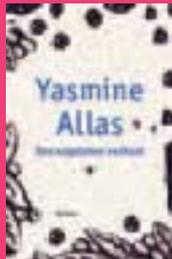


10 Books

from Holland and Flanders



Yasmine Allas

Laia Fàbregas



Tom Lanoye

Peter Terrin



Franca Treur

Carolina Trujillo

Sana Valiulina



Annelies Verbeke

Pieter Waterdrinker

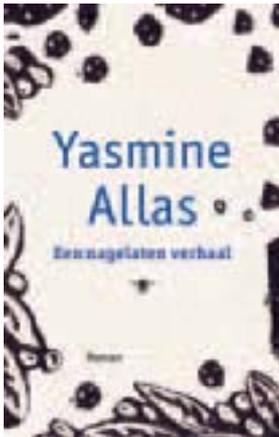
Christiaan Weijts



Re-imagining the past

Yasmine Allas

A Handed-Down History



AT A YOUNG AGE, the writer Yasmine Allas fled Somalia after her father was murdered during the civil war. For years she sought a way to return to the city where she grew up, until one day she was approached about making a television documentary about her youth. When she arrived in Africa, she found that everything had changed beyond recognition; the landscape was ravaged and the population had moved away. She realized that it was impossible to revive the past if you were continually escorted by a camera team. There was only one option: to use her imagination. And this is exactly what she has done in

this extraordinary and original novel.

The story centres around a love affair between the young nurse, Zeyneb, and a wounded soldier whom she refers to as the ‘Stranger’. On the day he is discharged from hospital, he asks her to marry him and promises to come back for her when he is physically strong enough to do so. Much later, after Zeyneb has been promised by her father to another man, she is standing on the veranda when she sees a land rover entering the square. It is the Stranger. His arrival presents her with a difficult dilemma: either obey her father or follow her heart and run away with the Stranger.

This story is narrated years afterwards by their only daughter, a writer who has been living in the Netherlands for decades and returns to her land of birth to make a television documentary. She has great expectations of the reunion, but there is no one there who knows her and no one she knows. She is not even accepted as a fellow Somali and it is clear that she does not belong there, she is not welcome. The daughter becomes acquainted with an old man who secretly takes her to her birthplace. There she pictures herself sitting on the garden swing in bygone days, she reflects on her parents’ marriage and the fate of her father, who was dragged out of the house by soldiers on that ominous day, never to return. This lyrical, occasionally magic-realist novel – a self-portrait, a love story and a social history all in one – is ultimately about accepting being uprooted. She is obliged to abandon the memories that have made her what she is, and a country she flees a second time.



photo Wim van de Hulst

Yasmine Allas (born in 1967) arrived in the Netherlands in 1987. She attended drama school, acted with various companies, and performed her own solo show. In 1998, she made her writing debut with the successful novel, *Idil, een meisje* (*Idil, A Girl*). Her second novel, *De generaal met de zes vingers* (*The General with Six Fingers*), 2001, was also highly acclaimed. In 2004, *De blauwe kamer* (*The Blue Room*) was published, followed by an essay collection entitled, *Ontheemd en toch thuis* (*Uprooted but Still Home*), 2006, on coping with Dutch culture and her own background and beliefs. *Een nagelaten verhaal* (*A Handed-Down History*), her fourth novel, has also been very well received and has been reprinted several times since its recent publication.

The powerful and unsentimental quest of a sensitive woman seeking herself and her position in life. DE TELEGRAAF

A poetic parable. Strong and delicate in equal measure. DE VOLKSKRANT

A well-written, richly stratified and occasionally shocking book. Splendid literature.

HP/DE TIJD

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Een nagelaten verhaal (2010)
270 pp

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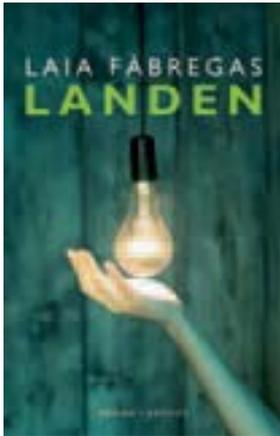
OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

La habitación azul (*De blauwe kamer*). Barcelona: Lumen, 2010.

