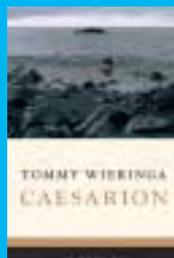


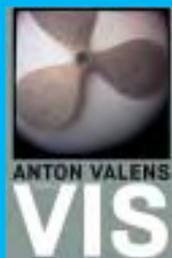
10 Books

from Holland and Flanders



Tommy Wieringa

Thomas Rosenboom



Marie Kessels

Anton Valens



J.J. Voskuil

Nicolette Smabers



Gerbrand Bakker

Bart Koubaa



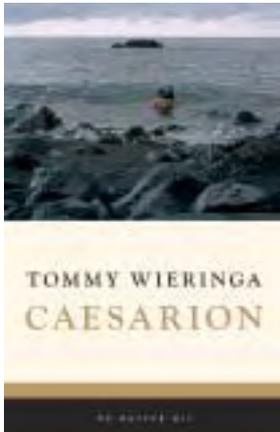
Bart Moeyaert

 Foundation for the
Production and
Translation of
Dutch Literature

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Literature
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In search of a true identity



Tommy Wieringa

Caesarion

The seed of Tommy Wieringa's new novel, the hefty *Caesarion*, was planted even before the resounding success of its predecessor, *Joe Speedboat*. Several years ago Wieringa read a report about the child conceived by Cicciolina with Jeff Koons. The porn star and the anything-goes artist who fills the world's museums with

überkitsch had called their son Ludwig, after Ludwig of Bavaria, who plundered the state coffers to build insanely elaborate castles high in the mountains. A child as conceptual art.

Wieringa wanted to know what kind of person would emerge from such a twisted, crazy, mythical marriage. What would his motivations be? The novel is in some senses the answer to that question.

As a boy, Ludwig Unger – Wieringa's hero is also called Ludwig – lives with his mother on the edge of the cliff, in King's Ness, a small village on the east coast of England, in a woodworm-infested timber house. All goes well for several years, until the sea washes away so much of the coast that they have to abandon their home, which is lost to a storm. 'The house toppled over its empty axis with astonishing lightness and slid groaning and screeching into the depths.'

Ludwig's settled existence ends in that instant and he sets off in search of his true identity and a place that can offer him a sense of homecoming. He seeks a new equilibrium between himself and his mother and resolves to get to know his father, the destructive, megalomaniac artist Bodo Schultz, who left when he was small. 'Only destruction,' Schultz preaches, 'has a permanent character.'

Ludwig travels the world in his quest, from Alexandria via England to Los Angeles, Vienna and Prague, places where Ludwig's mother revives her old profession as a porn actress. When his mother becomes terminally ill he returns with her to her birthplace, a rural farmhouse in the Dutch province of Groningen.

The apparently infinite roadtrip ends in El Real, deep in the primeval forests of Panama, where Ludwig hopes to find his father. The scenes set there reflect the famous ending of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Wieringa plays the game of references with verve, but more important in *Caesarion* is Ludwig's story, however dark and full of loss, loneliness, deception and destruction. Wieringa's writing, with its driving pace, is compelling and the book sparkles with a delight in storytelling, making *Caesarion* impossible to resist.

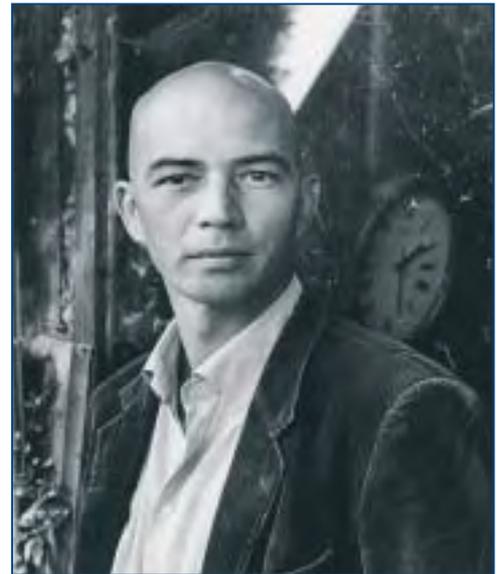


photo Roeland Fossen

Tommy Wieringa (b. 1967) grew up in the Netherlands and the tropics. He debuted with the novel *Dormantique's manco*. His breakthrough came with *Alles over Tristan* (*All About Tristan*, 2002), which was awarded the Halewijn Prize and nominated for the AKO Literature Prize. His next novel, *Joe Speedboot* (2005), has also become very successful: it won him the F. Bordewijk Prize, has sold over 300,000 copies, has been translated into over a dozen languages, and will be made into a film.

A more than worthy successor to *Joe Speedboat*. *DE MORGEN*

A novel full of vitality, fine writing, and flawless psychological insights. *VRIJ NEDERLAND*

The pleasure in storytelling leaps from the pages. *TROUW*

After a while, anyone who reads Wieringa will experience personally the rare, animated lightness of his central character and glide through the shoals of life with *Caesarion's* aid. Fearless and nimble. *KNACK*

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Caesarion (2009)
366 pp

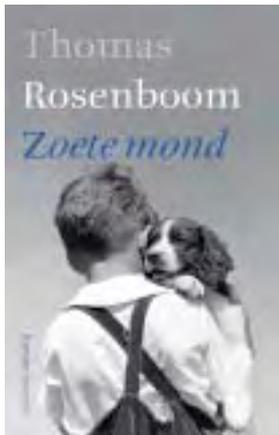
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OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Joe Speedboat. London: Portobello Books, 2009. Also in German (München: Carl Hanser, 2006 / Deutscher Taschenbuch, 2009), in Italian (Milano: Iperborea, 2008), in French (Arles: Actes Sud, 2008), in Finnish (Helsinki: Avain, 2008), in Spanish (Barcelona: Destino, 2008), in Czech (Praha: Argo, 2008) and in Polish (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2009).

