

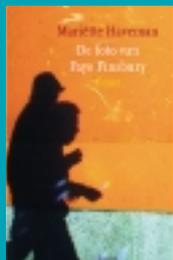
10 Books

from Holland and Flanders



Jan Siebelink

Anna Enquist



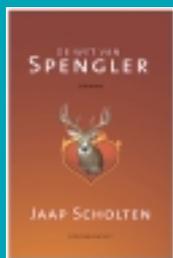
Mariëtte Haveman

Hugo Claus



Leon de Winter

Vincent Overeem



Theo Thijssen

Erik Vlamincx



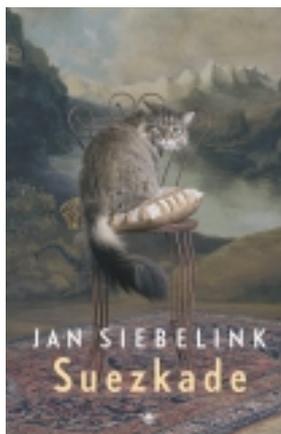
Marc Reugebrink

 Foundation for the
Production and
Translation of
Dutch Literature

Flemish
Literature
Fund



Dark romanticism



Jan Siebelink

Suezkade

Just as in *Kneeling on a Bed of Violets* Jan Siebelink again returned to his rigidly devout youth in a village on the banks of the River IJssel, so in *Suezkade* he revisits familiar territory. In the story of Marc Cordesius, a young French teacher at the Descartes College in The Hague, the reader will recognize many elements from

his earlier novels and stories with a secondary school as their setting. This will not surprise anyone who is familiar with the author's own story: for twenty-five years Siebelink was a French teacher himself.

Yet *Suezkade* is not a novel whose effect relies on the use of recognizably autobiographical material. On the contrary, the story of Marc Cordesius makes its considerable impact by creating a slightly surreal, rarefied, almost impalpable atmosphere. In describing that atmosphere Siebelink has undoubtedly been inspired by the French authors of the fin de siècle and the 1900s. The book is a testimony to his fondness for decadent poets and authors like Mallarmé and Huysmans, and the vitriolic, gossipy diary of the De Goncourt brothers.

Like the work of Siebelink's much-admired predecessors, there is something unfathomably dark about *Suezkade* right from the start. Marc Cordesius no longer really needs to work, since his grandmother has left him a fortune. His mother's mysterious disappearance years before means that his grandmother's death leaves him alone in the world. Marc applies for a job at the Descartes out of a love of the French language and its literature and for the teaching profession. He silently hopes that his teaching career will give his life depth and value and bring him into contact with kindred spirits.

It is a vain hope. From the first page, cracks begin to appear in his lofty image of the school. The other teachers do not know how to deal with the aloof Marc, and he finds himself increasingly isolated. The greatest bone of contention for his fellow teachers is his unconcealed love for the brilliant Moroccan pupil Najoua. Cordesius finds threatening notes in his pigeon-hole, is betrayed by the headmaster and, in a frenzy of rage, throws himself into a fight with the conventional, narrow-minded physics teacher. Meanwhile things are also going badly for Najoua. Anorexia takes hold and Marc watches her slipping away.

The most fascinating aspect of *Suezkade* is that Marc's decline is not merely tragic but beautiful. The dark romanticism of his reflections, his forbidden love and his retreat into loneliness give the book an irresistible allure. Marc realizes this himself. He wallows in injustice, heading directly for his own end like a Messiah who knows he will be crucified – and in his downfall he carries the reader with him to the final page.



photo Mark Kohn

Jan Siebelink (b. 1938) is the most successful Dutch literary author of the past few years. Although Siebelink could always count on a group of loyal readers, the publication of his previous novel has given him an exceptional, indeed unprecedented status. *Kneeling on a Bed of Violets* (2004), the story of a nurseryman's son whose father converted to the most devout form of Calvinism after experiencing religious ecstasy, is an unrivalled bestseller to this day. The most important reason for its success may be that in an increasingly Godless world Siebelink has laid bare and articulated the true nature of his fatherland, 'La Hollande profonde', with such great sensitivity.

On *Kneeling on a Bed of Violets*:
A truly majestic novel (...) Whoever reads this book without a lump in his throat is no human being. ELSEVIER

He succeeds brilliantly in describing the stranglehold of the rigidly orthodox. BRABANTS DAGBLAD

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Suezkade (2008)
382 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

OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Im Garten des Vaters (Knielen op een bed violen). Zürich etc.: Arche, 2007, Also in Danish (Tiderne Skifter, in prep.) and Italian (Marsilio, in prep.).

Art as a vehicle of despair



Anna Enquist

Counterpoint

A woman practises Bach's Goldberg Variations. From the start it is obvious that she is doing so out of a need for a sedation; she wants nothing more than to be 'a slave of the playing body'. She also loves to recall the last time she rehearsed this piece of music, thirty years before, and more

specifically she wants to feel her daughter's presence again, a daughter who as a child exclaimed during a piano performance in the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, 'Mama, that's our song!'