Ingenious composition

Laia Fàbregas

Landing



‘BIZTRESA’ means nothing, not in any language. It is just a collection of letters, but anyone who wants can find meaning in it. In *Landen* (Landing) by Laia Fàbregas, it is a metaphor for art, found hidden in a small chest that plays a central role. When the man to whom the chest belongs dies during a flight from Spain to The Netherlands, the woman who’d been placed in the seat beside him takes it with her. Gradually, as

the two protagonists take turns telling a chapter and the chapters jump backwards and forwards in time, the reader grows familiar with both their perspectives and finds out how much the lives of these two strangers were intertwined.

Fàbregas reveals their histories ingeniously. He, a widower, migrant and former worker at the Philips lightbulb factory, is travelling to meet his son and grandchild. She is a young woman, working for the Tax Office, much affected by the loss of her parents, who died in a car accident long ago, from which she was saved. She is still looking for the person who rescued her, albeit quite haphazardly. Yet, she manages to achieve an astonishing result, demonstrating how thought-through this tale is, how evocative it is – and how the inventive Fàbregas has dared to trust her reader’s insights. It is like being in a maze, having to find the way out yourself. But in reality Fàbregas has left discreet clues along the way, and you discover that she has been ahead of you all along. The first draft may have included more detail, but it was excised, making us think ourselves. This is what *Landen* shows us most of all – apart from beautiful, substantive ideas about art and identity – how the rock reveals itself in the pebble.



photo Ignacio Sánchez Zárate

Born in Barcelona in 1973, Laia Fàbregas has lived in The Netherlands and in Spain and studied in both countries – Visual Arts at the University of Barcelona and, later, Art and Culture Management in Rotterdam. She also followed the creative writing course at the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam. Having originally gone there to enrich her art, her first novel, *Het meisje met de negen vingers* (The Girl with the Nine Fingers), about two Catalan sisters growing up in the latter days of the Franco regime was published at this time. It was well received and has been translated into several other languages. One line from her debut illustrates the kind of author Fàbregas is: ‘You’re really conceptual, you.’ It’s an offhand declaration of love from one character to another, yet it characterises what Fàbregas is doing, creating literature that playfully speaks of art. *Landen* is her second novel.

A beautiful combination of philosophical depth and a gripping story. BOEK

That bizarre ending confronts you with the impression you already had while reading: that the two stories in the book are connected, that together they will lead to a solution. When they don’t, the whole book takes on something intangible and fascinating – and you understand why Fàbregas is a devotee of Paul Auster and of conceptual art. NRC HANDELSBLAD

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Landen (2010)
209 pp

RIGHTS SOLD

Ara Llibres

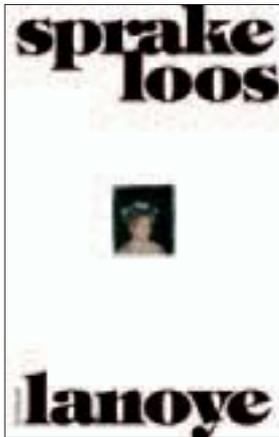
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OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

La ragazza dalle nove dita (Het meisje met de negen vingers). Modena, Roma: Guanda, 2009. Also in French (Arles: Actes Sud, in prep.), in Spanish (Barcelona: El Aleph, 2008), in Danish (Charlottenlund: Ries, 2009), in Norwegian (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2009) and in Catalan (Barcelona: Columna, 2008).

A new highlight in Lanoye's oeuvre



Tom Lanoye

Speechless

TOM LANOYE's successful and well-received novel, *Sprakeloos* (Speechless), tells the story of the life and death of the author's parents, particularly his mother's. It starts with an appealing lament about the effort it took him to write about them, questioning his methods and the result. The main

theme of the story that follows is the final years of his mother's life. After a thrombosis, she suffers aphasia and behavioural problems and never recovers sufficiently to be able to live at home. New attacks make her entirely dependent on help. Her son, the author, is deeply touched by her loss of speech, which – as an amateur actress – had been so dear to her, and his impotent anger at this from time to time makes his story a 'song of curses'. In compensation – and as a grateful and moving homage – he reconstructs her life in the abundance of language that used to be hers.

José, as the mother was called, is depicted as a flamboyant, domineering and controlling woman who, investing great effort in her family and their butcher's shop, always strove for everyone's respectability, reputation and well-being, resorting, from time to time, to dramatic scenes and shrewd manipulation to get her way. Among her most difficult experiences were, according to Lanoye, the fatal car accident that killed her one 'difficult' son, and the disclosure that her youngest son, the author, is homosexual. Lanoye tells of the ups and downs of family life in a good-natured, sometimes humorous fashion. The description of his mother's decline and death is, however, incredibly moving.

