

# 10 Books

from Holland and Flanders



Yves Petry

Adriaan van Dis



Willem G. van Maanen

Hella S. Haasse



Arnon Grunberg

Marcel Möring

Tom Lanoye



Maarten 't Hart

Mensje van Keulen



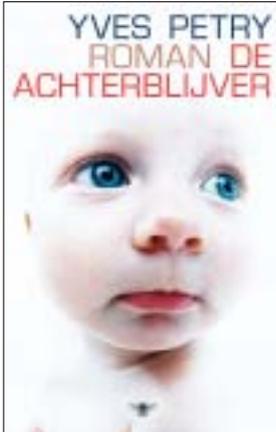
Dimitri Verhulst

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Production and  
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Dutch Literature

Flemish  
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## The struggle between a man and his creation



# Yves Petry

## The Straggler

**Y**VES PETRY studied mathematics and philosophy and this might be why his characters challenge received ideas and common values. They seem to delight in pointing out the false or superfluous aspects of phenomena such as identity, religion, love, sexuality, and ambition.

Petry's latest novel, *De achterblijver* (The Straggler), surpasses his three previous novels in composition, style and maturity. Gram, an enthusiastic young member of staff at the Carnitec technology company, is about to attend a colloquium in Austin, Texas, where he will speak about the future prospects of the project he is engaged in. Unfortunately, he is not fully focussed on the task at hand because his eccentric father has just passed away. This was a man who, in the period just before his death, had become obsessed first with sexual activities and then with culinary ones. To Gram's great relief, he has died as a result of syphilis, a physical rather than a psychological illness.

Gram does not appreciate subjective impressions of the world, he is a devotee of cool intelligence. He prefers to see humans as advanced machines and finds it ludicrous that his mother has found new love with a lout who enjoys wearing women's clothes. At the exaggeratedly sober and emotionless funeral, conflicts of principles and of a personal nature inevitably result.

In conjunction with his mentor in the company, Gram is working on a robot, Baby, which uploads human intelligence by means of brain scans, omitting the emotional ballast. In time, it will become more intelligent than man, reducing 'humanity to a self-help group of stragglers'. To Gram's great dismay, it is not his mentor who accompanies him to Austin but his direct rival in the company, Valeria Bitschkowa – what's in a name? During the flight, Gram intends to focus his thoughts on the future, but he finds himself continually preoccupied with his past. He also becomes increasingly edgy as a consequence of the tension between him and Valeria, and when the plane lands, he collapses, a victim of what he has always denied: emotions.

Yves Petry's main character is a harsh, isolated, pumped up misanthropist who looks down disparagingly on what makes humans human – sentiment, sexuality – and on their (in his view) limited intelligence, as articulated in spirituality or psychology. Nevertheless, in his classical style, Petry softens Gram's sarcasm and cynicism with amusing irony.



photo Stephan Vanfleteren

Yves Petry (b. 1967) debuted with *Het jaar van de man* (The Year of the Man, 1999), in which he sketched the witty portrait of a man who, for all his philosophical baggage, is clumsy and ill at ease in the modern world. In *Gods eigen muziek* (God's Own Music, 2001) he dissects the concept of love. *De laatste woorden van Leo Wekeman* (The Last Words of Leo Wekeman, 2003) brought the author to the attention of a broader readership. Yves Petry's most notable skill lies in his ability to present his characters' excessive stoical soul-searching in a genial and disarming manner.

You will seldom catch Petry engaged in sheer, unadulterated frivolity. In contrast, flair, intelligence, and humour are abundantly present in his third book. [...] Petry writes as if he has never done anything else in his life. *HET PAROOL*

Petry is a very good, occasionally brilliant narrator with a good eye for meaningful detail. *DE MORGEN*

As far as I am concerned, Petry's novel has quietly been the real literary sensation of the autumn. *KNACK MAGAZINE*

### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*De achterblijver* (2006)  
286 pp

### RIGHTS

De Bezige Bij  
Van Miereveldstraat 1  
NL – 1071 DW Amsterdam  
TEL.: +31 20 305 98 10  
FAX: +31 20 305 98 24  
E-MAIL: info@debezigebij.nl  
WEBSITE: www.debezigebij.nl



## A powerful novel with a social conscience



# Adriaan van Dis

## The Walker

**M**R MULDER seems to all appearances to be an upstanding gentleman, gliding through life, impeccably dressed, aloof to the hustle and bustle of the world around him. Because of a sizeable inheritance he can afford to idle

away his time, and so he leaves Holland for Paris, where he leads an anonymous, solitary existence. One night he witnesses a dramatic fire in a building occupied by illegal immigrants and transients. People throw themselves out of windows in blind panic, as the crowd below looks on helplessly.

From that day on Mulder finds himself with a new pet: a dog which survived the fire has adopted him. Mulder tries to shake him off, but the dog follows him everywhere. The dog seems to mirror the suppressed, instinctive side of Mulder's personality: everything the man shies away from, the dog seeks out. The animal also has an infallible memory for the people he knew before, and he opens up a new world for Mulder.

In searching for the cause of the fire, Mulder encounters a motley group of characters, like the whisky-soaked priest Bruno, a one-legged beggar woman and a taciturn Chinese who is never without his pull-cart. Mulder also starts to develop warm feelings for Sri, a mysterious woman he wants to save from the life of an illegal immigrant with a fake passport. But she is less than thrilled by his offers of help. 'I want to live my life without feeling guilty,' she says. 'Me too,' he replies. 'That's why I want to help you.'

But all Mulder's attempts to do the right thing come to naught. He is a believer without a god, a man committed to the idea of 'doing a little good'. But his ideals are no match for a city teeming with unrest and racial hatred, where riots in the banlieus are an ever-present threat to society. *De wandelaar* (The Walker) is a powerful, socially aware novel as well as an emotionally involving story of a loner who tries to give his life meaning in an ever more extreme world.



photo Merlijn Doornik

Adriaan van Dis (b. 1946) debuted in 1983 with the novella *Nathan Sid*, which won him the Golden Dog-Ear for the best-selling literary debut. Highlights of his ever-expanding oeuvre are the novels *Indische duinen* (My Father's War, 1994, winner of the Golden Owl), *Dubbelliefde* (Double Love, 1999) and *Familieziek* (Family Fray, 2002). He has also published a number of travel novels on China and Africa, like *Een barbaar in China* (A Barbarian in China, 1987), *Het beloofde land* (The Promised Land, 1990) and *In Afrika* (1992).