Slowly but surely, variation by variation, innocent, everyday memories unfold, of her family life with her husband, her son and especially her daughter. As she plays, the music amplifies feelings that alternate between rage, despair and longing. The sense of grief is a constant presence; 'she was playing something that had gone for ever, something she could never truly recall.' While practising the piece she wonders what inspired the composer to write this music, what frame of mind he was in, and to what extent she feels it speaks to her because of the parallels with her own situation. The closer she comes to the final chords, the more heavily the composition weighs upon her. The appalling end must be faced at some point: the end of Bach, of her rehearsal of his music, and of her daughter.

Contrapunt (Counterpoint) is a memorial built by Anna Enquist to her own daughter, who died in a traffic accident, just as Bach composed the *Goldberg Variations* out of grief for his dead son. In both cases art is a vehicle of despair. The reader does not need to know that the author's grief is real in order to be moved by Enquist's novel, but knowledge of the reality to which it relates certainly adds an extra dimension. She has tried before to capture the incomprehensible loss of her daughter in both prose and poetry, but never has she done that so succinctly. The detached vocabulary – she consistently writes of 'the woman' and 'the daughter' – and the precise, almost physically tangible way in which she describes the difficulties of playing the piano are in heartrending contrast to the sweet memories of a playful, spirited daughter. The knowledge of an inescapable fate makes it impossible to read these passages without goose bumps. *Contrapunt* is a solid literary structure, an exercise in control and at the same time a painful cry from the heart.



photo Susanne Schleyer

Anna Enquist (b. 1945) trained in piano at the conservatory in The Hague and at the same time studied psychology in Leiden. When she made her debut as a poet in 1991 with the collection *Soldiers' Songs*, for which she was awarded the C. Buddingh Prize, she was working as a psychoanalyst. Since then she has devoted more than fifteen years to writing. With her first two novels, *The Masterpiece* (1995) and *The Secret* (1997), psychological novels in which classical music is central, Enquist quickly reached a broad readership. In 2002 she wrote the Book Week Gift, *The Ice Carriers*, and in 2005 the major historical novel *The Homecoming*, which focuses on the wife of explorer James Cook. 'Enquist understands emotion' is how one critic has described the appeal of her work.

Mit bestürzender Intensität fasst die niederländische Autorin Anna Enquist Bachs Musik in Worte und verwebt sie ohne jegliche Sentimentalität mit der Geschichte einer Mutter und ihrer Tochter. Eine große Erzählung vom Leben und der Musik, deren beider Auftakt immer auch schon das Ende birgt.

DER SPIEGEL

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Contrapunt (2008)
204 pp

RIGHTS

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

RIGHTS SOLD

Luchterhand
(Germany), 2008

SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

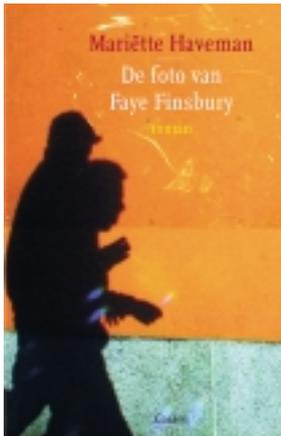
Letzte Reise (De thuiskomst). München: Luchterhand, 2006. Also in French (Actes Sud, 2007) and in Spanish (Seix Barral, 2007).
The Secret (Het geheim). London: The Toby Press 2000. Also in German (Luchterhand 1997, DTV 1999), and in many other languages.
The Masterpiece (Het meesterstuk). London: The Toby Press 1999. Also in French (Actes Sud 2001) and many other languages.



Quest for authenticity

Mariëtte Haveman

Faye Finsbury's Photo



Faye Finsbury's *Photo* is a modern Bildungsroman. Maria van Enschede turns from a schoolgirl with great ideals and little experience into an introverted drifter with a natural tendency to melt into the background. The reader is carried along effortlessly, which makes this first-person novel all the more oppressive and disturbing. We see how easily a person can come close to freezing to death on the streets of London.

It is the winter of 1978-79, known in Britain as the Winter of Discontent. The economy is in trouble, with two million unemployed and a relentless series of strikes. Against this background, nineteen-year-old Maria is training to be an actress. She is young, naive, lonely and looking for a better, more authentic style of life and a better, more authentic style of art. In her quest Maria turns to characters like Rosie, who displays the candour she is looking for but with it a certain harshness, to Faye, with her unreliable borderline personality, and to Wilf, who is perhaps the most obvious representative of the kind of stark existence she is after: wanting nothing, doing nothing. From beneath such starkness the authentic life must surely emerge of its own accord.

The novel paints a vivid portrait of the era. Not just of London and the rise of bands like Joy Division but of young people financially supported by their parents, able to choose any kind of further education they like, yet with no clue as to which direction to take or what their role in society might be.

Art historian Mariëtte Haveman is merciless in her description of the art world. Maria expects to find true life in art, but Faye plays a dirty trick on her (Maria is photographed without knowing it) and when Faye dies the media and the art world steal her work. Articles about Faye's art are published that Maria feels are incompatible with the woman she knew.