This is an 'unadorned account', an informal, honest testimony of a mother by her son, in which much is in what is not mentioned: good nature, gratitude, endearment, closeness. At the same time, Lanoye reflects on the actual function of writing and the vital importance of language in these circumstances. In a wider context, *Sprakeloos* is about a personal experience recognisable to everyone, woven into a lively fresco of a generation, a period, a life style, with astonishing brush strokes of *la flandre profonde*, masterful in its popular realism and the richness of its language.



Tom Lanoye (b. 1958) is one of the most popular and well regarded Flemish authors. He started out as a poet and a critic, but became famous with his prose, drama, politically and socially engaged columns and his performances. Abroad, particularly in Germany, he is highly regarded as a script writer. His debut as a fiction writer was *Een slagerszoon met een brilletje* (A Butcher's Son with Glasses). After *Alles moet weg* (Everything Must Go, 1988, filmed in 1996), he established his reputation once and for all with *Kartonnen dozen* (Cardboard Boxes, 1991), an autobiographical novel about becoming aware of his homosexuality. His most important work until now, about the eventful nineties in Belgium, which Flemish television turned into a ten part series, was the award-winning *Monstertrilogie* (Monster Trilogy, 1997–2002). *Het derde huwelijk* (The Third Marriage, 2006) was nominated for the Libris Literature Prize and the Gouden Uil.

An exorcist ritual in text, the sometimes heart-rending account of an attempt to let go. *HP/DE TIJD*

Full of love and admiration, yet quivering like raw meat. *DE STANDAARD*

Speechless far transcends the purely biographical story of a mother. It has become the portrait of a generation, of family life in the sixties and seventies. *HP/DE TIJD*

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Sprakeloos (2009)
359 pp

RIGHTS SOLD

France (Editions de la Différence)

RIGHTS

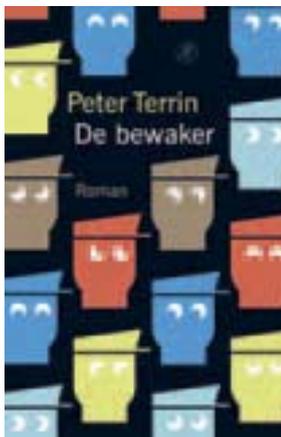
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OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

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 brilletje). 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.



A clever novel about paranoia



Peter Terrin

The Guard

PETER TERRIN'S new novel, *De bewaker* (The Guard), is set largely in the underground car park of a huge luxury apartment block. Two guards, manager Harry and narrator Michel, are there to ensure the occupants' safety. They are never relieved, but once in a while 'the organisation'

brings them new supplies. Their assumption that the outside world has been hit by major disaster or a war is strengthened when all residents save one flee the building. Entirely isolated and living in severe circumstances, they are nevertheless totally absorbed in their task. Since they hope to one day be part of the security officers' elite and expect to be tested for this, they don't want to make a single mistake regarding even their supplies deliverer as a potential threat.

When a third guard, a black man, arrives unexpectedly to fill a vacancy they didn't anticipate, all fuses in their perception of reality blow. Is he an inspector? Is he so relaxed because he is testing their commitment? Does he want them to stop trusting each other? Harry is the first to derail – he tortures and kills the man. Then he and Michel take the lift to check the situation upstairs, but they lose each other inside the immense building. Michel meets Claudia, one of the occupants' cooks. She cleans him up and pampers him. Then the last remaining resident also turns up and reassures Michel, so that he can return to the familiar cellar that has apparently shaped him irrevocably.

As in Peter Terrin's novel *Blanco* (Blank), the world of these characters is destabilized, with everything taking place in their heads as they become detached from reality. Their initial alienation leads to distrust, restricted awareness, insensitivity, paranoia, and finally violent excess. It isn't always clear to the reader when their twisted perception leads to delusion.