Marvellous portrayal of human failings



Thomas Rosenboom

Sweet Mouth

SWEET MOUTH, the title of this doorstopping fifth novel by Thomas Rosenboom, is borrowed from the author's childhood when he was occasionally allowed to give himself a 'sweet mouth' by stuffing handfuls of sweets into his mouth all at once, producing an immediate sense of well-being.

The title is of course a metaphor for the world conjured up here by Rosenboom. He describes the lives of the villagers of the fictional Angelen on the banks of the Rhine, a place thrown out of kilter by an excess of feeling. When a beluga whale comes swimming up the river, the village is captivated by the animal and is swamped by a wave of emotion.

Rosenboom plays on all our senses at once in his story of obsession and tragedy. *Sweet Mouth*, like all Rosenboom's novels, excludes any possibility of a happy ending, as even the prologue suggests. The outcome, in essence, is contained in the short story that tells of the catching of the white whale called Moby, which precedes the main body of the novel. The final sentence of the prelude runs: 'Yes, he had his freedom back. But he was alone.'

The loneliness in *Sweet Mouth* is that of two men, Rebert van Buyten and Jan de Loper. Rebert van Buyten is an outsider who settles in the village as a vet and soon has the villagers eating out of his hand, more by chance than by his own wisdom or skill. Rebert is a typical Rosenboom creation: unduly self-effacing, somewhat anxious, acting on misguided impressions of other people. Jan de Loper is in many ways his opposite. Born into wealth and the owner of a beautiful house on the edge of Angelen, he cannot resist brightening his empty life with practical jokes. He garners fame by travelling across Africa and by walking to Paris in slippers, then writing it all up in the local press, until the braggart becomes a hero in his own village.

The two men grow increasingly and fiercely competitive. Jan de Loper does not shrink from the most childish of tricks, even dressing up for St. Nicholas' Day as the saint's helper Black Pete and throwing sweets in Rebert's face. Both are battling for the favours of the charming Louise Benda, although in truth they are trying to gain the attention of the whole world through her. The mild-mannered vet and the compulsive joker grimly struggle to break out of their isolation, to be alone no more.

Anyone who reads the prologue will know their efforts are in vain. Angelen is the stage on which Thomas Rosenboom's marvellous portrayal of human failings is played out. *Sweet Mouth* inspires laughter but ultimately, more than anything, humility and compassion in the face of human loneliness.



photo Allard de Witte

Thomas Rosenboom (b. 1956) is the author of bestselling, much-praised novels like *Gewassen vles* ('Washed Flesh', 1994), *Publieke werken* ('Public Works', 1999), *De nieuwe man* ('The New Man', 2003) and the novella *Spitzen* ('Point Shoes', 2004). His novels, set in well documented historical backgrounds, always have an ambitious main character and a riveting plot. In a subtle, often cruelly humorous way, his characters are led to inevitable ruin. All this makes his novels real page-turners. His work has been translated in German, French, Hungarian, Spanish and Danish.

A typical Rosenboom novel: tragic and amusing, ominous yet hopeful.

NRC HANDELSBLAD

The charm of the book: it tells its story through an apparent naïveté in a moving and simultaneously wonderful way about the motives and mechanisms that lie at the base of human relationships. [...] Between the charming lines the story holds a sense of oppression.

DE STANDAARD

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Zoete mond (2009)
512 pp

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OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Das Liebeswerk (*Gewassen vles*) Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000. Also in Spanish (Barcelona: Mondadori, 1998).
Den nye mand (*De nieuwe man*). København: Gyldendal, 2006. Also in German (München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2009).
Offentlige arbejder (*Publieke werken*). København: Gyldendal, 2002. Also in German (München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2004), in French (Paris: Stock, in prep.), in Hungarian (Budapest: Gondolat, 2009).
Tango (*Spitzen*). München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2005 / Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 2007. Also in French (Paris: Stock, 2006), in Danish (København: Gyldendal, 2005).



Rendering the invisible visible

Marie Kessels

Rough



MARIE KESSELS WRITES novels set inside the often fickle minds of her protagonists who are willing to go to any length to defend their autonomy. The subject of this new novel is blindness. Gemma, the protagonist, is injured in a traffic accident which leaves her sight permanently damaged. ‘It happened so fast that I can hardly remember it. A terrible moment before the blow, then the ear-splitting sound as of an

explosion, a noise in which my pain (which must have been there) was lost.’

The novel’s short, poignant chapters describe how Gemma tries to rebuild her life. Now excluded from the world in which she is visible to others, she sets out to map it on nocturnal walks through the neighbourhood during which she registers every tile and drainpipe she passes. She thus discovers a new city, a ‘new nocturnal universe’. But she doesn’t only use her sense of touch, she also asks others to read to her and she learns Braille, using her new skills to read *Blindness* by Jose Saramago, *The Light that Failed* by Rudyard Kipling and *Touching the Rock* by John Hull. The old blues singer, Blind Willie McTell, also fascinates her.