Despite the tragic plot, Haveman's style ensures there is nothing melancholy about this novel. Her use of descriptive detail to illustrate her main character's state of mind is remarkably astute. Haveman succeeds in describing her character's world convincingly from within, without the reader ever being required to lose touch with reality altogether. Only at the end do we realize just how far Maria has allowed things to go. It seems her landlady was right to say that 'London is no city for young girls.'



photo Jeroen Stumpel

Mariëtte Haveman (b. 1957) is an art historian and writer. She is editor-in-chief of the magazine *Kunstschrift* and the author of *Studio Secrets*, about Dutch artists' studios from 1200 to the present. *Faye Finsbury's Photo* is her first novel. In 1978 Haveman spent a year in London and on her website she writes, 'There lies the germ of the book *Faye Finsbury's Photo*. But Maria van Enschede is not a self-portrait from that period. Her experiences are invented. At best you could say that the book is a heightened, dramatized and completely fictionalized version of a much more ordinary and messy life that was lived in 1978-79.'

Subtle portrait of Maria and her unremitting descent from 'naive and high-minded girl' to someone who sleeps in cardboard boxes in an empty factory.

HET PAROOL

Haveman strikes all the right chords as she describes the confused mind of a person who has lost her way.

NEDERLANDS DAGBLAD

PUBLISHING DETAILS

De foto van Faye Finsbury (2008)
288 pp

RIGHTS

Cossee
Kerkstraat 361
NL - 1017 HW Amsterdam
TEL.: +31 20 528 99 11
FAX: +31 20 528 99 12
E-MAIL: cossee@cossee.com
WEBSITE: www.cossee.com

High expectations and evaporated illusions



Hugo Claus

Mild Destruction

As in so much of his writing Hugo Claus incorporated autobiographical details in *Een zachte vernieling* (Mild Destruction), set in Paris in 1950, when, a young man in his early twenties, Claus moved there. After the Second World

War Paris was a Mecca for artists and Claus soon came into contact with the CoBrA group painters, Karel Appel among them, as well as the Dutch poets Remco Campert, Rudy Kousbroek, Hans Andreus and Lucebert, and the extravagant Simon Vinkenoog, the central figure of the group. They lived a hand-to-mouth existence, but relished being able to be immersed in the ambience of newly-won freedom and uncontainable creativity.

In the novel, André Maertens, the director of a cultural centre somewhere in Flanders, hears of the death of the poet Bernard Wachlens whom Maertens knew in Paris in the fifties. In a lengthy flashback, he mulls over his experiences during that period. He'd been a housepainter in Ghent, when, fascinated by Sabine, the daughter of wealthy parents, he followed her to Paris. She introduced him to artistic circles and his own natural artistic talents developed. They lived an emancipated existence there, but their relationship was undermined by a fatal abortion, a rape, romantic rivalry between Maertens and Wachlens, and Wachlens's war record. They scarcely realized that they were driving themselves to destruction, driven by their high expectations of life and blinded by it. 'During that time in Paris, I forgot something, lost something that should have taken the place of what I have now become,' Maertens admitted resignedly much later.

Claus looks back at the artists, setting them in perspective with a certain irony, even ridicule at their pompous zeal. At the same time he gradually evokes a dramatic undercurrent, which, fed by Wachlens's death, swells to become a gripping, emotional and gloomy reflection on unfulfilled expectations, evaporated illusions and past loves, and the futility of bourgeois life. Hugo Claus was master at expressing a sober but suggestive, emotionally charged melancholy.



photo Chris van Houts

In his prose, poetry and plays, Hugo Claus (1929-2008) was one of the most important post-war Flemish authors. His best-appreciated works include the modernistic novel *De verwondering* (Amazement, 1962), and his magnum opus, the internationally successful *Het verdriet van België* (The Sorrow of Belgium, 1983). But novels such as his debut *De Metsiers* (The Metsiers, 1950), *Het verlangen* (Desire, 1978), *Een zachte vernieling* (Mild Destruction, 1988), and *De geruchten* (The Rumours, 1996), were all highly praised. Hugo Claus received all the important Dutch-language literary prizes as well as the European Union Aristeion Literary Prize for *De geruchten* in 1998, and the 2002 Leipziger Buchpreis zur Europäischen Verständigung (Leipzig Book Award for European Understanding) for his oeuvre. For years he was tipped as a possible winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

As a sensual author, Claus is difficult to match.

TROUW

Claus's work is just as broad as the soul is deep.

GERRIT KOMRIJ

Claus enabled me to hear the amazing richness of Dutch, the rampant luxury of the countless registers of our dialects and expressions, the fermenting lingual swamp under the polished glass roof of our Standard Dutch.

ERWIN MORTIER

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Een zachte vernieling (1988)
190 pp

RIGHTS

Liepman AG
E-MAIL: info@liepmanagency.com

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: www.debezigebij.nl

TRANSLATIONS

Une douce destruction. French (Lausanne: Éditions de Fallois, L'Age d'Homme, 1988). Swedish (Bonniers, 1990), Catalan (Empúries, 2003), Spanish (Anagrama, 1992), Danish (Lindthardt & Ringhof, 1994), Norwegian (Gyldendal, 1994).