*Adriaan van Dis is a master of self-effacement, and ironizes in a subtle manner the yearning to 'do something' about the suffering in the world. He has succeeded in writing a novel that rubs the reader's nose in today's news.*

NRC HANDELSBLAD

*De wandelaar is a witness to powerlessness and anger, and yet also of empathy with the tormented metropolitan society in the Western world.*

ALGEMEEN DAGBLAD

*A topical novel that poses urgent questions. The unity of time and place ensures that the narrative remains compact, while the pace and fluent style do the rest.*

ELSEVIER

*The fact that De wandelaar emerges as an invigorating reading experience is due to the deft style that is Van Dis's trade mark. Smooth sentences, elegant and acute phrasing, apt characterization, it's all there.*

BRABANTS DAGBLAD

### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*De wandelaar* (2007)  
224 pp

### RIGHTS

Augustus  
Herengracht 481  
NL-1017 BT Amsterdam  
TEL.: +31 20 524 98 00  
FAX: +31 20 627 68 51  
E-MAIL: mnagtegaal@amsteluitgevers.nl  
WEBSITE: www.augustus.nl

### SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*My Father's War* (Indische duinen). London: Heinemann, 2004. Also in German (München; Wien: Carl Hanser, 1997 / Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 2000), in Italian (Baldini & Castoldi, 1996), in French (Actes Sud, 1999), in Norwegian (Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1995), and in many other languages.  
*Doppelliebe* (Dubbelliefde). München: Carl Hanser, 2004. Also in Spanish (Maeva, 2002).  
*Fichue famille* (Familieziek). Paris: Gallimard, 2003. Also in German (Hanser, in prep.), and in English (Heinemann, in prep.)



## Sensuality, ripening and decay

# Willem G. van Maanen

## Love and Don't Look Back



**O**VER THE LAST FEW DECADES Willem G. van Maanen has composed a wonderful and penetrating body of work in relative silence. His novels and stories are ambiguous and attest to an obstinate ethic. Those who surrender themselves to it are rewarded with deep and authentic insights into our existence. This exceptional quality also characterizes *Heb lief en zie niet om* (Love and Don't Look Back). The title may contain a tender encouragement, but the characters do quite a bit of looking back at a dark past, with disastrous consequences.

*Love and Don't Look Back* is a diptych. The first section relates the story of an actor, low of stature and in morals. He marries a Jewish girl during the German occupation and joins the *Kultuurkamer* (Chambre of Culture) at the same time – an institution established during the Second World War by the Germans that (performing) artists, writers and musicians were supposed to join. The actor in question does what many did during the war: he saves himself by entering a twilight zone. The young boy living next door to the actor, Sally, dies within the first pages. The second section consists of a monologue written by Sally's mother as a means of coping with the loss of her son. In this section, a man, who the reader might recognize as the adult version of the dead boy, goes back to the place he had been in hiding during the war.

The two stories are ingenious reflections of each other. Van Maanen plays a clever game with the identities of the two protagonists – the cheating actor and the boy in hiding. At times he places them at opposing poles, while at other times they seem to merge. He addresses one of the essential topics in history: our inability to make choices in extreme circumstances. 'For some the war was resistance, for some betrayal, for some indifference or resignation, and for others persecution and annihilation. For me, if I leave the dead be, it was nothing more or less, apparently, than awakening and finally awakened sensuality, ripening and decay, and despite everything the belief in that dear lie for which we must forgive ourselves and each other.'

With this, the novel's final sentence, Van Maanen demonstrates the merciless and at the same time melodious manner in which he has crafted his story. His long, rhythmic sentences are exceptionally beautiful and have tremendous evocative power, while allowing a sense of mystery to remain.

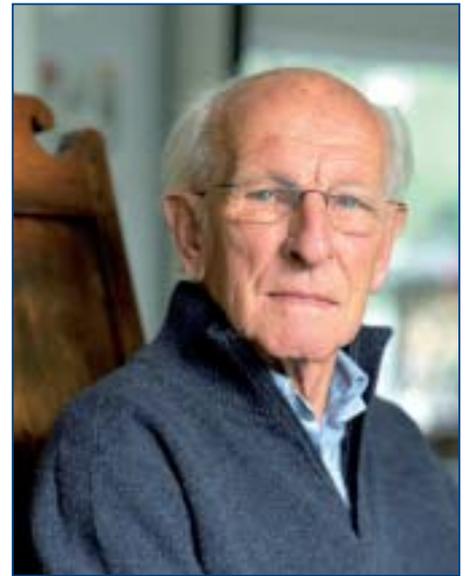


photo Roeland Fossen

Willem G. van Maanen (b. 1920) made his debut in 1953 with *Droom is het leven* (Dream is Life). His novels, *De onrustzaaier* (The Troublemaker), published in 1955, *De dierenhater* (The Animal Hater), published in 1960, and *Het nichtje van Mozart* (Mozart's Niece), published in 1983, were honoured with important literary awards. In 2004 the Constantijn Huygens Award was conferred upon Van Maanen for his entire work.

Darn well written [...] Derangement  
directed by an expert. *DE VOLKSKRANT*

A novel in which traditional themes such as crime and punishment, loyalty and betrayal, love and hate, and friendship and enmity are once again explored and reconsidered. *TUBANTIA*

Writing well is a true art, and this author is a master.

*DE GROENE AMSTERDAMMER*

A smart, ambiguous and correspondingly enthralling war novel.

*NRC HANDELSBLAD*

### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Heb lief en zie niet om* (2006)  
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### RIGHTS

De Bezige Bij  
Van Miereveldstraat 1  
NL – 1071 DW Amsterdam  
TEL.: +31 20 305 98 10  
FAX: +31 20 305 98 24  
E-MAIL: info@debezigebij.nl  
WEBSITE: www.debezigebij.nl

## Past tragedies

# Hella S. Haasse

## The Garden House



**H**ELLA S. HAASSE is renowned for her historical novels. They are intelligent, exciting, and well-documented; they take the reader by surprise and lead one back, compellingly, to another time and place. When she uses contemporary settings for her novels and stories, she generally writes about ordinary people, characters engaged in a profound struggle with personal choices and circumstances.