Kessels has always been a sensitive and sensual author and, in this novel, she immerses the reader in the effect of invisibility – the smell of rain in the air, or how the sounds of a busy city can evoke a panorama. The tone of the novel is, however, never melancholy or plaintive, rather it is lighthearted with determination fairly jumping off its pages. As always with Kessels, the story is not in the plot but in the imaginative details and original ideas – now formulated by Gemma. *Ruw* (Rough) does what literature should: render the invisible visible.



photo Tessa Posthuma de Boer

Boa, the 1991 debut novel of Marie Kessels (b. 1954), is about a young woman who locks herself into her own house for one summer. Kessels followed this with *Een sierlijke duik* (‘A Graceful Dive’, 1993). Her third novel, *De god met gouden ballen* (‘The God with Golden Balls’, 1995) was nominated for the Libris Literature Prize and was reprinted several times. Her three most recent books are not novels, but meditations on love, the mind, the body, eroticism and art. She won the Multatuli Prize for her 1998 book *Ongemakkelijke portretten* (‘Uneasy Portraits’). *Het nietigste* (‘The Most Insignificant’), a collection of short, skilful contemplations and reflections, was published in 2002 and *Niet vervloekt* (‘Not Cursed’) appeared in 2005. *Ruw* (‘Rough’) is her fourth novel and has been brilliantly received by the press.

Ruw is more than a novel evoking what it is like to become blind. In some senses, it is also a plea for better reading, slower reading and for the pleasure this provides. *HET PAROOL*

Kessels manages to maintain a wonderful balance between being a victim and being determined, between being hopeless and being optimistic, and between being resigned and being assertive. *NRC HANDELSBLAD*

This novel’s victory is the alienation which *Ruw* imposes on the reader. Do we ever look properly, considering that Gemma shows us that you can experience so much more using smell, taste, hearing and touch? (...) This novel is a gem.

DE VOLKSKRANT

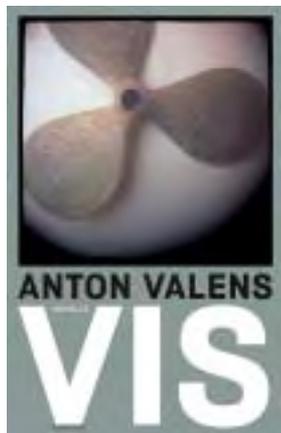
PUBLISHING DETAILS

Ruw (2009)
207 pp

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Wonderful tale of initiation



Anton Valens

Fish

ANTON VALENS' characters invariably attempt to make an unknown world their own. In his widely praised debut *Meesters in de hygiëne* ('Master in Hygiene', 2004) the central character is an art student who works

as cleaner for lonely elderly people and becomes caught up in their life stories. In the novella *Vis* ('Fish') we meet an unemployed artist who having signed up with a fishing boat that trawls the bottom of the Wadden Sea for plaice, dab and sole soon has to revise any romantic notion he had about fishing. Life on board is tough. Between casting and hauling in the nets there are only a few hours to sleep and to eat. The work itself is dirty and cruel. The fish are gutted alive, stripped of their entrails with a knife. As for the crew, the atmosphere between them is tense in the extreme. The narrator's friends Addie and Fred in particular, who found him the job, do not get along. By refusing to take sides, the narrator throws away any chance of getting to know Fred better. He remains an outsider, all the more so after the captain is heavily fined for gutting undersized fish and the blame falls on him.

His insecure position and his artistic calling make the narrator an ideal observer. The descriptions of overpowering nature are intense. Valens paints the intricate and subtle colours of the sea and sky – their greys, greens and blue, shot through with gold and silver light from the sun and the moon – contrasting them with the inferno down in the hold and the kitchen: hot and filthy and dominated by the pounding of engines. Against this background the story grows menacing, a mood reinforced by references to the biblical story of Jonah and to Melville's *Moby Dick*. Of course hunting for flatfish has little in common with whaling and the captain of the DH731 does not resemble the vengeful Ahab. But like Melville, Valens creates an oppressive atmosphere and steers his novella towards a fateful conclusion.



Anton Valens (b. 1964) studied painting at the Rietveld Academy and the Rijksacademie. In 2004 he published his debut novel *Meesters in de hygiëne* ('Master in Hygiene'), about his experiences in home care. The press was unanimous in praising the novel, which was reprinted three times and awarded both the Maarten Toonder / Geert Jan Lubberhuizen Prize and the Lucy B and C.W. van der Hoogt Prize. Valens followed it up with a sequel, *Dweiloorlog* ('Mop War', 2008), and went on to publish the travel book *Ik wilde naar de rand van Beijing* ('I Wanted to Go to the Edge of Beijing', 2008) about his visit to China. This novella *Vis* ('Fish', 2009) too met with an extremely positive reception.

A wonderful tale of initiation in which Valens succeeds in raising the anecdotal to the level of symbolism.

VRIJ NEDERLAND

A sparkling novella about the divide between men of logic and men of habit. [...] Valens maintains a subtle and astonished tone to the end. NRC HANDELSBLAD

The first sensations in Fish are created by diesel, salt and male sweat. [...] Only later do we see Valens' projection of something bigger, something that has to do with a guilty conscience and feeling aggrieved, and with the chances you're given in life, or take – something we often experience wordlessly in everyday life. DE VOLKSKRANT

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Vis (2009)
138 pp

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TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Maître en hygiëne (Meester in de hygiëne). Arles: Actes Sud, in prep.