Clever, beautiful, nightmarish

Leon de Winter

The Right of Return



In *Het recht op terugkeer* (The Right of Return) Leon de Winter has written an audacious book that demonstrates more powerfully than ever that he is a prophet of doom. In this science-fiction novel, set mainly in 2024 and 2025, he describes a doom scenario in which Israel has been reduced in size and beleaguered to such an extent that it is virtually uninhabitable. Bram Mannheim runs an office in Tel Aviv that helps parents track down lost children. His own son disappeared sixteen years previously. In his free time he works

as a volunteer for the ambulance service. After a bloody attack on a border post, Bram makes a discovery that puts him on the trail of a sinister plot, in which his son may have been involved.

'Solidarity,' De Winter's central character sighs, 'grew out of the fate he shared with them [his students, his colleagues, his father] and the great abstraction that this country was. He could not free himself from it, even if he wanted to.' De Winter is a writer with a mission. If he can no longer save the world through his columns and polemical articles, then surely he can with his novels. In *Het recht op terugkeer* he leaves no room for doubt that unless the Jews root out the Palestinians, then the reverse will happen. In fact the Muslims will gain the upper hand in any case, wherever they are in the world. This fear of Muslims is expressed not by De Winter's protagonist Bram Mannheim but by Bram's father, his employer and his fellow employees, so that it seems some slight opening remains.

Writers with an all too urgent message usually write poorly. In that sense De Winter is an exception. With *Het recht op terugkeer* he continues in the vein that made his novel *God's Gym* (2002) such an achievement: a pared down kind of literature, emulating the American 'hard-boiled' thriller. It is a genre that leaves little room for ambiguity or enigma but instead takes a direct path to its terrible dénouement. Clever. Beautiful. Nightmarish. You want to read all about it, without delay, to be convinced of an acrimoniously composed world view: where the synagogue disappears, the mosque will arise.



photo Marco Ockhuizen

Leon de Winter (b. 1954) became known in the early 1980s with subdued, intellectual novels like *Looking for Eileen W.* and *La Place de la Bastille*, but he later concentrated on creating vehicles for his most important themes – Jewish identity after the Second World War, good and evil – in what he refers to as 'good reads.' *Kaplan* (1986), *SuperTex* (1991), *Zionoco* (1995) and *God's Gym* (2002) each became bestsellers. De Winter invariably writes about a man in a crisis, searching for his (Jewish) roots and being forced to make existential choices. His cinematic style reflects the fact that De Winter is also a film maker. *Het recht op terugkeer* has been nominated for both the AKO Literature Prize and the NS Public's Choice Prize.

A pitiless pageturner. DE PERS

Unbearably exciting. VRIJ NEDERLAND

A sensational comeback. DE MORGEN

*A bold novel with Mulisch-like allure.
DE VOLKSKRANT*

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Het recht op terugkeer (2008)
458 pp

RIGHTS

Diogenes
E-MAIL: bau@diogenes.ch

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: www.debezigebij.nl

OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Il cielo di Hollywood (De hemel van Hollywood). Milano: Marcos y Marcos, 2000. Also in Spanish (Circe, 1999), in Russian (Text, 2002), in French (Seuil, 2004), in German (Diogenes, 1998, 2000).

Malibu (God's gym). Zürich: Diogenes, 2003. Also in Spanish (Salamandra, 2005), in French (Seuil, 2006), in English (The Toby Press, in prep.).

Place de la Bastille (La place de la Bastille). Zürich: Diogenes, 2005, 2008.



Excellent story-telling



Vincent Overeem

Misfit

In Amsterdam one stifling hot summer, an eighteen-year-old boy experiences an intense, physical love for his girlfriend, who is two years older: 'Kaat with her blazing eyes. Kaat who sat on a chair with that concentrated expression as she varnished her nails. "Look, isn't that a

cute colour?" and she'd stick her foot out towards me, wiggling her toes. Who liked kissing you best of all while you were eating ice-cream. "Lovely cold tongue you've got now. With flavour to it." Who always undressed underpants first, wandered around bare-assed for a bit and only then took off her top and her bra.'

Overeem switches smoothly back and forth between past and present; the oppressive heat of the summer forms a contrast to the drab grey veil that hangs over the past. Since the narrator – a rough diamond type like Holden Caulfield – tells his own story, you learn relevant facts but can never be certain how reliable they are. He often mentions his younger brother Krijn, and it quickly emerges that something is the matter with the little boy. But whenever the story becomes more specific the narrator cuts it short, creating a suspense that culminates at the end of the book in a surprising dénouement.

The main character's childhood is beautifully described. Early in the book we read of his desire to have a brother, a wish that is eventually fulfilled. Then we see on the one hand his disappointment that he cannot take Krijn along with him, that the boy hides, does not seem to want to embrace life, and on the other his abiding desire to help his little brother and take him under his wing. His love for Kaat seems increasingly obsessive. He begins to regard the all too jovial builder he works for as a threat and is furious when his girlfriend stays away all night.