*Het tuinhuis* (The Garden House), a collection of the short stories that Haasse has written during her rich and long authorship, proves that she can create the same effects with fewer words. Most remarkable is the way in which Haasse subtly and imperceptibly lures the reader into a new atmospheric setting each time, imparting the characters' dilemmas, fears, and desires in an instant. The mood in Haasse's stories is often threatening, such as in the powerful title story in which a mother and daughter are locked in a subtle and at the same time painful psychological struggle.

Often a tragedy from the past emerges between the lines. This is the case in 'Perkara', in which the Dutch present and the Dutch East Indian past are expertly intertwined. The past imposes itself even more forcefully in 'Het portret' (The Portrait), in which a family drama is depicted in a single photograph. The picture brings home just how far a genteel family have descended from their origins as well as the fact that their souls are filled with illusions: 'He who is hindered by that which is missing, complements it with clutter.'

The story 'Genius loci' demonstrates yet again Haasse's ability to bring places to life with powerful, fascinating, and dark descriptions. The female protagonist senses that somebody is watching her from the woods surrounding her French house. 'The invisible presence didn't seem threatening; she felt no fear but rather a vague disquiet. Something was expected of her, but she didn't know what it was.' Haasse creates the mood with just a few elegant, razor sharp strokes of her pen.

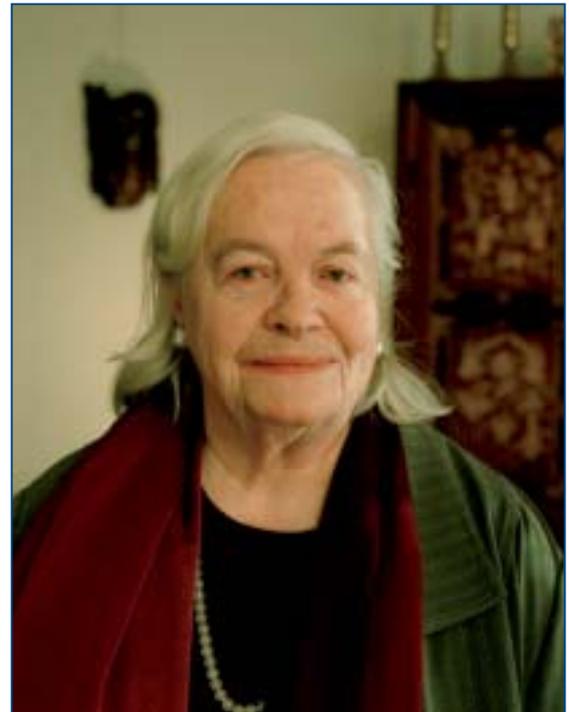


photo Roy Tee

Hella S. Haasse was born in Batavia (present-day Jakarta) and moved to the Netherlands after finishing secondary school. In 1948 she made her name with *Oeroeg* (Forever a Stranger), which quickly became a Dutch literary classic. *Het woud der verwachting* (In a Dark Wood Wandering, 1949), *De ingewijden* (The Insiders, 1957), and *Mevrouw Bentinck of Onverenigbaarheid van karakter* (Mrs. Bentinck or Irreconcilable in Character, 1978) were also extremely successful. Some of her more recent novels are *Heren van de thee* (The Tea Merchants, 1992) and *Sleutelooi* (Eye of the Key, 2002). Haasse has received several prestigious literary awards.

*Infinitely intriguing.*

*HET FINANCIEELE DAGBLAD*

*Vibrant phrasing, interesting characters and lots of mystery.* *NRC HANDELSBLAD*

*Het tuinhuis displays Haasse's mastery.* *TROUW*

*Literary jewels.* *DE TELEGRAAF*

### PUBLISHING DETAILS

Het tuinhuis (2006)  
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### RIGHTS

Querido  
Singel 262  
NL-1016 AC Amsterdam  
TEL.: +31 20 551 12 62  
FAX: +31 20 639 19 68  
E-MAIL: rights@querido.nl  
WEBSITE: www.querido.nl

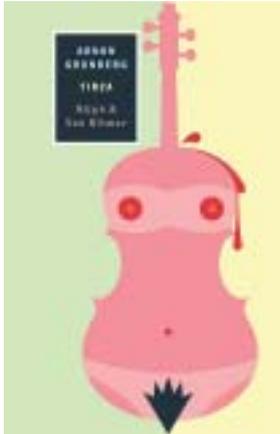
### SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*L'anneau de la clé* (Sleutelooi). Arles: Actes Sud, 2004. Also in Italian (Iperborea, 2006), and in Spanish (Edhasa, 2006).  
*Wald der Erwartung* (Het woud der verwachting). Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999. Also in English (Academy Chicago Publishers, 1997), in French (Seuil, 1991), and in many other languages.

*Die Teebarone* (Heren van de thee). Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2001. Also in French (Seuil, 1996), in Italian (Rizzoli, 1997), and in many other languages.  
*The Scarlet City* (De scharlaken stad). Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1990. Also in German (Rowohlt, 1994), in French (Seuil, 1997).



## Menace lurking beneath every word



# Arnon Grunberg

## Tirza

**I**T IS NOTHING short of remarkable how Arnon Grunberg continually reinvents himself. Each new book is strikingly different from the last, but at the same time they are all unmistakably Grunberg with his unforgiving eye for human frailties and compelling, wryly ironic style.

At first glance, the bizarre, sadistic universe that informed Grunberg's earlier works seems to be absent from *Tirza*. Jürgen Hofmeester, a book editor edging toward retirement, leads a conspicuously dull, bourgeois existence: 'His one comfort in life was that the better part of it lay behind him.' In the novel's understated opening scene, we see Hofmeester preparing sushi for his youngest daughter Tirza's graduation party.