A rich psychological sketch



J.J. Voskuil

Inside the Skin

HE WAS IN A QUANDARY RIGHT to the end,' writes Lousje Voskuil-Haspers in the foreword to *Inside the Skin*, 'because of the intimate nature of the book and his not wanting to hurt anyone.' The author, who died last year, had misgivings about publication and left the final decision to his wife. It is hardly surprising

that Voskuil had his doubts, since *Inside the Skin* is a remarkable account of the emotional roller-coaster the author finds himself on when he falls in love with his best friend's wife. There can be few books in world literature that expose so inexorably the contradictions in the author's own attitude and feelings. The central character wants to be consistent but is tossed back and forth by his emotions. All this against the background of a 1950s intellectual milieu in which opposition to bourgeois morality appears to be the most important of values.

At the start of the novel Maarten is confronted by his friend Paul's apparently untroubled decision to live a 'bourgeois life'. Paul has become a teacher in a provincial town, with a modern house and a child on the way. Maarten and Nicolien resent the fact that he now lives as he does, despite all his talk about 'resistance' and 'Paris'. Nevertheless, Maarten too baulks at following their mutual friend Henriette, who has taken the plunge and moved to Paris. He knows that in the end he will 'capitulate' and seek a career. The thing he holds against Paul most of all is his refusal to acknowledge his 'cowardice'.

Against this background, Maarten falls in love with Paul's wife Rosalie. It is fascinating to watch how at first Rosalie chiefly annoys him (Maarten and Nicolien see her as the evil genius behind Paul's bourgeois existence), until he falls for her charms. He wrestles with concepts like loyalty and longs to act alone, to be tough, a 'plebeian', a 'commercial traveller' (the opposite of the intellectual in this milieu), but of course an inhibited intellectual is what he remains.

Voskuil's technique, as in his other novels, is to report events, conversations and reactions with great precision. One significant difference between this and the author's other novels is that *Inside the Skin* is written in the first person, making it seem closer both to the author and to the reader. It is a painful account, in which the author spares neither himself nor his wife and friends, making his wife's decision to publish particularly courageous.

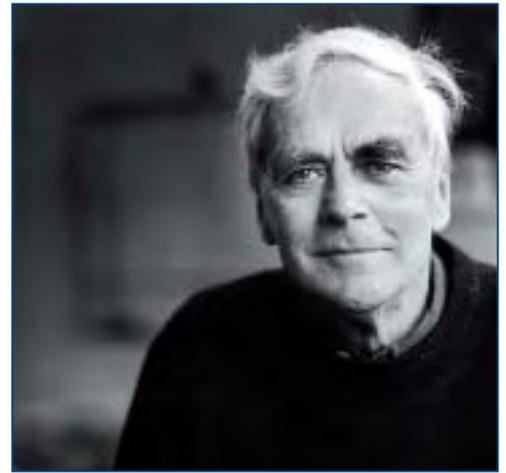


photo Vincent Mentzel

J.J. Voskuil (1926–2008) did not publish much in his lifetime. After *Bij nader inzien* ('On Second Thoughts') in 1963 there was silence until *The Bureau* began appearing in 1995, a seven-part series of novels about Voskuil's job as a senior civil servant at a research institute.

Voskuil himself said of his career as an author that he wrote only if he had 'a problem'. In *On Second Thoughts* he puts paid to the illusions of friendship, in *The Bureau* it is the turn of the alliance he had imagined existed between him and his colleagues, while *Inside the Skin* lets fly at marriage and loyalty.

A merciless self-analysis and an indirect but rigorous settling of accounts.

NEDERLANDS DAGBLAD

A disillusioning look at the constancy of the supposedly deeper things in life, such as emotions, feelings and passionate desires.

DE GROENE AMSTERDAMMER

The things that remain valuable in this posthumous confession are reminiscent of the pent-up rage with which W.F. Hermans attacked bourgeois morality and the grim analysis offered by existentialist authors like Camus and Sartre. TROUW

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Binnen de huid (2009)
427 pp

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A touching and intimate family saga

Nicolette Smabers

The Gas and Electricity Man



NICOLETTE SMABERS once said in an interview, that ‘story telling is an act of love’. This statement characterizes the way she writes. Withholding important information from children, thus denying them the right to the truth, and resulting in a lopsided view of reality, plays a role in all of Smabers’ work.

Sixteen year-old Eva Porceleyn learns that her parents are planning to emigrate from The Hague in the Netherlands to California. This, to them, is the fulfilment of a long-cherished dream, and they hope that their daughter will be as excited as they are. Instead she bursts into tears. Emigrate to America? ‘You choose, Eva,’ says her father after hours of pleading, ‘between coming to the land of oranges and orchards, and growing sour in this damp and chilly country.’

Eva wants to stay on in the Netherlands, and she wants to become a teacher. Besides, she is in love. But if she stays, her parents and brothers will be gone, and she’ll have to live with her Uncle Leo and Auntie Amanda. Faced with this choice, Eva tries to understand the fraught relationship between her father and her uncle. She delves into her childhood, when her father told her stories every night, fairy tales, Bible stories and memories of the former Dutch East Indies, where the family lived before Eva was born, interwoven with stories about the fortunes of the Porceleyn family.

However, all the stories, fast paced and told with great delight, conceal important details. Eva discovers that some wounds are hard to heal, and that the past ‘is under a spell of silence’. Her search takes her to the 1920s, to a school playground in a town in the middle of Java, where her father and his brothers, children at the time, engaged in a fight which also raged outside: the one between black and white Dutchmen. *De man van gas en licht* (The Gas and Electricity Man) is a touching and intimate family saga showing the power of story-telling cutting across oceans and generations.



photo Mark Kohn

Nicolette Smabers (b. 1948) wrote her debut, a well-received collection of short stories entitled *De Franse tuin* (‘The French Garden’), in 1983. She followed this with the novellas *Portret van mijn engel* (‘Portrait of my Angel’, 1987) and *Chinezen van glas* (‘Chinese in Glass’, 1991), and several children’s books. In 1992, she was awarded the Halewyn Prize. After several years of silence, she published her first novel, *Stiefmoeder* (‘Stepmother’) in 2003. In 2004, a new collection of her first three books, entitled *De Franse tuin. Verhalen en novellen*, (‘The French Garden. Stories and Novellas’) was published. *De man van gas en licht* (‘The Gas and Electricity Man’) is her second novel.