The unexpected happy ending to the novel shows that Overeem has mastered the technique of building a plot in which, with the future expertly foreshadowed, everything falls into place. As a reader you suddenly realize that the real misfit may not be the main character at all but rather his younger brother, and that the ways in which he has dealt with his own longing for a brother and his complicated relationship with his parents are the causes of his restless and anxious behaviour. Overeem is a new Dutch writer to reckon with.

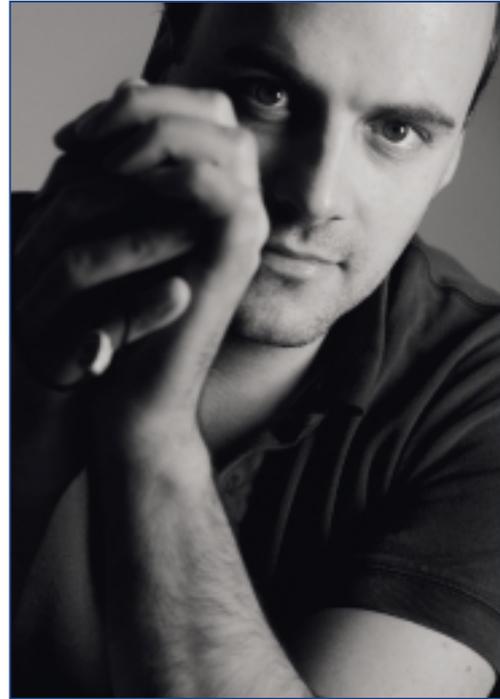


photo Giuliani/Paul Postma

Vincent Overeem (b. 1974) has published short stories in the literary magazines *De Gids* and *Tirade* and is a regular guest on the cultural radio programme *De Avonden*. In late 2005 he made his debut with the story collection *Novembermeisjes* (November Girls), which was much praised by the critics and nominated for the Gerard Walschap Literature Prize. *Misfit*, his first novel, was equally well-received.

Overeem takes an increasingly firm hold on you, until you can barely let go of Misfit. With his first novel Vincent Overeem has made good the promise of his short story collection.

NRC HANDELSBLAD

You need only read a few sentences of his first novel Misfit to see that here is a writer of the kind encountered in Anglo-Saxon countries: a good storyteller who can maintain a rapid pace.

TROUW

Unbelievably well written.

PIETER STEINZ, TROS NIEUWSSHOW

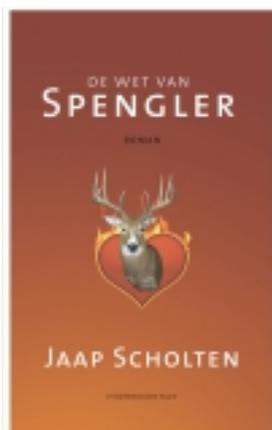
PUBLISHING DETAILS

Misfit (2008)
253 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

About fraternal love and growing up



Jaap Scholten Spengler's Law

The Spenglers are a well-to-do family from the province of Twente. They own landed estates, have several cars and servants, go hunting in their own woods, and in the early afternoon they settle down to drinks around the open fire. Frederik Spengler, the narrator of

the novel, grows up with his four brothers, all of them cut from the same cloth: they like fighting and joshing, they hide their feelings but stand behind each other to a man (that too is Spengler's Law). The family moves to Belgium, where after a while the father commits suicide.

The father's death does not seem the most important element of the story that describes, in the first part of the book, the brothers' childhood and their coming to adulthood in an eccentric milieu. But it certainly presages what awaits them many years later when they are adults: the oldest brother, Julius, the one they all looked up to most, the one who always did what no one else dared to do, discovers he has an incurable form of cancer. His sudden departure leaves a sense of emptiness behind that only Frederik is capable of putting into words.

Jaap Scholten is a born writer. He commands a meticulous, classical style and knows how to construct a story that convinces from beginning to end. Take the opening sentence: 'It was the time in which it became clear that Putin had the West by the balls with his gas reserves, the time when you could be certain of snow only in the highest ski resorts and the time that, thanks to the mild winters with their abnormally long motorcycling seasons, practically the whole of Europe had a surplus of donor organs.'

De wet van Spengler (Spengler's Law) is a novel about fraternal love and growing up, a sequel to Scholten's much praised debut. It demonstrates what Scholten is best at: describing the milieu in which he was raised, one that in literary terms lies somewhere between Buddenbrooks and F. Scott Fitzgerald. The portrait of Julius, forced to fight an unequal battle, is deeply poignant. Just before Julius dies the brothers kiss one another, for the first time in their lives, and in the closing scene they fire a salute to their dead brother with their hunting rifles. An appropriate departure for an impressive novel.



photo Keke Keukelaar

Jaap Scholten (b. 1963) made his debut in 1995 with the successful and acclaimed novel *Tachtig* (Eighty). From then on he devoted himself entirely to writing, including work for television. His second novel *Morgenster* (Morning Star), about the 1977 train hijack in Drenthe by Moluccan separatists, was published in 2001. Scholten has lived in Hungary for several years, where he writes columns and letters that appear in *NRC Handelsblad* and other publications. *De wet van Spengler* (Spengler's Law) is his long-awaited third novel. Driven by the death of his brother and pinned to the

mores of his provincial ancestors, Scholten could hardly write a better novel than this one. It is his representation of the man in optima forma, an ode to masculinity and, as such, everything a big brother could be to a little brother.

