decades, but she has almost never made the transition into English. There's no obvious explanation, unless it is that her work is not flashy enough and too difficult to make a fuss of. We have been the losers: it is exactly her unflashy quality that is remarkable, the way her stories derive an unostentatious strength from her steady, irresistible immersion in her characters' lives.'**

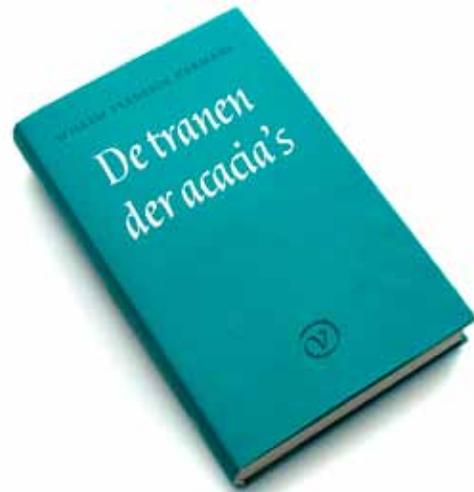
The Guardian

# Willem Frederik Hermans

## Tears of the Acacias

A grisly, contrarian war novel about the dark side of liberation

Willem Frederik Hermans (1921-1995) was one of the most prolific and versatile Dutch authors of the twentieth century. He wrote essays, scientific studies, short stories, and poems, but was best known for several novels, the most famous of which are *De tranen der acacia's* (The Tears of the Acacias, 1949), *De donkere kamer van Damocles* (The Darkroom of Damocles, 1958), and *Nooit meer slapen* (Beyond Sleep, 1966).



*De tranen der acacia's* (1948)  
422 pages, 135.000 words

**Publisher**  
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De Bezige Bij

**Translations**  
German (Kiepenheuer, 2005; Aufbau, 2007)

This may be the most contrarian war novel ever. It is the masterpiece of a young author who came out of the war with a vision of human nature as dark as the night and a determination to turn that vision into literature. The book opens with the unlikely friendship between Oskar Ossegal, a forty-year-old chemist, and Arthur Muttah, a chemistry student. The latter is practically an orphan and regards Oskar as a surrogate father.

To write is to astound, Willem Frederik Hermans once claimed, and *Tears of the Acacias* is nothing if not astounding. As Canadian soldiers liberate the exuberant city, Arthur Muttah wants nothing but to disappear: 'Everyone was doing nothing but screaming, waving flags, taking pictures, kissing soldiers and asking for cigarettes. Everyone wanted a lift, further into town, and he was in search of what might be the only car headed in the opposite direction.'

Wartime Amsterdam with its sinister streets and Brussels in the frenzy of liberation form the backdrop to the story, and the two cities are drawn with chilling precision. Although the situations described in the novel remain chaotic, they have the transparency of classical tragedy. The personalities are unstable and make blind choices, and their fateful decisions lead to catastrophe.

More than just sophisticated linguistic constructs, his novels are philosophical parables in which the loneliness of the individual and the chaos of the world meet and give rise to compelling literature that grabs the reader by the throat.

### More from Hermans

- Ik heb altijd gelijk* (I Am Always Right, 1951). A man returns to Holland in 1948 from the war in Indonesia and despises everything. He dreams of starting a political party that will put an end to the Netherlands as a nation.
- Het behouden huis* (The House of Refuge, 1952). A young soldier, fighting against the Germans on the Eastern Front, withdraws to a civilian house, kills the inhabitants and acts as if he is the owner. Slowly, the house takes him over and becomes a character in its own right.
- Richard Simmillion: Een onvoltooide autobiografie* (Richard Simmillion: An Unfinished Autobiography, 2005). Powerful, haunting stories about the protagonist's strained relationship with his father and the suicide of his sister, from the perspective of Hermans' alter ego Richard Simmillion.

'There is his accurate delineation of place, the inscrutability of his characters and a fascination with language's capacity to order reality.'

Times Literary Supplement

'Not only would Dutch literature be considerably poorer without Hermans; so would European literature.'