De bewaker addresses the reader on different levels. Peter Terrin himself suggested that his novel could be read as an allegory of the war in Iraq, but it is more. In the unusual tension and troubling atmosphere of the seclusion of this 'huis clos', he portrays a wide range of everyday emotions.



photo Stephan Vanfleteren

Peter Terrin (b. 1968) wrote his debut, a collection of short stories titled *De code* (The Code), in 1998. After his first novel, *Kras* (Scratch, 2001), he broke through with *Blanco* (Blank, 2003), about a man who loses his wife due to a car-jacking. In *Vrouwen en kinderen eerst* (Women and Children First, 2004) a team of engineers and workmen disassembling a conveyor belt in a deserted factory confront a lifeless but inflexible opponent in indefinable, inhospitable surroundings, creating an ominous atmosphere. With it, Peter Terrin placed himself forever at the forefront of Flemish literature. In 2006, he published the collection of short stories, *De bijeneters* (The Bee Eaters). *De bewaker*, nominated for the Libris Literature Prize, confirms his talent as a stylist and a creator.

De bewaker is a novel that leaves you astonished with its beauty and completeness. NRC HANDELSBLAD

Terrin has enriched Flemish literature with a clever novel about modern, yet simultaneously universal, paranoia that ends in a perfect psychological pas de deux.

DE MORGEN

A sublime book (...). This novel has an tremendous amount to offer, first and foremost a brilliantly told story. HET PAROOL

PUBLISHING DETAILS

De bewaker (2009)
256 pp

RIGHTS SOLD

UK (MacLehose Press), Italy (Bompiani) and France (Gallimard)

RIGHTS

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OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Blanco (Blank). Lund: Augusti, 2006.



Best-selling debut**Franca Treur****Confetti on the Threshing Floor**

THE ENORMOUS SUCCESS of Franca Treur's debut *Dorsvloer vol confetti* (Confetti on the Threshing Floor) has more than a little to do with the subject matter: the strict Calvinist upbringing of a dreamy-eyed farm girl in the coastal province of Zeeland. Katelijne, the protagonist of the novel, grew up on a farm there with her six brothers. She would have liked nothing better than to work alongside the boys: hay-making, feeding the animals, milking, spreading manure, etc. But the opportunities were few and far between. Because she was a girl, she was allocated the typical female task of helping her mother with the housekeeping chores.

Alongside this portrait of archaic farm life, a prominent role is reserved for the family's Calvinist faith. Katelijne's parents adhere to a variety of Protestantism in which Man is born in sin, and even a virtuous life is no guarantee of a place in heaven. Forswearing sexuality and ungodly behaviour is not enough. One must be converted, touched by God, indeed, chosen by Him. The dread which the Last Judgment inspires in Katelijne is overwhelming. After being cheeky to her mother, she dreams that when Judgment Day comes around, God banishes her to hell: 'She's standing next to the open car door and giving her mother a cheeky look. 'Ohhh,' she hears people whisper, bringing their hands to their mouths. The Lord God looks at her and says: 'Remove her from My sight. Cast her into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.'

Franca Treur grew up herself on a farm on the island of Walcheren. She pulls no punches in her description of Calvinist life but she is not out to settle old scores. Her portrait of Katelijne's youth is painted with love, and it is full of astonishment rather than bitterness. That may well be the secret of its success. Fellow author Jan Siebelink did something similar in his perennial best-seller *Knielen op een bed violen* (Kneeling on a Bed of Violets). While he was delving into the darkest depths of Calvinism, he never rejected faith or the faithful.

And yet the key to the quality of *Dorsvloer vol confetti* is neither the rural nor the deeply religious setting. Franca Treur is simply a very good writer. The manner in which she tells her story, which is divided into brief scenes from Katelijne's childhood on the farm, commands respect. She combines keen observation with dreamy retrospection, and the Dutch original is punctuated with pithy regional expressions and Biblical quotations.



photo Bob Bronshoff

Franca Treur (b. 1979) was born and raised in Zeeland, and studied Dutch and literary theory at the University of Leiden. She writes for the national newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*. The publication of her debut *Dorsvloer vol confetti* last year brought her unprecedented success. It is the best-selling debut of the twenty-first century.

Dorsvloer vol confetti is a buoyant regional novel with poignant accents.

NRC NEXT

An enchanting novel. Reasons aplenty to keep Treur in mind.

DE VOLKSKRANT

A striking narrative talent.

TROUW

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Dorsvloer vol confetti (2009)
224 p.