Yet, as in Dostoyevsky, after the apparently quiet opening, things inexorably start to unravel. Not with flashy stylistic fireworks or the snappy one-liners typical of Grunberg's previous works, but in language that is as taut as it is restrained. It is a quiet, low-key story, but in that quiet the reader can hear the footsteps of Fate approaching.

In scene after scene Hofmeester is stripped of life's apparent certainties. His wife, who had left him years before for a childhood sweetheart, makes an unexpected reappearance, turning his sedate household upside-down. Without warning, Hofmeester is laid off at the publishing house. Then Tirza, the apple of his eye, threatens to leave for Africa with her boyfriend, whom Hofmeester can only see as the *doppelgänger* of Mohammed Atta, the terrorist.

Although we witness a number of painful and strange confrontations between Hofmeester and his wife, and between Hofmeester and Mohammed Atta, 'the beast' that Hofmeester believes lives in the people around him, remains hidden. In reality, this beast dwells within himself.

Once Hofmeester leaves for Africa in search of his daughter, Grunberg shifts into top gear, taking the reader along for the ride. Then out of nowhere, in mid-paragraph, he drops a bombshell, and everything we have read up to that point is cast in a new, astonishing light. Grunberg's remarkable control of the plot, the cool tone and the sense of menace lurking behind every sentence, beneath every word, make *Tirza* a true *tour de force*.



photo Stephan Vanfleteren

Arnon Grunberg (b. 1971) made a striking debut with *Blauwe maandagen* (*Blue Mondays*, 1994), which describes the world of prostitution with sardonic humour. His subsequent novels *Figuranten* (*Silent Extras*, 1997) and *Fantoompijn* (*Phantom Pain*, 2000) reinforced both the readers' and the critics' conviction that he was the new bright young man of Dutch literature. But Grunberg was not satisfied with one literary career, and in 2000 he made a second debut, this time under the name Marek van der Jagt, keeping his real identity secret for as long as he could. *De joodse messias* (*The Jewish Messiah*, 2004) is Grunberg's fourth novel to be published in English translation. Arnon Grunberg lives and works in New York.

Grunberg places the anxiety for meaninglessness and loss of control right in the centre of our post-9/11 era, he makes it tangible and comprehensible, he exhibits empathy but at the same time scoffs in the face of the middle class. *NRC HANDELSBLAD*

*Tirza* is both a clear and dark representation of what people inflict upon themselves and thus upon one another. [...] With this novel, Grunberg advances slowly but surely toward the class of major authors who write lucidly about the incomprehensibility of human actions. *HAARLEMS DAGBLAD*

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*Tirza* (2006)  
432 pp

### RIGHTS

Nijgh & Van Ditmar  
Singel 262  
NL – 1016 AC Amsterdam  
TEL.: +31 20 551 12 62  
FAX: +31 20 627 36 26  
E-MAIL: rights@querido.nl  
WEBSITE:  
www.uitgeverijnijghenvanditmar.nl

### SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*The Jewish Messiah*. New York: Penguin (New York: Penguin, in prep.). Also in Italian (Instar Libri, 2005), in French (Héloïse d'Ormesson, in prep.) and in German (Diogenes, in prep.).  
*Der Vogel ist krank* (De asielzoeker). Zürich: Diogenes, 2005.  
*Gnadenfrist* (Het aapje dat geluk pakt). Zürich: Diogenes, 2006

*Phantom Pain* (Fantoompijn). London: Secker & Warburg, 2003 / New York: Other Press 2004, and in many other languages.  
*Silent Extras* (Figuranten). London: Secker & Warburg, 2000. Also in German (Diogenes, 1999), in Italian (Mondadori, 2000), and in Spanish (Grijalbo Mondadori, 2000).  
*Blue Mondays* (Blauwe maandagen). New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997, and in many other languages.



## Desperately in search of love



# Marcel Möring

## Dis

**I**F LOVE DIED AT AUSCHWITZ, is there any hope of reviving it? This is a crucial question in *Dis*, a tragic love story set in the provincial town of Assen in June 1980, on the eve of an internationally famous motorcycle race, the Dutch TT. In a style that explores the whole range of human emotions,

Marcel Möring recounts the rise and impending downfall of the prosperous but despondent Jakob Noach, proud father of three daughters.

In May 1945, just after the end of the war, Noach crawls out of his hiding place on the heathland of northeast Holland, 'like a mole'. He has managed to elude the Germans, but his parents and brother were not so lucky, and their loss is almost too much for him to bear. At first he is consumed by anger at the homicidal anti-Semitism of the German invaders and the opportunism of Dutch collaborators. But he soon turns his anger into unbridled energy. Starting out as a simple shoemaker, he rapidly climbs the social ladder of Assen, establishing himself as a successful real-estate magnate. Now Jakob Noach, the father figure whose only love is for his daughters, is dying.

Marcus Kolpa, a writer who has run short of ideas, is a son on a quest. He returns to his hometown Assen and tries to get back in touch with his childhood sweetheart Chaja, Noach's youngest daughter. The backdrop to the action is the Assen fair, a maze of sinister attractions. But the path to love is strewn with casualties. In the chaotic night before the TT race, the characters fail to connect, and their inability to love becomes painfully clear.

With ingenious shifts in narrative perspective and the use of surprising images, Möring paints an unsparing portrait of a city on the edge of hell: Assen as the tragic centre of the world, a city of words that bears more than a passing resemblance to *Dis* (from Dante's *Inferno*) or James Joyce's *Dublin*.

Möring cunningly casts an itinerant peddler as the incarnation of death. Will this wandering figure have the last word in the urban labyrinth of *Dis*? Or is there a glimmer of hope in the canvas of Möring's exhilarating literary circus? At the end it seems that Marcus Kolpa may have found the start of a new love.

*Dis* is a brisk, innovative novel of international stature. In Möring's capable hands, Assen really does become the centre of the world.



photo Mark Kohn

Since his debut, Marcel Möring (b. 1957) has been ranked among the Netherlands' most important contemporary authors. His first novel, *Mendels erfenis* (*Mendel's Inheritance*, 1990), won him the Geertjan Lubberhuizen Prize for that year's best debut. His second book, *Het grote verlangen* (*The Great Longing*, 1992), was awarded the prestigious AKO Literature Prize. For his novel *In Babylon* (1997) he received the Golden Owl, the most important literary prize in Flanders. His work has been widely translated.