The press on *STIEFMOEDER* (STEPMOTHER):

After twelve years she is back with a brilliant novel.
TROUW

A beautiful composition of carefully styled, evocative prose. *HET PAROOL*

Subdued and highly moving. *DE VOLKSKRANT*

A wonderful novel. *STANDAARD DER LETTEREN*

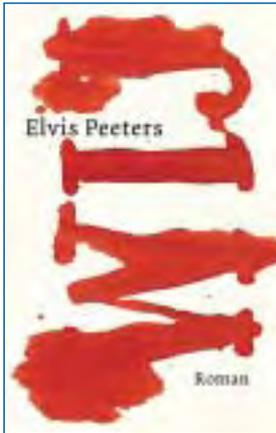
PUBLISHING DETAILS

De man van gas en licht (2009)
302 pp

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Unsettling, raw novel



Elvis Peeters

We

THE NEW, controversial novel *Wij* (We) by Elvis Peeters is about eight under-age boys and girls in a close-knit club who disparage the worlds of school and adulthood as empty and boring. Free and secluded in a shed, they dispel tedium with uninhibited sexual games, continually shifting their limits: they explore

each others' bodies and their own, they make love listlessly, they have to guess which objects are being inserted into their orifices. When one of them dies as the consequence of rough penetration, even this fails to move them. With no thought of morality, they take to the world of internet sex and prostitution, and continue to believe that they have full control of their own lives and liberty. When the girls begin to tire of this, the boys introduce two new girls who are prepared to fulfil a subordinate, occasionally humiliating role and to prostitute themselves. The book does not conclude with a drama, catharsis nor repentance and the young people even manage to save themselves in confrontation with underworld figures. No matter what they do, they escape apparently intact.

The young people take turns in the first person in telling how they think about and what they do, shamelessly and unaffectedly, how they look at life, and how much they distance themselves from every normative ideal. 'We had no benchmarks, no measures, we just did things, everything that life invited us to do.' They are not motivated by rebellion, negativism, pessimism about their future, or desperation. At most, they are characterized by a derisive rejection of their parents' lifestyle. They are not subject to discomfort or remorse, they refer to themselves as 'young, not perverse'. But, enclosed in their morally free state, their lack of inhibition puts pressure on the general sense of values.

Elvis Peeters is not aiming at easy success. In his striking realism and the detached tone of the young people's narratives, he reaches into the unfathomable depths of the existential feeling that prevents this group of adolescents from entering into the adult world. They regard this world as one of universal frustration, compromise and non-fulfilment, whereas they champion absolute freedom and autonomy. *Wij* is a stunning novel that no one can read and remain unmoved.



photo Stephan Vanfleteren

Elvis Peeters is a musician, performer, playwright, and screen writer. He made his debut with *Het uur van de aap* ('The Hour of the Monkey', 1992), followed by *Wij dolen in de nacht en worden verteerd door het vuur* ('We Wander in the Night and Are Consumed by Fire', 1995), and *Brancusi* (1999). *Calvados* (2001), contains a broad selection of old and new stories and dialogues. Elvis Peeters has collected his poems in *Wat overblijft is het verlangen* ('What Remains is the Yearning', 2001), and *Dichter* ('Poet/Closer', 2008). *Spa* (1998), was his first novel. He reached a broad public with his novel *De ontelbaren* ('The Uncountables', 2005), which was nominated for important literary prizes. It has as its theme a major influx of immigrants who completely disrupt a lethargic Western country. His latest novel, *Wij*, has received a great deal of attention in the press.

With Wij Peeters again demonstrates that he is a consistent thinker. DE VOLKSKRANT

Wij is a hard and effective portrait of children who play on the rubbish dump of the bored welfare state. BOEK

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Wij (2009)
173 pp

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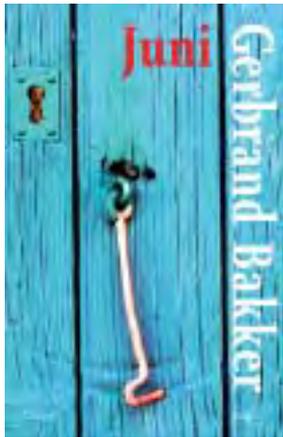
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TRANSLATED TITLES

Brezštevlni (*De ontelbaren*). Nova Gorica: Educa, 2008.



Tragedy and powerlessness



Gerbrand Bakker

June

JUNI (June), the second novel by Gerbrand Bakker, begins astonishingly enough from the perspective of the former Dutch queen, Juliana, who on 17 June 1969 paid a working visit to the district of Wieringerwaard. Queen Juliana, known for occasionally breaking with protocol, abruptly turns her attention to a woman and child arriving late, by bicycle.

The Kaan family, to which the mother and child belong, is central to the rest of the book. Forty years on, Anna Kaan has ensconced herself in the straw on the top floor of the old barn, with a bottle of advocaat and a packet of her favourite biscuits. Granddaughter Dieke, five years old, wonders why grandma refuses to come down.