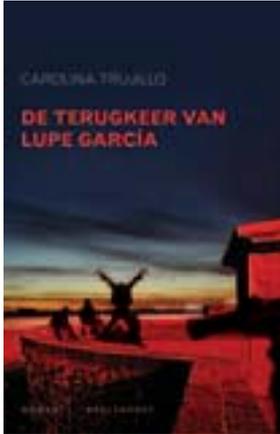
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For ever in love

Carolina Trujillo

The Return of Lupe García



GONO, THE NARRATOR, fell in love with Lupe García at school the day he met her. She had returned from exile in The Netherlands, where she and her mother had fled the military dictatorship that, for years, had imprisoned her father in the Penal, a notorious jail. Later, Lupe goes back to The Netherlands to study journalism but visits her country of birth every year. After finishing her studies, she returns to South America, planning to make a documentary about the jail. She hires Gono, now an unemployed,

alcoholic barman, as production assistant. Partly due to his heavy drug use, the entire project is derailed and is transformed into violent revenge against the former executioners of the military regime. At least, Gono manages to realize the original aim of the documentary to film inside the notorious Penal – by ending up there himself.

De terugkeer van Lupe García (*De terugkeer van Lupe García*) tells the story of a lost generation that does not know what to do with itself. But Trujillo's story is humorous and told at cinematic speed, with a quick succession of scenes full of absurd, colourful detail, bizarre characters and both comic and dramatic events. It is also a beautiful love story, about a man who manages to make his adolescent love his own by making a great sacrifice and, in doing so, is separated from her. In that sense, the story can be compared with *Love in the Time of Cholera* by Gabriel García Márquez, in which both lovers keep missing each other throughout their lives. In Trujillo's novel, it is the military dictatorship which separates married couples from each other and their children, causing the pain to be passed on to a second generation. It is a formidable theme, but treated by Trujillo with stylistic bravura, humour and a beautifully constructed plot, which makes the story all the more exciting.



photo Brenda van Leeuwen

At eighteen, Carolina Trujillo (b. Montevideo, 1970) wrote her first novella, in Spanish. After graduating from the Film Academy in Amsterdam, she published her first novel, *De bastaard van Mal Abrigo* (*The Bastard of Mal Abrigo*), in Dutch, in 2002. It was awarded the Marten Toonder/Geertjan Lubberhuizen Prize for literary talent. *De terugkeer van Lupe García* is her second, much praised novel. It received the BGN Literature Prize and was nominated for the AKO Literature Prize.

Trujillo has written a poignant novel that lingers in your mind for a long time. TROUW

The seemingly light tone of the novel makes even the craziest situations seem credible. It's true that the revolution eats its children, as De terugkeer van Lupe García proves with Latin American verve. KNACK

A novel in which great passion is kept in check by great skill – a novel about putting one's past behind one, leaving the reader helpless and torn.

JURY REPORT BNG NEW LITERATURE PRIZE 2009

PUBLISHING DETAILS

De terugkeer van Lupe García (2009)
331 pp

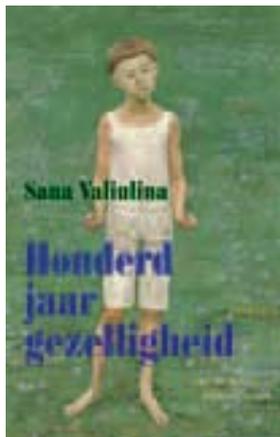
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A masterly quest for purity

Sana Valiulina

A Hundred Years of Conviviality



AFTER HER EPIC NOVEL, *Didar and Faruk* – nominated for the Libris Literature Prize 2007 – set in Stalinist Russia during the Second World War, the Estonian-Tatar author, Sana Valiulina, meticulously dismembers Dutch society which, in her opinion, is bursting at the seams in these overheated times.

Roland Warmer, a scion of a prosperous family and recipient of an excellent education, decides to seek significance and salvation in this prosaic society. The grotesque quest for the ‘truth’ begins literally at the bottom. On the principle that ‘per merdam ad astra’ (from faeces to the stars), Roland applies for a job with the municipal cleaning department in the most squalid and dangerous part of the city.

He ends up in a colourful environment, populated by an impressive group of outcasts: the boys from the cleaning department with their simple pleasures; an improbably fetid, raving female vagabond, and the queen of the waste, who has a fascination for excrement. All watch in astonishment as Roland enthusiastically pounces upon the filthiest jobs, driven by his will to make sacrifices.