*Dis* is a rich and splendid book by a great author.  
DAGBLAD VAN HET NOORDEN

A stylistic and literary masterpiece.  
ALGEMEEN DAGBLAD

An awe-inspiring book, written in language that moves even during the humiliating moments, covering the vacuity of the condition humaine.  
TUBANTIA

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508 pp

#### RIGHTS

A.P. Watt Ltd.  
E-MAIL:  
apw@apwatt.co.uk  
WEBSITE:  
www.apwatt.co.uk

#### PUBLISHER

De Bezige Bij  
Van Miereveldstraat 1  
NL - 1071 DW Amsterdam  
TEL.: +31 20 305 98 10  
FAX: +31 20 305 98 24  
E-MAIL:  
info@debezigebij.nl  
WEBSITE:  
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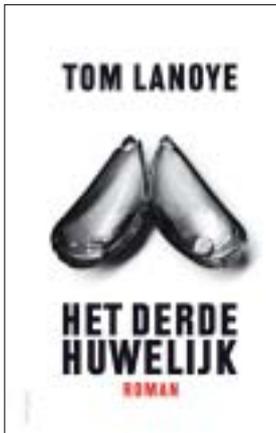
USA (William Morrow), UK (HarperCollins), Germany (Luchterhand)

#### SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*In Babylon* (*In Babylon*). New York: William Morrow / HarperCollins, 2000. Also in German (Rowohlt, 2000), in Spanish (Alianza, 2003), in French (Flammarion, 2001), in Danish (Rosinante, 1999), and in Swedish (Natur och Kultur, 1998).  
*The Dream Room* (*Modelvliegen*). New York: William Morrow / HarperCollins, 2002. Also in German (Luchterhand, 2001), in Hungarian (Noran, 2005), and in French (Les Allusifs, 2003).  
*Mendel* (*Mendels erfenis*). München: Luchterhand, 2003.  
*The Great Longing* (*Het grote verlangen*). New York: HarperCollins, 1995, and in many other languages.



*Infinately quotable and extremely enjoyable*



## Tom Lanoye

### The Third Marriage

**A**ND WHAT ISN'T USEFUL, simply disappears. No questions asked.' *Het derde huwelijk* (The Third Marriage), Tom Lanoye's sixth novel, opens with this hard truth; hard because Maarten Seebregs, the main character, is not a 'useful' person. He is dying, his work as a location scout for

films has been taken from him, and the only things that remain are painkillers and recollections of his deceased lover. And then an opportunity to be of use, just one more time, comes from out of the blue. A stranger offers him a large sum of money to enter into a marriage of convenience with his girlfriend, African refugee Tamara. Maarten hesitates, but not for long.

In eight chapters, Lanoye tells the story from the point of view of Maarten Seebregs, who sees the world as if through a camera lens, making *The Third Marriage* a very cinematic novel. Each chapter is composed of a single scene: meeting Tamara for the first time; the day she moves in; a visit by the Immigration Department inspectors; an encounter with Maarten's previously callous father now mellowing with age. And the moment at which things start to get out of hand: when a second refugee moves in with Maarten. According to Tamara, Phillip is her brother, but Tamara is not averse to a little white lie if it suits her purposes.

The book reads like a tragicomedy, seasoned with criticism of such things as the dumbing down of television and the petty bourgeoisie in trendy urban quarters. Maarten is a gifted grouser with a dark sense of humour and nothing escapes his mockery. Yet there is room for beauty too, most particularly in Maarten's memories of his deceased lover.

Walking a tightrope between slapstick and drama, journalism and opera, Lanoye has written an extremely topical novel which highlights social decline, migration, Europe's future, problems with young immigrants, and racism. He manages to avoid clichés rather elegantly, even when Maarten and Tamara are verbally abused by immigrant youths in a tram. As this particular exchange continues, the aggressors prove to be just as human and tragic as their victims.

In the up-tempo *The Third Marriage*, Lanoye also treats the reader to more of the splendidly recalcitrant definitions that litter all of his prose, a fine example being 'migration is only a form of Darwinism.'



photo Stephan Vanfleteren

Tom Lanoye (b. 1958) published his first collection of stories *Een slagerszoon met een brillette* (A Butcher's Son with Glasses) in 1985. He has since become one of the most important Flemish authors. Highlights of his oeuvre include *Kartonnen dozen* (Cardboard Boxes, 1991), a novel on homosexual adolescent love, 1991, 'The Monster Trilogy' (the ultimate novel on the disintegration of the Kingdom of Belgium, 1997-1999-2002), the sizeable play *Ten oorlog!* (To War!, 1997), based on Shakespeare's history plays, and *Niemand's Land* (No Man's Land), Lanoye's translation of British war poets (2002).

*This novel is the perfect synthesis of Tom Lanoye's work and therefore the perfect introduction for those who are not yet familiar with his work. Lanoye introduces a deus ex machina at suitable moments and uses all manner of dramatic techniques that give his story a hellish tempo and suspense. DE TIJD*

*Once again this is a marvellous book, that makes you laugh out loud, shudder, and strikes you dumb. Literary juries note: praise this book, praise this man. ELSEVIER*

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Het derde huwelijk* (2006)  
337 pp

#### RIGHTS

Prometheus  
Herengracht 507  
NL - 1017 BV Amsterdam  
TEL.: +31 20 624 19 34  
FAX: +31 20 622 54 61  
E-MAIL: pbo@pbo.nl  
WEBSITE: www.pbo.nl

#### TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*Pappschachteln* (Kartonnen dozen). Hildesheim: Claassen, 1993. Also in Afrikaans (Queillerie, 1996).  
*Mama Medea* (Mamma Medea). Kaapstad: Queillerie, 2002.  
*Metzgerssohn mit schriller Brille und andere Geschichten* (Een slagerszoon met een brillette). Hildesheim: Claassen, 1995.  
*Célibat* (Celibaat). Carnières-Morlanwelz: Lansman, 1996.  
*Schlachten! Nach den Rosenkriegen von William Shakespeare* (Ten oorlog). Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1999.