Bit by bit, from continually changing perspectives, the reader learns about the drama that took place on the day of the royal visit. Anna's two-year-old daughter was run over by the village baker and killed. Interior monologues reveal how each of the characters experienced that day and how it affected the rest of their lives. Now, in baking hot weather, two of the three brothers are tidying the little girl's grave. They all seem to have failed in life. Klaas, the eldest son and the only one married with a child, does practically nothing these days. The cows have gone and the farmhouse is slowly falling apart for lack of repairs. The youngest son, Johan, speaks slowly and uninhibitedly as the result of a motorcycle accident. Son Jan, in some ways the central figure in the book, has moved away to live on the island of Texel.

As the day nears its end, father and sons make one final attempt to get mother down from the hayloft, but only the empty advocaat bottle ends up on the ground floor. Johan is returned to his sheltered apartment. Jan catches the train for the ferry home, although he seems to be having second thoughts.

Bakker's concise, sometimes rather languid style is used to great effect in evoking the world of a village in North Holland forty years ago: porridge for breakfast, the baker's new Volkswagen van, the children dressed in hand-knitted cardigans for the queen's visit.

As in *Boven is het stil* (The Twin), *Juni* has a farm setting, so little is said and emotions are never expressed. Bakker's unemotional style guards against sentimentality – we are after all dealing with the death of a child – without being any the less moving for that. We see family relationships that have run aground, leaving nothing but incomprehension and stifled rage, but as in his debut there are moments to make us laugh or smile.

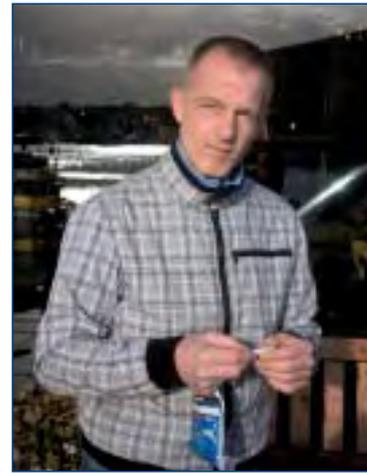


photo Bob Bronshoff

Gerbrand Bakker (b. 1962) is the third son in a farming family of seven children. He studied Dutch at the University of Amsterdam, worked as a translator of subtitles for nature films and three years ago qualified as a horticulturalist. He wrote books for young people before publishing his first novel in 2006, *Boven is het stil* (The Twin), a remarkable book that immediately sold well, delighted the critics, won several literary prizes and was translated into English, German, French, Italian, Turkish, Danish, Norwegian and Korean.

The portrayal of the Kaan family is impressive, not to say deeply moving. [...] June is a heartrending novel, with a tone entirely its own. DAGBLAD VAN HET NOORDEN

Bakker once again proves himself a master at creating atmosphere. Abundant sensuous details pervade the reader's consciousness: the mother's hips that shrink and grow on her bicycle saddle, the swallows flying soundlessly in and out, the damp concrete floor that heralds a shower of rain. [...] Bakker is and remains every inch a writer. TROUW

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Juni (2009)
272 pp

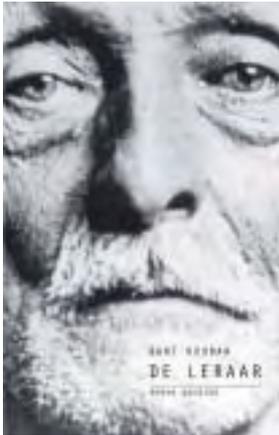
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OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

The twin (*Boven is het stil*). London: Harvill Secker, 2008 / Brooklyn (NY): Archipelago Books, 2009. Also in German (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), in French (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), in Danish (København: Gyldendal, 2008), in Norwegian (Oslo: Arneberg, 2009), in Italian (Iperborea, in prep.), in Turkish (Aykiri, in prep.), in Korean (Moonji, in prep.).

Teacher novel evolves into a horror story



Bart Koubaa

The Teacher

BART KOUBAA'S NEW NOVEL *De leraar* (The Teacher) is mainly narrated in the first person by a Dutch-language teacher, advanced in years, nicknamed The Crow. His pupils at the technical school, are not interested in the subject and he has great difficulty in getting them to do anything. Unlike his openly embittered colleagues, he has become resigned in his cynicism and quietly conservative in his opinions. He even absorbs the news that he is suffering from prostate cancer quite meekly. Since the death of his mother, he has lived alone, his father, a military man, had vanished long ago and never re-established contact. The Crow had also been a soldier, a sniper, before he turned to teaching.

Reading between the lines of his narrative, what comes through is his care and anxiety for one particular pupil to whom he is drawn. He also refers to an 'incident'; several pupils had attacked him and pulled down his trousers. The scene was filmed and unexpectedly shown at the school party and on internet. Yet he does not press charges.

Slowly it becomes clear that The Crow is holding the one boy about whom he was so concerned as a prisoner in his cellar, and that this boy was one of his attackers. After an incident with the boy, The Crow takes a plane to the USA to shoot his recently traced father. A report in the last chapter of the book discloses finally that The Crow is a serial killer, schizophrenic and maniac, who has stored the dissected bodies of his victims in freezers in order to eat them.