As he tirelessly disposes of the world’s waste like a modern Sisyphus, he begins to metamorphosize. His transformation continues when, during a short holiday, he falls into the hands of a shamanistic eccentric who gives him hallucogenic seaweed juice. Once he returns to the garbage zone, it seems like Roland’s pursuit of purity has yielded nothing at all. It is only when he becomes unintentionally mixed up in the murder of a Pole and is forced to look after the filthy female addict that he can do anything of genuine significance: ‘By saving one person, you have actually saved the entire world.’ But once again it turns out that the world is not exactly grateful for his help. *Honderd jaar gezelligheid* (A Hundred Years of Conviviality) can be justly described as a book of our time. Valiulina’s outrageous imagination radiates from every page and she refers with light-footed ease to world literature. Together with its effervescent and original tone, this makes the novel an unforgettable reading experience.



photo Otto Snoek

Sana Valiulina (b. 1964) grew up in Tallinn, Estonia. After studying Norwegian Language and Literature in Moscow, she emigrated to the Netherlands. She made her debut in 2000 with the semi-autobiographical and much-discussed novel, *Het kruis* (The Cross), about life in a Moscow student flat. This was followed in 2002 by the novella collection *Vanuit nergens met liefde* (From Nowhere with Love). Her breakthrough came in 2006 with the epic *Didar and Faruk*, which is based upon her parents’s life during Stalin’s reign of terror. The novel was nominated for the Libris Literature Prize.

Holds up a mirror to present-day Dutch society.
NEDERLANDS DAGBLAD

Honderd jaar gezelligheid is primarily a book about the desperation of Dutch society in 2010.
NRC HANDELSBLAD

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Honderd jaar gezelligheid (2010)
287 pp

RIGHTS

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OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Didar & Faruk (Didar en Faroek). Munich: Knaus, 2007. Also in Italian (Milan: Rizzoli, in prep.).

The art of self deceit



Annelies Verbeke

Saving Fish

ANNELIES VERBEKE'S NEW NOVEL, *Vissen reddden* (Saving Fish), is imbued with the pain of love lost. After writer Monique Champagne is left by her boyfriend Thomas, she turns away from literature, finding a new purpose in life, denouncing the dramatic decline of the world's fish stocks. When asked to by an

organisation to do a literary interlude at international conferences on fishing, she travels to Tallinn, and from there to Athens and Lisbon, on to Istanbul – although her performance there is cancelled – and to inhospitable Vladivostok.

In Tallinn, she meets an Austrian, who gives her the manuscript of his new novel to read. Knowing that if it is an autobiography, she should be careful of what he is hiding, but adrift in her pain, she spends a drunken night with him. Equally recklessly, she pretends to be someone else when a strange woman mistakes her for a long lost friend, and spends several days with her. In Vladivostok, she is convinced that her deepest desires can be fulfilled by a man she meets at the hotel, until it turns out he is active in illegal fishing. On the way home, she completely loses control of herself at the airport. She has lost the will to live, but, in a beautiful final scene, she survives her attempt at suicide through drowning. Monique's preoccupation with fish and her obsession to save them arises from her awareness that man is the evolutionary descendant of fish, which came ashore 375 million years ago. Emotionally powerless and defeated, searching for her identity and meaning in her life, Monique attempts, equally foolishly and riskily, to escape her inner pain and grief. Through saving fish, she tries to save humanity, and eventually herself. Thus, the fact that she is washed ashore after she has tried to drown herself takes on a deep symbolic meaning.

Monique Champagne with her complex emotional life and bizarre obsession is a fascinating character. Her ecological mission involves the reader in an acute problem faced by the whole world, not one you would expect in a literary context. No less original is how impressively Verbeke has interwoven Monique's personal account with the theory of evolution; laced with Verbeke's typically contrary, ambiguous, laconic humour. *Vissen reddden* is an intelligent, impressive novel.



photo Liesbeth Kuipers

Annelies Verbeke (b. 1976) became instantly famous with her successful first novel *Slaap!* (*Sleep!* 2003). The Dutch edition sold more than 70,000 copies and was published in eighteen countries. Her second novel, *Reus* (*Giant*, 2006), and her collection of short stories *Groener gras* (*Greener Grass*, 2007) attracted attention for her surprisingly unusual realism and lightly bizarre and absurd humour. Annelies Verbeke also writes columns, film scripts and plays. With her new novel, *Vissen reddden*, a new highlight in her career, she strengthens her position as one of the most prominent authors of her generation.