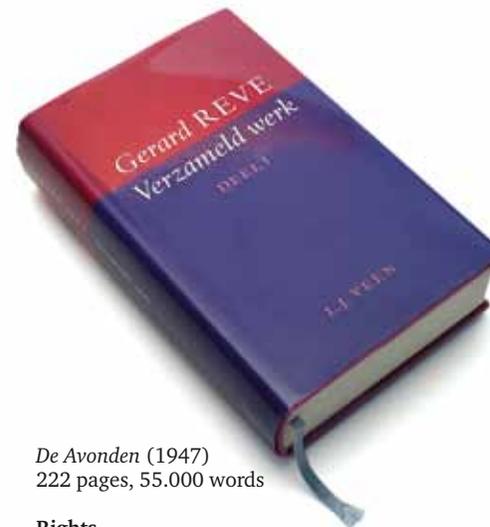
Süddeutsche Zeitung

# Gerard Reve

## The Early Years

One of the Netherlands' most controversial and beloved writers

The most widely read book by Gerard Reve (1923-2006) remains his debut *De Avonden* (The Evenings, 1947), but the controversial, epistolary novels *Op weg naar het einde* (On My Way to the End, 1963) and *Nader tot U* (Nearer to Thee, 1966), with their frank discussion of homosexuality and the author's conversion to Catholicism, were instrumental in establishing Gerard Reve as a public figure in the Netherlands.



*De Avonden* (1947)  
222 pages, 55.000 words

**Rights**  
Andrew Nurnberg

**Publisher**  
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**Translations**  
*De Avonden* – German (Merlin, 1988), French (Gallimard, 1970), Hungarian (Jelenkor, 1998), Norwegian (Gyldendal, 1993), Slovakian (Európa, 2007), Spanish (Acantilado, 2011), Swedish (Ersatz, 2008).  
*Werther Nieland* – Included in *The Dedalus Book of Dutch Fantasy* (1994)

No author from the Netherlands has influenced later generations so profoundly as Gerard Reve – the marriage of eloquence and everyday banality is central to his style of writing. Before the publication of his debut novel *De Avonden*, Reve wrote two impressive novellas.

*The Downfall of the Boslowits Family* is set during the Holocaust, yet nowhere is this theme made explicit. Instead we watch through the eyes of an Amsterdam boy as the family of one of his friends slowly loses everything and is then taken away. The only one left behind is the father, who later takes his own life. Because the word 'Jewish' is never mentioned, the reader senses this could have happened to anyone.

*Werther Nieland* is a novella set in the working-class Amsterdam neighbourhood where Reve grew up. It is the tale of young Elmer, who longs to make friends and tries to control the world around him by forming secret clubs, of which he is the president. When he invites Werther to become a member, a game of attraction and repulsion begins. It is a psychological masterpiece; in just a few words, Reve conjures up a child's whole world, full of oppression and enchantment.

Reve's debut novel *The Evenings* continues to win new readers. The book describes the aimless days between Christmas and New Year's Eve, when one holiday has passed and the next one begins. The Second World War has just ended, but the country is in crisis, the streets are dark and there is little to do.

Ashamed of his middle-class family, twenty-three-year-old antihero Frits van Egters hurls sarcastic remarks at his friends and parents. His nightmares, along with his unrelenting observation of all the details that exude quiet despair, form a poignant contrast with his tender words to a toy rabbit, the sole object of his affection.

The closing scene, in which Frits learns his mother accidentally bought fruit juice for New Year's Eve instead of wine, prompting a solemn, ceremonious monologue in which he addresses his parents with love and compassion ('It has been seen. It has not gone unnoticed'), has often been called the most beautiful passage ever written in Dutch.

- Gerard Reve's candid collections of letters from the 1960s did a great deal to advance the liberation and social acceptance of homosexuals.
- One of Reve's favourite books was Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night*, about which he presented a television documentary.
- In the 1950s, Gerard Reve wrote a collection of stories in English, some of which were published by George Plimpton of *The Paris Review*.

'One of the great stylists of modern Dutch literature.'

The Times Literary Supplement

# Jan Wolkers

## American Crewcut

### The life of a tormented, damaged young soul

After the Second World War, Jan Wolkers (1925-2007) attended art schools in The Hague and Amsterdam. In 1961 he published his first collection of short stories, *Serpentina's Petticoat*. It was followed by *Kort Amerikaans* and *Gesponnen suiker* (Candy Floss, 1963). The rawness of his work and his descriptions of both horror and tenderness caused controversy.

*Kort Amerikaans* (1962)  
185 pages, 40.000 words

**Rights**  
J.M. Meulenhoff

**Translations**  
Swedish (Forum, 1985)

# J.J. Voskuil

## The Bureau

### A depiction of the world of bosses and wage slaves

J.J. Voskuil (1926-2008) made his debut in 1963 with a 1,200-page novel called *Bij nader inzien* (On Second Thoughts), about a group of students in Amsterdam between 1946 and 1953. Following his retirement, he wrote *The Bureau*: seven books, a total of 5,500 pages, published between 1996 and 2000.