The book seems for some time to be dealing with a disillusioned teacher, a lonely man scarred by a few dramatic experiences in his youth, no longer expecting much from life but nevertheless cherishing principles of good citizenship. His insensitive tone towards the rest of the world appears to be necessary to shield himself from a sense of impotence. Nothing in this Flemish teacher's narrative, an engrossing psychological portrait of a loner, prepares the reader for what develops into a horror story of a completely derailed individual. Then all the separate motifs, hints and intriguing sayings suddenly coalesce and acquire significance and relevance. In the final revelation Koubaa places everything in a wider psychological context, through drawing a parallel with Albert Fish, a similar cannibal in his thirties. *De leraar* wrongfoots the readers for quite a while, before slapping them in the face and leaving them dumbfounded.



photo Laila Koubaa

Bart Koubaa (b. 1968) is a photographer and writer. His first novel *Vuur* ('Fire', 2000), set among gypsies, was awarded the Flemish debut prize and was widely distributed as part of a campaign to promote reading. *Lucht* ('Sky', 2005), is situated partly in Japan and partly in the USA, at the time of the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima. In 2007, Koubaa published *Het gebied van Nevski* ('The Nevski Region') about a writer who falls through the ice on a trip through Russia and has to relearn language as a consequence of brain damage. *De leraar* (2009) is Koubaa's fourth novel.

Phenomenal novel by Koubaa (...). In *De leraar* – readable, exciting, unsettling and critical of social structures – his talent rises to its full glory. *DE TELEGRAAF*

A constrictive, disquieting book, a challenging reflection on our reality, one that does not let you go. *TROUW*

Cleverly constructed novel. *DE VOLKSKRANT*

PUBLISHING DETAILS

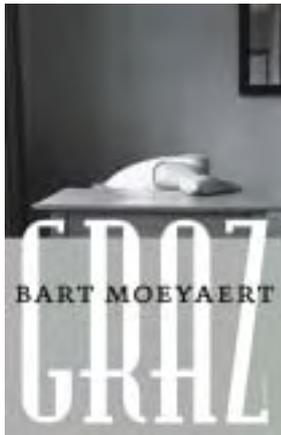
De leraar (2009)
283 pp

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A penetrating urban novella



Bart Moeyaert

Graz

BART MOEYAERT's new novel *Graz* was sparked by a repeat visit to that Austrian city at the invitation of the Graz Literary House, in a hotel room with a view. In the novella, the author projects himself in the fictitious figure of Herman Eichler, the business manager of 'Zum guten

Hirten' pharmacy opposite the hotel. The man is unmarried, stable, orderly and precise, a model of reliability. To his customers he gives much-appreciated support and good advice, as he describes himself as 'a good soul, an honest soul' as well as 'a poor searching soul'. In reality he is timid and has difficulty making contact. With women, even forward ones, he remains reserved. His father's authority weighs him down and when the pharmacy is renovated, he is unable to remove the old-fashioned name from the windows.

One day, right in front of the pharmacy a girl falls off her bicycle. He picks up the casualty's wallet and finds that it was not a girl but a boy. This knocks the pharmacist sideways and emotions suppressed deep down begin to stir. That evening he grows restless and, in the night, unable to sleep and driven by curiosity, he decides to deliver the wallet to the boy's address. On the way back, he allows himself to be seduced into a short sexual encounter with a man. Next morning he is still shaken up and no longer quite himself in his dealings with the neighbours. It makes him realize how distressing his isolation and loneliness are.

Bart Moeyaert's prose excels in its subtlety. Without actually naming emotions or referring directly to them, his description of ostensibly unimportant actions and behaviour skilfully evoke subdued longings. The city of Graz with its monuments forms an appealing backdrop to a series of walks undertaken by Eichler, one in the past during the daytime, and now a risky one in the present, at night. These are hesitant attempts to break free of his prescribed, apparently harmonious existence.

Eichler, pathetic, pitiful yet endearing, gradually wins the heart of the reader. *Graz* is an extraordinarily attractive urban novel in which Bart Moeyaert plucks at the heartstrings.

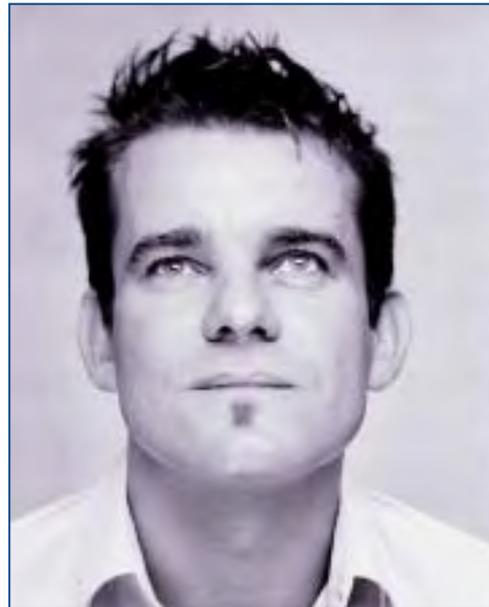


photo Diego Franssens

Bart Moeyaert (b. 1964) enjoys great renown as an author of children's novels and as a poet. In 2006 and 2007 he was the city poet of Antwerp, where he currently lives. All his novels, *Duet met valse noten* (*Duet with False Notes*), 1983, *Kus me* (*Kiss Me*), 1991, *Blote handen* (*Bare Hands*), 1995, *Mansoor, of hoe we Stine bijna doodkregen* (*Hazelwort, or how we almost got rid of Stine*), 1998, *Het is de liefde die we niet begrijpen* (*It is Love We Don't Understand*), 1999, *Broere* (*Brother*), 2000, *Luna van de boom* (*Tree Luna*), 2000, *De schepping* (*Creation*), 2003, and *Dani Bennoni*, 2004, have been awarded the most prestigious literary prizes. His readership comprises both adolescents and adults, and he wishes to make no distinction between them.