DE VOLKSKRANT

PUBLISHING DETAILS

De wet van Spengler (2008)
268 pp

RIGHTS

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

OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Die blonde Göttin. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2002.
Morgenstern (Morgenster). Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2002.
Achtzig (Tachtig). Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1998.

'A class has its own soul'



Theo Thijssen

The Happy Class

Don't let anyone tell you being a schoolmaster isn't an adventurous job...' The speaker is Staal, a teacher at an Amsterdam school for poor children in the early twentieth century. There is little prestige attached and his

wife thinks he should look for a better job, but Staal sees his work as a calling. He wants to help the forty young individuals in his charge to get on in life. So while pretending to be studying for his French diploma he writes his diary, recording observations, concerns and ideas about education and child-rearing.

Be they smart, sickly or foolish, all children have a unique side and Staal knows how to make the most of that, although he is often seized with doubt as to whether he is doing the right thing. Theo Thijssen writes beautifully about the class as an organism: 'You can tease a class, flatter it, make it laugh, tremble, a class has its own soul.' When a boy with a humpback appears at school the class is understanding, but when another boy shares out stale nuts the teasing is relentless – and there you have it after all, 'the dreadful wolfish morality of the world of grown ups.' To Staal the class is important as a social unit, as Thijssen makes clear at the end of the novel: 'My marvellous, sweet, difficult lot, I really know only one thing: the year or so that I have you and you have me we ought simply to be a happy class. The rest is nonsense, believe me, although I'd never tell you that.'

Theo Thijssen's writing was based on his practical experience as a teacher and this novel takes the form of a diary. It demonstrates how remarkably good he was at entering into the world of the child, an exceptional achievement for the time. He caused a furore by exposing the deficiencies of generalized methods of teaching and child-rearing and appealed for more respect for the teacher, the ultimate expert on how to approach his class. As a result Thijssen's message is still relevant today, and his novel provides a joyful if wistful insight into the world of the recent past.



photo Letterkundig Museum

Theo Thijssen (1879–1943) was author, teacher and socialist politician. He is best known for his book *Kees de jongen* (Young Kees, 1923), the story of a working class boy in Amsterdam that became a classic and on which a film was based. Last year the CPNB Foundation (Collective Propaganda for the Dutch Book) made Thijssen's novel *The Happy Class* (1926) the centrepiece of a reading promotion campaign. It was published in a record print run of almost a million copies that were handed out free of charge to members of Dutch public libraries and to secondary school children. All over the country libraries organized talks about Thijssen and this book. The complete works of Theo Thijssen were published in 2003 in four volumes.

The Happy Class [...] forms a highlight of his oeuvre – it is a splendid book about the lost paradise of our childhood.

SIMON CARMIGGELT

A sprightly and exquisite book. It is a powerful plea in favour of the magnetism between the teacher and his class, the extraordinary community in which much useful knowledge is acquired, and the situation in which people learn to live with one another in a natural manner.

JAN SIEBELINK

The Happy Class illustrates in an almost Kafkaesque manner the incipient bureaucracy in education: the registers that have to be maintained and the nerves before the school inspections, which, in turn, lead to unfair punishments to guarantee the obedience of the pupils.

DE VOLKSKRANT

PUBLISHING DETAILS

De gelukkige klas (1926)
277 pp

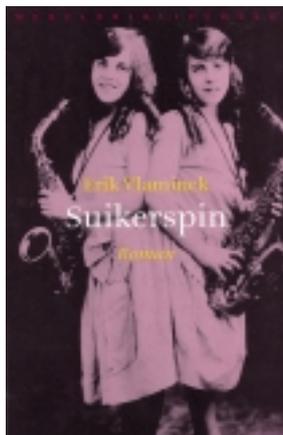
RIGHTS

Athenaeum-Polak & Van Gennep
Singel 262
NL – 1016 AC Amsterdam
TEL.: +31 20 551 12 62
FAX: +31 20 620 35 09
E-MAIL: rights@querido.nl
WEBSITE: www.klassieken.nl

OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Kees, der Junge (Kees de jongen). Wien; Zürich; Prag: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1935.

Fascinating epic of fairground life



Erik Vlamincck

Candy Floss

In *Suikerspin* (Candy Floss), the impressive new novel by Erik Vlamincck, Jean-Baptist Van Hooylandt travels from fair to fair in the early twentieth century with his collection of live human curiosities. His most astonishing act is a 'derodyme', female Siamese twins, the

refined Joséphine and the apathetic Anastasia. Fortunately, Anna, the owner of another fairground attraction, concerned about the twins, is often around to look after them. Even so, they die in dramatic circumstances in 1912. Anna then mothers Jean-Baptist's son Albert.