*Het bureau deel 1: Meneer Beerta* (1996)  
773 pages, 240.000 words, 400.000 copies sold

**Rights**  
G.A. van Oorschot

**Translations**  
German (C.H. Beck, 2012)

Eric van Poelgeest is a tormented soul, damaged inside and out; the scar on his face is like the mark of the devil. As a child he was forced to have his hair in a crewcut, so everyone could see his disfigured features.

While his brother, a resistance fighter, lies on his death-bed, Eric is fighting a war of his own. The Netherlands has entered the most gruelling months in its history: the hunger winter of 1944. 'Looking around, you'd never know my brother was dying,' he thinks. 'There are buttercups in the bloody grass and flowering rushes in the ditches. The peace that passeth understanding.'

To avoid being sent to a German labour camp he has gone into hiding in a deserted art academy building. He has no idea what to do with his rage and his energy, so he paints and takes refuge in loveless sex with two women friends.

As in *Kort Amerikaans*, Jan Wolkers's brother Gerrit died in the Second World War at the age of twenty-two. Death permeates Wolkers' entire oeuvre, both visual and literary. Nevertheless, he regarded death as part of life: 'If there was no death, everything would become pointless.'

—Many of Jan Wolkers' novels have been made into films. *Turks fruit* (Paul Verhoeven, 1973) with Rutger Hauer playing the lead, *Kort Amerikaans* (Guido Pieters, 1979) and *Terug naar Oegstgeest* (Theo van Gogh, 1987).

Never has the humour and boredom of office life been described as in the *The Bureau*. Set in an academic institute in Amsterdam, it mercilessly describes the frivolity, the petty irritations and teasing, the conniving and crawling, the hierarchy, the suppression of emotions and the alienation found there.

Mr Beerta is a brilliant portrait of the institute's director, a symbol of academic research as a kind of occupational therapy that provides status and income for its practitioners, who prudently remain silent when outsiders and inferiors question its meaningfulness.

Gradually the Bureau itself emerges as the real main character, an institute which draws its staff into itself every morning with a magnetic power, encloses them, wrings them dry, then spits them back out at the end of the working day.

*'The Bureau is the universe in a pocket edition, an allegory of society. The fact that there is still plenty to laugh at, mainly because of the sublime style and the often comic dialogue, makes human fate bearable.'*

Jury report, Libris Literature Prize 1997

**'The Great Dutch Novel.'**

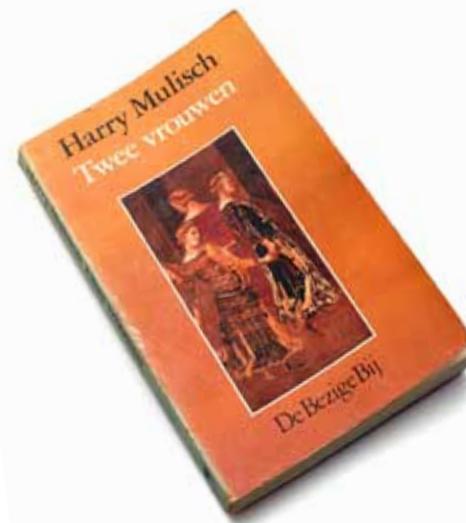
NRC Handelsblad

# Harry Mulisch

## Two Women

### An understated love story and a modern Greek tragedy

Harry Mulisch (1927-2010) made his debut in 1951 with *Tussen hamer en aambeeld* (Between Hammer and Anvil), followed immediately by a second novel, archibald strohalm. He remained a prolific author, producing a total of eleven novels, six short-story collections, eight novellas, nine collections of poetry and many volumes of essays, pamphlets and studies. He is one of the most influential Dutch writers of the twentieth century. *Twee vrouwen* (Two Women, 1975) was the first in a series of successful novels. *The Assault* (1982) was translated into more than thirty languages. His last three novels, *The Discovery of Heaven* (1992), *The Procedure* (1998), and *Siegfried* (2001), were all international bestsellers.



*Twee vrouwen* (1975)  
160 pages, 35.000 words

**Rights**  
De Bezige Bij

**Translations**  
English (John Calder; 1980), Czech (Ivo Zelezny, 1993), French (Actes Sud, 2005), German (Rowohlt, 2000), Hebrew (Keter, 1983), Icelandic (Vaka-Helgafell, 1999), Polish (Dolnoslaskie, 1990), Portuguese (Teorema, 1999), Slovakian (Danubiapress, 1993), Spanish (Tusquets, 1988)

In 1975 Harry Mulisch published a novel that stunned the critics with the simplicity of its storyline and the unexpected theme of lesbian love, which until then had been almost exclusively the domain of female writers. But *Twee vrouwen* is above all a psychological novel.