## Life in a eighteenth-century fishing village



# Maarten 't Hart Psalms and Riots

**F**OR YEARS Maarten 't Hart has been planning to write a historical novel (what he calls a documentary novel) about his birthplace Maassluis. *Het psalmenoproer* (Psalms and Riots) is that novel. At the macro-level the book deals with the eighteenth-century

struggle between supporters and opponents of a new, faster way of singing psalms, a symptom of the conflict between Protestant factions. At the micro-level a father-son quarrel is central. Roemer Stroombreker, a shipowner, is a typical 't Hart hero, a lover of nature and music, with a tendency to question the Bible. Roemer's queries when a boy are hilarious: how was Noah's ark able to accommodate all those thousands of couples? And how did the seals manage? 'Did they shuffle laboriously overland to the ark?'

Roemer is neutral in the argument about the psalms, but he is thought to be among the supporters and that brings him into direct conflict with his son Gilles. This son is the issue of a single sexual encounter with Anna, a red-haired net mender whom Roemer could not marry. It had been arranged that he should marry Diderica Croockewerff, an enormous woman whose dowry consisted of two ships, making Roemer the biggest ship owner of Maassluis.

Roemer may be one of the leading men of the town, but this brings him little joy. He worries about all kinds of things. Most of all he likes to be in his small office doing his accounts, or watching the birds flying above the harbour. A good relationship with his son – something that really matters to him – never develops. The son hates him.

*Psalms and Riots* keeps the reader spellbound from the first page to the last. 't Hart knows exactly how to engage the reader, with lively conversations between Roemer and Spanjaard the schoolmaster, with the description of the political troubles between the Patriots and the Prince's party, and the attempts to obtain state support for the declining fisheries. His list of sources shows how much he has tried to be historically accurate for the background of the story, and this includes the style used.



photo Bert Nienhuis

Maarten 't Hart (b. 1944) grew up in a Calvinist milieu. His first novel, *Stenen voor een ransuil* (Stones for a Long-Eared Owl), was published in 1971. He continued at first to teach biology at the University of Leiden, while producing an uninterrupted stream of novels, short-story collections, essays, and newspaper articles. 't Hart has also regularly contributed to radio programmes about classical music. Aside from his Calvinist youth and his struggle with the Bible, his passions for nature and music constantly crop up in his work. 't Hart is a skilful narrator with a rich vocabulary and an unequalled ability to create a convincing plot.

*All intrigues – regardless of how entertaining or emotive they may be – are negligible when compared to the great virtue of Maarten 't Hart as a writer of a historical novel: he manages to make outstanding use of the decor of bygone days. Het psalmenoproer is full of marvellous details on life in that eighteenth-century fishing village. Full of atmosphere, intimate, often extremely amusing, and also threatening – this is the world that 't Hart manages to create by making effective use of small-scale, visual perception, the play of light and shade, and penetrating observations on village and natural life. Maarten 't Hart is an excellent craftsman, but he is more than that. He is also a great artist. HET PAROOL*

*A magnificent novel. VRIJ NEDERLAND*

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Het psalmenoproer* (2006)  
288 pp

#### RIGHTS

The Susijn Agency  
E-MAIL:  
info@thesusijnagency.com  
WEBSITE:  
www.thesusijnagency.com

#### PUBLISHER

De Arbeiderspers  
Herengracht 370-372  
NL – 1016 CH Amsterdam  
TEL.: +31 20 524 75 00  
FAX: +31 20 622 49 37  
E-MAIL:  
info@arbeiderspers.nl  
WEBSITE:  
www.arbeiderspers.nl

#### RIGHTS SOLD

Germany  
(Piper)

#### SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*Le retardataire* (De nakomer).  
Paris: Belfond 2002. Also in  
German (Piper, 2001, 2007).  
*The Sundial* (De zonnewijzer).  
London: Arcadia (2004), and in  
many other languages.  
*A Flight of Curlews* (Een vlucht  
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York: Allison & Busby, 1986, and  
in many other languages.

*Das Wüten der ganzen Welt* (Het  
woeden der gehele wereld).  
München; Zürich: Piper / Zürich;  
Hamburg: Arche (2001), and in  
many other languages.  
*In unnütz toller Wut* (Lotte  
Weeda). München; Zürich: Piper  
(2004; 2006)



*Realism, suspense and sinister humour*

## Mensje van Keulen

### The Last Guests



**M**ENSJE VAN KEULEN manages to build an almost incessant tension into her writing. The reader has the constant feeling that something is about to happen: a crime, a murder, or some other calamity. There's only one remedy: to keep on reading.

In her most recent novel, *De laatste gasten* (The Last Guests), the main character, Florrie, is raised by her aunt Lena, a hairdresser of easy virtue, adept at backhanders. Lena doesn't like Florrie, the words 'cunt bitch' are constantly on her lips when she sees her. When her aunt succumbs to a cerebral hemorrhage, Florrie feels no pity. She swallows back her rising euphoria though. 'I had figured out just as quickly that I shouldn't expect too much of "now everything will be different."' However, when she meets Alice Müller a new world seems to open up to her. Alice offers her room and board in d'Meihof, an artsy villa along the Amstel, the river that ends in Amsterdam. The genteel and artistic residents of d'Meihof represent a completely different social class than the former boxers and con artists of Florrie's past. That past moves to the background, although there is always a chance that Rudie Hus, with his cauliflower ear, will come to claim from Florrie what's rightfully his.

The artistic group's dinner conversations form a brilliant and humorous part of the novel. Naturally the painters, historians, and philosophers turn out to be no better, morally, than the hairdressers and boxers. When the smug painter Fagel, who introduces himself as a cannibal, bad-mouths art historian Emile Waterman, the blue-blooded Mrs Stalpert believes him immediately. 'He wouldn't be the first Jew to lie.' Then a dog turns up, badly abused. Civilization is apparently only skin deep.