Moeyaert prefers to orient himself to the small rather than the large, so we shall not be reading about a storm. Moeyaert does not roar, he rustles. It is a pleasing sound.

NEDERLANDS DAGBLAD

With small, subtle shifts, Moeyaert succeeds in easing the initially ponderous story towards increasingly buoyant channels, gradually, skilfully, animating a dull old world.

A splendid novella. DE MORGEN

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Graz (2009)
101 pp

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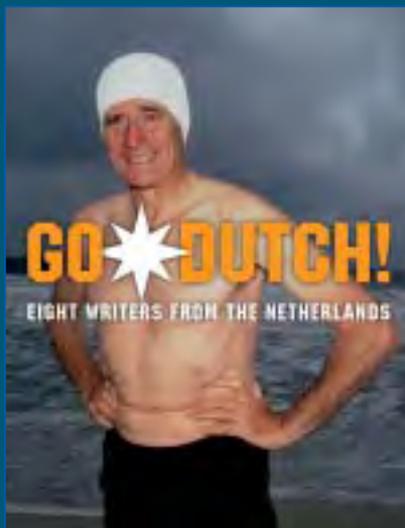
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SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Bare hands (*Blote handen*). Asheville, North Carolina: Front Street, 1998. Also in French (Paris: Seuil, 1999), in Italian (Milano: Bompiani, 1997), in German (Weinheim: Beltz & Gelberg, 1999), and in many other languages.
Brüder (*Broere*). München etc.: Carl Hanser, 2006. Also in English (Asheville, North Carolina: Front Street, 2005), in French (Rodez: Éditions du Rouergue, 2007), and in Korean (Seoul: JoongAng Books).
Duet desafinat (*Duet met valse noten*). Barcelona: Columna, 2001. Also in German (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 1998), in Japanese (Tokyo: Kumon Publishing, 1998).



Go*Dutch!



The Go Dutch! programme 2009-2010 will feature eight Dutch writers, including Tommy Wieringa and Otto de Kat, who will receive extra attention in the UK because their work has recently been translated into English: *Joe Speedboat* (transl. Sam Garrett for Portobello Books) and *Man on the move (De inscheper)* (transl. Sam Garrett for MacLehose Press). Both translations have been enthusiastically received in the British press.

But there have been other English translations of Dutch fiction published this year: *The Public Prosecutor (De PG)* by Jef Geeraerts (transl. Brian Doyle for Bitter Lemon Press), *The Portrait (Specht en zoon)* by Willem Jan Otten (transl. David Colmer for Scribe), *Wonder (De verwondering)* by Hugo Claus (transl. Michael Henry Heim for Archipelago), *The gift from Berlin (Het cadeau uit Berlijn)* by Lucette ter Borg (transl. Liedewij Hawke for Cormorant Books), *Back to the coast (Terug naar de kust)* by Saskia Noort (transl. Laura Vroomen for Bitter Lemon Press), *Rupert* by Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer (transl. Michele Hutchison for Open letter), *In a dark wood (Dis)* by Marcel Möring (transl. Shaun Whiteside for Fourth Estate), *The Reunion* by Simone van der Vlugt (transl. Michele Hutchison for Harper Press) and *Close-up* by Esther Verhoef (transl. Paul Vincent for Quercus).

Recent translations

H.M. van den Brink

Over vannet

(On the Water)

Translated into Norwegian by Geir Farner for Solum

Jeroen Brouwers

[Mères adéspotés]

(Numberless Days)

Translated into Greek by Ino van Dijk-Balta for Metaixmio

Maria Dermoût

[(De tienduizend dingen)]

(The Ten Thousand Things)

Translated into Chinese by Chen Li for Flower City Publishing

Adriaan van Dis

Il vagabondo

(The Walker)

Translated into Italian by Fulvio Ferrari for Iperborea

Willem Elsschot

Le bateau-citerne

(The Tanker)

Translated into French by Marnix Vincent for Le Castor Astral.

Renate Dorrestein

Porodična tajna

(A Crying Shame)

Translated into Serbian by Olivera Wieringa for Mono i Manjana

Tomas Lieske

Sumanlarin Gelini

(Dünya)

Translated into Turkish by Gül Özlen for Alef Yayinevi

Hans Münstermann

Das glückliche Jahr 1940

(The Happy Year, 1940)

Translated into German by Matthias Müller for Deutscher Taschenbuch

Cees Nooteboom

Nachts kommen die Füchse

(At Night the Foxes Come)

Translated into German by Helga van Beuningen for Suhrkamp

Jona Oberski

Masa Kanak-kanak

(Childhood)

Translated into Indonesian by Laurens Sipahelut for Pena Wormer

Marieke van der Pol

Brudereisen

(Bride Flight)

Translated into Norwegian by Hedda Vormeland for Pax

Anne Provoost

Regarder le soleil

(Looking into the Sun)

Translated into French by Marie Hooghe for Fayard

Thomas Rosenboom

Közmunkák

(Public Works)

Translated into Hungarian by Judit Gera and Zsófia Tálasi for Gondolat

Dimitri Verhulst

Gospoda Verona silazi s brežuljka

(Mrs Verona Comes Down from the Hill)

Translated into Croatian by Maja Weikert for Andrijići

Henk van Woerden

Outremer

(Ultramarine)

Translated into French by Annie Kroon for Actes Sud

Leon de Winter

God's Gym

Translated into English by Jeannette K. Ringold for The Toby Press

For a complete list of translations of Dutch fiction, see:
www.nlpvf.nl/translations

10 BOOKS FROM HOLLAND AND FLANDERS

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