After her childless marriage comes to an end, art historian Laura falls in love with a young woman called Sylvia. She has a volatile personality. After a while she disappears but is discovered having an affair with Laura's ex-husband. She pretends to be in love with him, but when she becomes pregnant she returns to Laura. The man, furious at being manipulated, kills Sylvia and her unborn child, and Laura loses her beloved a second time.

Why does the novel have such an impact? In the years prior to its publication, Mulisch wrote mainly non-fiction and experimental work. Readers were surprised by this classic tale of love, jealousy, and murder. Since the novel is written from Laura's perspective, the reader identifies with her sense of abandonment, her happiness when Sylvia returns and her ultimate anguish.

Mulisch explores themes that would return in his later work. For him, lesbian love is problematic because it is infertile; when the laws of nature are violated, destiny takes charge. To what extent can humans intervene? With modern technology, we have almost become capable of creating life. We can artificially postpone death, clone living beings and manipulate the reproductive process. Along with Mulisch's successful novels of the 1980s and 1990s, this remains a compelling book. In 2008 it was distributed by libraries as part of a national reading campaign. More than a million copies were printed and the book became the subject of widespread debate, bringing it back more to attention.

#### More by Mulisch

—*De diamant* (The Diamond, 1954). The main character is the largest diamond in the world, which brings death and destruction to all who possess it, east and west, even after it is broken in two. The story ends with the destruction of the diamond itself.

—*Het zwarte licht* (The Black Light, 1956). A day in the life of lonely carillonneur Maurits Akelei, who decides to celebrate his birthday by treating the world to heavenly music. By the end of his party, an ecstatic mob marched through the flooded streets toward its doom.

—*Hoogste tijd* (Last Call, 1985). An ageing actor from a renowned theatrical family makes his comeback. His return to the big city and his infatuation with a young actress slowly but surely lead to his downfall.

*'A moving love story, but at the same time a literary page-turner – a term more commonly applied to thrillers. No reader will remain unmoved by the chilling conclusion.'*

Philip Freriks

# Andreas Burnier

## The Boys' Hour

A novel about different ways of being excluded

Andreas Burnier (1931-2002) was born Catharina Irma Dessaur. She studied sociology, earned a doctorate and became a professor of social criminology. Her literary work includes novels and collections of short stories and essays.

*Het jongensuur* (1969)  
106 pages, 20.000 words

**Rights**  
Atlas Contact

**Translations**  
German (Twenne, 1993)

The year is 1945. Simone has survived the war. To evade capture by the Germans, she had to go into hiding without her parents in a series of households, adapting to the lives of farmers, Calvinists, Catholics, social democrats, and intellectuals. But did she ever really fit in anywhere?

Simone is the eternal outsider. She is a girl who wishes she weren't one, placed in the wrong body by the Creator: 'Women and Jews – I hardly see a difference. They can't retaliate; they're always guilty.' As the precocious Simone observes the often inexplicable behaviour of the children and adults around her, she cobbles together her own private world view.

The six chapters, unfolding in the reverse of a chronological order, show Simone's attempts to break free of fixed patterns, through her short hair, her imagination and her physical activities. But when she goes swimming at a time reserved for boys, she exposes herself to humiliation and disgrace.

'I tried to imagine how it would feel to have been born a boy. It wouldn't come as a surprise. It would seem only natural that your body was perfectly fine, that you could play football, walk the streets at night and strike up conversations with girls, or swim during the boys' hour.'

From: The Boys' Hour

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# F. Springer

## Tehran: A Swan Song

A moving love story during the 1979 Iran revolution

F. Springer (1932-2011) was the pseudonym of Carel Jan Schneider. As a diplomat and public official of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Schneider travelled the world, and all his postings – New Guinea, New York, Bangkok, Brussels, Dhaka, Luanda and Tehran – feature as backdrops to his stories. His style is reminiscent of the work of F. Scott Fitzgerald.

*Tehran. Een zwanenzang* (1991)  
376 pages, 120.000 words

**Rights**  
Querido

One of the most international of Dutch authors – earning comparison to Graham Greene for both his international settings and the clarity of his style – Springer has a cool eye for his characters' weaknesses. A typical Springer novel presents these failings with humour and mild irony, using a major political upheaval as a setting.

This novel tells the story of Toby Harrison, the author of a series of popular histories that rely on fantasy and jokes rather than facts. Convinced he's landed the biggest fish of his career, Harrison travels to Iran to write a family history for the Shah.