The name Roald Dahl often shows up in reviews of Van Keulen's writing, a logical association, considering the mixture of realism, suspense, and sinister humour. In reading this novel, too, the comparison is appropriate, for example in the scene where Florrie wraps Lena's ashes up into two colourful little presents to be offered to a customer and an associate of her detested aunt.



photo Eddy Posthuma de Boer

Mensje van Keulen (b. 1946) began her writing career in 1972 with the novel *Bleekers zomer* (Bleeker's Summer), which was an instant success. *Bleekers zomer* and the collection of short stories *Allemaal tranen* (So Many Tears) are now considered modern Dutch literary classics. She has published more than ten novels and short-story collections, some of which have been translated into German. In addition, she is a successful writer of children's books. Van Keulen's writing is characterized by carefully developed narratives and well-constructed plots. Hella S. Haasse lauded her ability to create a rounded character in a few sentences.

But what Mensje van Keulen leaves open in an extremely skilful fashion is the fact that everything could have been different. She has used thirty years of maturing talent to allow the suspense to hover as freely as it does here. She has no patent on the truth, she simply tells her story. In this, there is a resemblance with the genius of Vermeer, which is visible on the renowned canvas without anyone being able to offer a definitive explanation. *DE VOLKSKRANT*

Brilliantly written and replete with keen observations [...] At first sight, it appears to be a story of great simplicity. When you read *De laatste gasten* two or three times, then you realize just how refined the structure is. *NRC HANDELSBLAD*

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*De laatste gasten* (2007)  
167 pp

#### RIGHTS

Atlas  
Herengracht 481  
NL - 1017 BT Amsterdam  
TEL.: +31 20 524 98 00  
FAX: +31 20 627 68 51  
E-MAIL: mnaagtegaal@amsteluitgevers.nl  
WEBSITE: www.uitgeverijatlas.nl

#### SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*Die Glückliche* (De gelukkige).  
Zürich: Arche, 2003 / München:  
Knaur Taschenbuch, 2005  
*Die rote Schlinge* (De rode strik).  
München: Knaur, 2001  
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Frankfurt am Main: Fischer  
Taschenbuch, 1997  
*Herr Ratti* (Meneer Ratti). Berlin:  
Twenne Verlag, 1994 / Weinheim:

Beltz & Gelberg, 1996.  
*Die Freunde des Mondes* (Vrienden  
van de maan). Berlin: Twenne  
Verlag, 1992 / Weinheim; Basel:  
Beltz, 1994  
*Die Kette* (De ketting). Göttingen:  
Bert Schlander, 1986  
*Ein trister Sommer* (Bleekers  
zomer). Göttingen: Verlag  
Bert Schlander, 1982



## Journey's end

# Dimitri Verhulst

## Mrs Verona Comes Down from the Hill



**W**ITH *Mevrouw Verona daalt de heuvel af* (Mrs Verona Comes Down from the Hill), a subdued, sensitive novella, Dimitri Verhulst adds a new dimension to his work.

Years ago, Mrs Verona and her husband, both of them musicians, moved to a hill outside the village of Oucwègne. Then Mr Verona took ill, built up a vast woodpile for his wife, and hung himself from a tree. The widow decides to have a cello made from wood from the pile, but because it needs to dry out extremely slowly, the instrument will take twenty years to make. In the meantime, her dogs keep her company.

The village slowly falls into decline, and the forty remaining residents get by on what little that they have. The local female vet also acts as doctor. The young men start up a table football competition in a shabby canteen. The manageress of the village shop sells goods that have long passed their expiry date, but she also gives generous credit.

After the death of her husband, the bachelors in the village hope to catch Mrs Verona's eye. Before they pluck up the courage to make a move, they wait patiently for a signal that the widow is ready to begin a new life. It never comes. On a cold February day, when Mrs Verona has placed her last log in the stove, she descends the path to the village with her faithful dog, in the knowledge that she will never have the energy to climb the hill again.

Dimitri Verhulst brings the rundown village to life with exceptional simplicity and authenticity. The extraordinary care he devotes to his written style allows the leisurely narrative pace to harmonize with the development of the story, and creates the scope for an appealing geniality and *intimisme*. Mild irony lurks beneath the salient formulation, lodging the evoked emotions in an attractive field of tension. *Mrs Verona Comes Down from the Hill* is a modest but discerning literary masterwork.

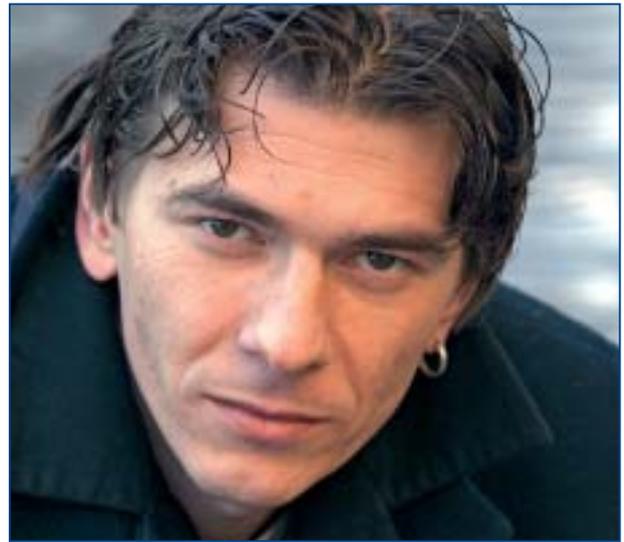


photo Klaas Koppe

Dimitri Verhulst (b. 1972) made his debut with the collection of stories *De kamer hiernaast* (The Room Next Door), published in 1999, about his unsettled youth spent in foster homes and institutions. The novels *Niets, niemand en redelijk stil* (Nothing, Nobody, and Reasonably Quiet, 2000), and *De verveling van de keeper* (The Boredom of the Goalkeeper, 2002), also cover the same ground. *Problemski Hotel* (2003), a funny but poignant novel about the former residents of an asylum seekers' centre in the north of Belgium, was his breakthrough to the general public. In 2006 he published *De helaasheid der dingen* (The Misfortunates), which has been compared to the work of Irish novelist Roddy Doyle. Verhulst also has a collection of poetry to his name, *Liefde, tenzij anders vermeld* (Love, Unless Otherwise Stated, 2001).

The language in which this story is written steams and stamps, and then is suddenly blank and bare. Verhulst sees the reality behind the façade, and, with this small-scale narrative recounts the story of love, without it ever becoming sweet or sticky.