Albert's son Arthur, embittered and marginalised, sees the income from a roundabout which he inherited from his father, vanish as he attempts by foul means to keep up with fairground developments. He is a dogged reactionary, a failed opportunist and a hypocritical misogynist, watching the world go to ruin. Suddenly a writer appears on the scene, looking for information on Arthur's grandfather Jean-Baptist Van Hooylandt and on the circumstances surrounding the death of the Siamese twins. In a surprising dénouement, the writer discovers that Arthur is not Anna's grandson, as everyone has always assumed, but the twins'.

This fascinating family epic of fairground life is filled with variety partly because much of what happens is told by Arthur, the grandson, in his particular comic idiom.

Other characters in the novel tell different or incomplete, misleading versions of the same stories, thereby consistently wrong-footing the reader. And Vlamincck is able to present his own writing ironically through Arthur's pessimistic outlook.

Vlamincck mixes fragments of past and present, the colour of fairground life, with archive material and fiction, reconstructing these in a sophisticated novel, which is riveting to read. The reader reconstitutes the family's history as the novel progresses, and a few carefully inserted links in the story guide him or her to the brilliant conclusion.

In *Suikerspin* Erik Vlamincck tells a family saga based on fact, set in an extraordinary world and replete with dark intrigue and sinister secrets. The tone is controlled, the language authentic and laconic. A dramatic, penetrating read with much covert humour.



photo Chris van Houts

Erik Vlamincck (b. 1954) writes autobiographically inspired prose and plays in which his experiences in psychiatric nursing and care for the homeless are incorporated. In 1992, the novel *Quatertemperdagen* (Ember Days) became the first in a six-part naturalistic family saga set partly in a village in Belgium and partly in Canada after the Second World War. The main character is a great-uncle whose unexpurgated stories stimulate the writer to delve into family secrets and long-concealed chronicles. The author himself also appears in the last part of *Het schismatieke schrijven* (Schismatic Writing, 2005), to explain his position and his intentions. *Angélique* (2003), a short story and stage monologue, is about a nun who was raped in the Congo who returns to Belgium, to miserable care. Erik Vlamincck teaches at the Writers' Academy in Antwerp and chairs of the Association of Flemish Authors.

The Flemish author Erik Vlamincck has never built cathedrals. This heir to Willem Elsschot erects beautiful small chapels in the Flemish countryside.

NRC HANDELSBLAD

One of the greatest talents among the new generation of Flemish writers.

DE STEM

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Suikerspin (2007)
286 pp

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Wereldbibliotheek
Spuistraat 283
NL - 1012 VR Amsterdam
TEL.: +31 20 638 18 99
FAX: +31 20 638 44 91
E-MAIL: info@wereldbibliotheek.nl
WEBSITE: www.wereldbibliotheek.nl



Entertaining rendering of recent history



Marc Reugebrink

The Big Delay

The seductive promise of 1968 of change and prosperity gave way within fewer than ten years by the *No future!* slogan of the punks. *Het grote uitstel* (The Big Delay), which is set between 1976 and 1989, covers the aftermath of '68. Marc Reugebrink couples the sexual revolution to its political

counterpart, and, in doing so, has produced one of the most remarkable Dutch-language novels of 2007. It was awarded the Gouden Uil in 2008, the most important and best-known literary prize of Flanders.

The narrative perspective is a clever one with the reader consistently knowing more than the main character Daniël Winfried Rega, through whom the story unfolds. Daniël seems incapable of fully understanding what is happening to him. We follow him from schooldays, influenced by the left-wing spirit of the times in the 'Che' youth club somewhere in the Dutch backwoods, via his time as a vaguely Marxist student, through teacher training in Groningen, to adulthood with vague ambitions and blurred political ideals in West Berlin.

Rega sheds his radical plumage more as a consequence of his gullibility than opportunism. He has always been a fellow-traveller. He knows of left-wing guerrillas fighting in South America, of Ulrike Meinhof hanging herself in her cell in Stammheim, but he prefers to be involved with his girlfriend, his head trapped blissfully between her legs. It is only fitting that he should eventually end up working in a sex club in Berlin (admittedly displaying the 'right' colour: *Das Rote Kabarett*).

'Rega was happy': from this opening sentence Reugebrink manoeuvres skilfully to the end as the Wall falls on 9 November 1989. 'And we, yes, we were happy that night, happy through and through. Yes, I believe so.' Significantly, the final sentence has changed from singular to plural. Along the way he hilariously debunks the former ultra-left rhetoric, while not renouncing his ideals of greater equality and social justice, and implicitly raising questions about the essence of political and social engagement, and the Utopian aspect of literature.

Het grote uitstel is a successful serious and yet entertaining rendering of recent history, evoked with great precision (and by means of pop hits typical of the times, such as 'Almost Cut My Hair' by CSNY or Madonna's 'Like a Virgin', for example). A fascinating political novel.



photo Koen Broos

Poet, essayist and novelist Marc Reugebrink (b. 1960) studied Dutch and English at Groningen University. He made his debut as a poet in 1988 with *Komgrond* (Backland) which earned him the Van der Hoogt Prize in 1989. He worked as editor for several literary magazines and wrote as a newspaper critic. His first novel, *Wild vlees* (Proud Flesh) appeared in 1998, the same year that he moved to Ghent (in Belgium), where he still lives. His collection of essays *De inwijkeling* (Immigrant) was published in 2002, and his novel *Touchdown* in 2004. He has been editor and editorial secretary of the Flemish literary magazine *Yang* since 2001.