Springer gives an insider's account of the origins of the Islamic Revolution, describing the old regime's bureaucrats, the Western hangers-on gathered at the Hilton and the Shah himself. As the dark ages descend on Tehran, Harrison's infatuation with his secretary, Patricia Jahanbari, the embodiment of the modern secular Iran of the 1970s, propels him and the book to a crushing, dismal ending. This abrupt swing from comedy to tragedy is vintage Springer.

— Full German translation by Helga van Beuningen available.

# The Dutch Foundation for Literature / Nederlands Letterenfonds

## supports writers, translators and Dutch literature in translation

### Information

The Foundation's advisors on literary fiction, quality non-fiction, poetry and children's and youth literature are present each year at prominent book fairs, including Frankfurt, London, Beijing and Bologna. The brochures *Books from Holland and Flanders*, *Quality Non-Fiction from Holland* and *Children's Books from Holland* recommend highlights from each category's selection.

### Translation Grants

Foreign publishers wishing to publish a translation of Dutch or Frisian literature may apply for a subsidy towards the translation costs. Having acquired the rights, the publisher's application must be accompanied by a copy of the contract with the rights owner and a copy of the contract with the translator. Application forms are available from the Foundation's website. Subsidies are disbursed after receipt of proof samples, citing the subsidy. If the Foundation is not acquainted with the translator, a sample translation will be evaluated by external advisors. The maximum subsidy is 70% of the cost of translation. Applications for translations that have already been published cannot be taken into consideration. Publishers looking for a qualified translator can request a list of endorsed translators for their specific language area.

### Illustrated Books

In the case of illustrated children's books and/or graphic novels, foreign publishers can apply for assistance to cover a portion of the production costs. Subsidies are jointly funded by the Mondrian Foundation and the Dutch Foundation for Literature.

### Documentation centre

The documentation centre is an extensive information resource regarding Dutch literature abroad. The library contains more than 11.000 translated titles in more than seventy-five languages. The documentation centre can be visited by appointment. One significant component, the database of Dutch-language literature in translation, can be perused online at [www.vertalingendatabase.nl](http://www.vertalingendatabase.nl).

### Promotional travel

The Foundation is able to support a publisher wishing to invite an author for interviews or public appearances. Literary festivals are likewise eligible for support. Additionally, the Foundation organizes international literary events in co-operation with local publishers, festivals and book fairs.

### Writers-in-residence

The Foundation coordinates writer-in-residence programmes together with foreign universities and institutions. Foreign authors are also invited to spend time working in Amsterdam. They may stay one or two months at the writers' lodgings above the Athenaeum Bookshop on the Spui (in co-operation with the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts). In addition, Amsterdam Vluchtstad offers accommodation to writers fleeing the regime of their home country.

### International visitors programme

The visitors programme and the annual Amsterdam Fellowship offer publishers and editors the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the publishing business and the literary infrastructure of the Netherlands.

### Translators' House

The Translators' House offers translators the opportunity to live and work in Amsterdam for a period of time. It is involved with numerous activities assisting and advancing translators' skills. Each year the Literary Translation Days are held for those translating to and from Dutch. The event also includes translation workshops.

### Grants

The Foundation for Literature is active locally, offering travel and work grants to authors and translators in the field of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and children's and youth literature. Workshops are also organized for beginning translators into Dutch.

### Schwob

Schwob draws attention to as-yet undiscovered, untranslated world literature. Each month the editors select a modern classic, spotlighting it on [www.schwob.nl](http://www.schwob.nl), by way of reviews and sample translations.

### Background

The Dutch Foundation for Literature, created in 2010 as the result of the merger between the Foundation for the Production and Translation of Dutch Literature (NLPVF) and the Foundation for Literature (FvdL), is an independent organization financed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Policies and projects are carried out in close co-operation with the Flemish Literature Foundation.

Interested in receiving a newsletter via e-mail? Send your request to [post@letterenfonds.nl](mailto:post@letterenfonds.nl) or sign up on the website [www.letterenfonds.nl](http://www.letterenfonds.nl)

**N**ederlands  
letterenfonds  
dutch foundation  
for literature

# ‘Much of the best postwar fiction written in Dutch has recently become available in English. Much still remains to be done.’

Tim Parks, *The New York Review of Books*

## Website

All titles in this brochure can be found on the Foundation's website: [www.letterenfonds.nl](http://www.letterenfonds.nl). The category 'Authors and translators' offers information on the work of nearly 500 Dutch-language authors, and has a searchable database of more than 17.000 translations from Dutch into other languages.

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