DE GROENE AMSTERDAMMER

*Mevrouw Verona daalt de heuvel af* is a slow, constant, melancholic book. Brilliant. LEEUWARDER COURANT

You taste the God-given writing talent in almost every sentence. ELSEVIER

### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Mevrouw Verona daalt de heuvel af* (2006)  
110 pp

### RIGHTS

Contact  
Keizersgracht 205  
NL – 1016 DS Amsterdam  
TEL.: +31 20 535 25 35  
FAX: +31 20 535 25 49  
E-MAIL:  
mngatgeaal@amsteluitgevers.nl  
WEBSITE:  
www.uitgeverijcontact.nl

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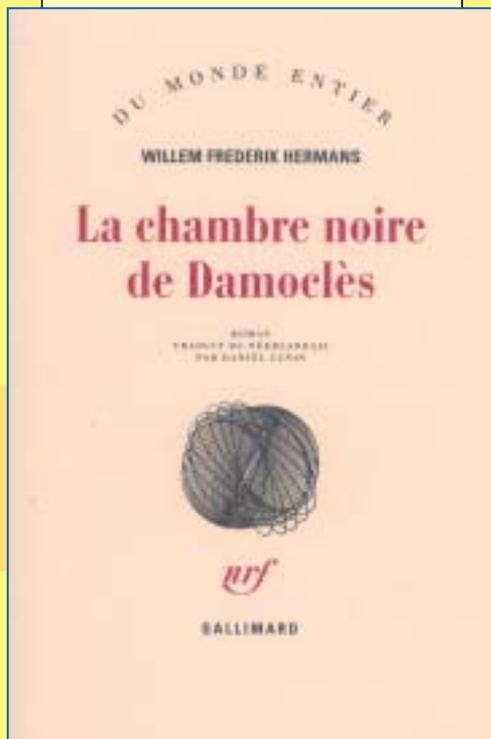
### TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*Problemski Hotel* (Problemski Hotel). London; New York: Marion Boyars Publishers, 2005. Also in German (Claassen, 2004), in French (Christian Bourgois, 2005), in Danish (Ries, 2004), in Italian (Fazi, 2006), in Hebrew (Carmel, 2006), in Slovenian (Goga, 2005), in Spanish (Lengua de Trapo, in prep.), and in Hungarian (Európa, in prep.).  
*Die Beschissenheit der Dinge* (De helaasheid der dingen). München: Luchterhand, in prep. Also in Danish (Ries, in prep.), in Italian (Fazi, in prep.), in Slovenian (Goga, in prep.), and in Hebrew (Carmel, in prep.).



# Recent publications

W.F. Hermans  
**La chambre noire de Damoclès**



In *Le monde des livres* Milan Kundera, the French author of Czech origin, praises the French translation of W.F. Hermans's novel *The Darkroom of Damocles* (Gallimard 2006, translation Daniel Cunin) for its style and Hermans's capacity to raise the suspense to the extent that the reader cannot put the book down.

Kader Abdolah  
**My Father's Notebook**

(Spijkerschrift)

Translated into English by  
Susan Massotty for Canongate

Tessa de Loo  
**Gemelas**

(The Twins)

Translated into Spanish by Ana Maria Crespo Solans for Círculo de Lectores

Bernlef  
**[Huang hu]**

(Out of Mind)

Translated into Chinese by  
Pan Xinliang for People's Literature  
Publishing House

Margriet de Moor  
**Prvo sivo pa bijelo pa plavo**

(First Gray, Then White, Then Blue)

Translated into Croatian by  
Maja Weikert for SysPrint

Louis Paul Boon  
**Summer in Termuren**

(Zomer te Ter-Muren)

Translated into English by  
Paul Vincent for Dalkey Archive Press

Harry Mulisch  
**Objavenie neba**

(The Discovery of Heaven)

Translated into Slovakian by  
Adam Bzoch for Slovart

Louis Couperus  
**Gizli Güç**

(The Hidden Force)

Translated into Turkish by  
Roza Hakmen for Kanat Kitap

Cees Nooteboom  
**Paradisets förlorat**

(Paradise Lost)

Translated into Swedish by  
Per Holmer for Bonniers

A. den Doollaard  
**[Svadba vo ohrid]**

(The Wedding of the Seven Gypsies)

Translated into Macedonian by  
Violeta Loopstra for Vis Poj

Willem Jan Otten  
**La mort sur le vif**

(Specht and Son)

Translated into French by  
Daniel Cunin for Gallimard

Willem Elsschot  
**Tsiis**

(Cheese)

Translated into Frisian by Frank Dijkstra  
for Athenaeum-Polak & Van Gennep

Peter Terrin  
**Blanko**

(Blanco)

Translated into Swedish by  
Urban Lindström for Augusti

Otto de Kat  
**Sehnsucht nach Kapstadt**

(De inscheper)

Translated into German by  
Andreas Ecke for Suhrkamp

Tommy Wieringa  
**Joe Speedboat –  
Keine Zeit für Helden**

(Joe Speedboat)

Translated into German by  
Bettina Bach for Hanser

Most of these books were covered previously  
in our 10 Books brochures.

For a complete list of translations of Dutch fiction,  
please consult our website: [www.nlpvf.nl/translations](http://www.nlpvf.nl/translations)

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## CONTRIBUTORS

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## TRANSLATION

George Hall, Barbara Backer-Gray, S.J. Leinbach

## EDITOR IN CHIEF

Dick Broer

## DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

Wim ten Brinke, BNO



NLPVF

Singel 464  
NL – 1017 AW Amsterdam  
TEL.: +31 20 620 62 61  
FAX: +31 20 620 71 79  
E-MAIL: [office@nlpvf.nl](mailto:office@nlpvf.nl)  
WEBSITE: [www.nlpvf.nl](http://www.nlpvf.nl)



VFL

Generaal Capiaumontstraat 11/5  
B – 2600 Berchem  
TEL.: +32 3 270 31 61  
FAX: +32 3 270 31 60  
E-MAIL: [info@fondsvoordeletteren.be](mailto:info@fondsvoordeletteren.be)  
WEBSITE: [www.fondsvoordeletteren.be](http://www.fondsvoordeletteren.be)