Reugebrink has sublimely combined history, the psychological development of his main character and his sexual yearnings in language that is pretty unique, and rocks just as hard as the punk section from the soundtrack to this novel.

NRC HANDELSBLAD

Marc Reugebrink has written a beautiful and important book.

DE GROENE AMSTERDAMMER

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Het grote uitstel (2007)
320 pp

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Meulenhoff/Manteau
Mechelsesteenweg 203
B - 2018 Antwerp
TEL.: +32 3 285 72 00
FAX: +32 3 285 72 99
E-MAIL: harold.polis@standaarduitgeverij.be
WEBSITE:
www.standaarduitgeverij.be/meulenhoffmanteau



Recent publications

Gerbrand Bakker
Ovenpà er der stille



This year several translations of *Boven is het stil*, the best-selling and prize-winning Dutch novel written by Gerbrand Bakker, have been published. David Colmer's English translation (*The Twin*) was published by Harvill Secker (UK) and Scribe (Australia). Andreas Ecke translated the book for Suhrkamp (*Oben ist es still*) and Birthe Lundsgaard made the Danish translation for Gyldendal (*Ovenpà er der stille*).

More translations are to come: in April 2009 the book will be published in America by Archipelago Books and Elisabetta Svaluto Moreolo is working on the Italian translation for Iperborea. Turkish (Aykiri), French (Gallimard), Korean (Moonji) and probably yet more translations will follow, as this novel got many good reviews in the national and international press.

J.M. Coetzee called the book 'A novel of restrained tenderness and laconic humour.'

'This is a novel of great brilliance and subtlety.' PAUL BINDING (*THE INDEPENDENT*)
'This is a beautifully written book – its lustre lies in the clear simplicity of language as well as the authenticity of Helmer's internal dialogue.' RUTH WILDGUST (*THE SUNDAY BUSINESS POST*)

Hugo Claus
Nedonkocana preteklost

(Onvoltooid verleden)

Translated into Slovenian by
Mateja Seliskar for Modrijan

Louis Couperus
[(De stille kracht)]

(The Hidden Force)

Translated into Chinese by
Yongmin Huang for Shanghai Literature
and Arts Publishing House

Adriaan van Dis
Repatriated

(Familieziek)

Translated into English by
David Colmer for Heinemann

Anna Enquist
[(Het geheim)]

(The Secret)

Translated into Armenian by
A. Nazarian for Zangak-97

Laia Fàbregas

La nena dels nou dits

(Het meisje met de negen vingers)

Translated into Catalan by
Maria Rosich Andreu for Columna

Arnon Grunberg

Tirza

(Tirza)

Translated into German by
Rainer Kersten for Diogenes

A.F.Th. van der Heijden

Treibsand urbar machen

(Drijfzand koloniseren)

Translated into German by
Helga van Beuningen for Suhrkamp

Arthur Japin

[Be-enej Lucia]

(In Lucia's Eyes)

Translated into Hebrew by
Rachèle Liberman for Keter

Mensje van Keulen

Posljednji gosti

(De laatste gasten)

Translated into Croatian by
Maja Weikert for Andrijici

Tom Lanoye

'n Slagterseun met 'n brilletjie

(Een slagerszoon met een brilletje)

Translated into Afrikaans by
Daniel Hugo for Protea Boekhuis

Harry Mulisch

Siegfried

(Siegfried)

Translated into Romanian by
Gheorghe Nicolaescu for Univers

Jan Jacob Slauerhoff

La révolte de Guadalajara

(De opstand van Guadalajara)

Translated into French by
Daniel Cunin for Circé

Simon Vestdijk

Çalgili Bahçe

(De koperen tuin)

Translated into Turkish by
Gül Özlen for Versus

Leon de Winter

Porsche' em do ziemi obiecanej

(SuperTex)

Translated into Polish by
Ryszard Turczyn for Twój Styl

Jan Wolkers

Türk Lokumu

(Turkish Delight)

Translated into Turkish by
Burcu Duman for Versus

Most of these books were covered previously in our *10 Books brochures*. For a complete list of translations of Dutch fiction, see: www.nlpvf.nl/translations

10 BOOKS FROM HOLLAND AND FLANDERS

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EDITORIAL BOARD

Carlo van Baelen, Maria Vlaar, Henk Pröpper, Greet Ramael, Ingrid Mersel

CONTRIBUTORS

Onno Blom, Jos Borré, Karin Broer, Marlies Hoff, Herman Jacobs, Marja Pruis, Victor Schiferli

TRANSLATION

George Hall, Liz Waters

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

WEBSITE: www.nlpvf.nl



VFL

Generaal Van Merlenstraat 30

B4-42600 Berchem

TEL.: +32 3 270 31 61

FAX: +32 3 270 31 60

E-MAIL: info@fondsvoordeletteren.be

WEBSITE: www.fondsvoordeletteren.be