Weeping without shedding a tear – due to a novel which has much to laugh about. That's irresistible.
DE VOLKSKRANT

A love story of staggering proportions.
NRC HANDELSBLAD

A very exciting novel in which the author amazes with unexpected turns, fast changes in tone and clever formulations. Since Sleep! Verbeke has undergone an impressive stylistic evolution. (...)
Her best yet. DE STANDAARD

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Vissen reddden (2009)
185 pp

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WEBSITE: www.degeus.nl

OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Schlaaf! (*Slaap!*). Leipzig: Reclam, 2005. Also in French (Paris: Mercure de France, 2005), in Italian (Torino: Instar Libri, 2005), in Turkish (Istanbul: Ayrinti, 2005), in Finnish (Helsinki: Avain, 2006), in Lithuanian (Vilnius: Vaga, 2006), in Danish (Charlottenlund: Ries, 2005), in Romanian (Bucuresti: Univers, 2006), in Estonian (Tallinn: Eesti Ekspressi, 2006), in Hungarian (Pécs: Jelenkor, 2007), in Slovenian (Ljubljana: Založba Tuma, 2006), in Spanish (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2008), in Czech (Zlin: Kniha Zlin) and in Croatian (Zagreb: Andrijići, 2008). *Komşunun tavuğu komşuya...* (*Groener gras*). Ankara: Aksel Yayincilik, 2009.



Yearning for happiness

Pieter Waterdrinker

The Death of Mila Burger



ALREADY in the Prologue to *De dood van Mila Burger* (The Death of Mila Burger), the author has told us that calamity is always lurking in the wings and strikes when one is not expecting it. When Mila is still a child, her grandfather is ground to death in a centrifuge when a drunken colleague turns the wrong handle.

Mila grows up with her grandmother in the Russian city of Kazan in the latter years of the Soviet era. After a dreary university period, she meets Dutchman Nico Burger and decides to follow him to his homeland.

But after ten years she finds herself in a windy coastal town, with a dead-end job in domiciliary care, no children and a disillusioned, unemployed husband who humiliates her.

One day, her old friend Asja turns up at her rental apartment. Asja tells Mila that she has apparently stolen the heart of an eccentric millionaire, Romanovski, who has seen a photo of her. When Mila takes up Romanovski's invitation to go to Moscow, she enters a world that, in terms of decadence, has many similarities with the late 19th century tsarism, including duels, serfs and landaus. From his masterly descriptions of the excesses at parties and in clubs, it is clear that the author is familiar with both the glitz and the less glamorous underbelly of Moscow.

Romanovski and Mila prefer to retire to a fairytale-like estate in the forest, where a new feudal age seems to have dawned. While Romanovski works on a comprehensive book on the Lipizzaner breed of horse, Mila attempts to liberate herself from her former life in the Netherlands. Their happy, secluded existence forms a fine contrast with the uprooted *nouveau riche* in Moscow, who are constantly seeking ever-greater extravagances. Their contentment appears to be complete when Mila becomes pregnant, but Romanovski's shady past increasingly becomes a threat to their happiness. Fate eventually strikes and Mila is forced to begin all over again.

De dood van Mila Burger reads as a captivating classical tragedy, full of lascivious scenes and sentences. Waterdrinker is a master narrator who leads his characters to their demise while again demonstrating the power of a good story.



photo Julia Klotchkova

Pieter Waterdrinker (b. 1961) has been living alternately in Moscow and Saint Petersburg for 15 years. He has unparalleled knowledge of modern Russia, and his habitat always plays a principal role in his work. In 1998, he made his writing debut with the novel *Danslessen* (Dancing Lessons) which received immediate acclaim. This was followed by the novels *Liebman's ring* and *Een Hollandse romance* (A Dutch Romance) and the collection of short stories entitled *Montagne Russe*. His major breakthrough came with the novel *Duitse bruiloft* (The German Wedding) which was translated into English, German and Russian, and was nominated for the Gerard Walschap Prize. The international film rights were also recently sold.

In many respects De dood van Mila Burger is a novel about twenty-first-century Russia, dished up according to the laws of the nineteenth-century novel. Fluent, expressive, amusing.

NRC HANDELSBLAD.

De dood van Mila Burger is a classic tragedy. It is quality prose. Exuberant in a rather un-Dutch way.

VRIJ NEDERLAND.

A marvellous novel. Grandiose and fascinating.

HET PAROOL

PUBLISHING DETAILS

De dood van Mila Burger (2010)
398 pp

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OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

[Kol'co Libmana] (Liebman's ring). St Petersburg: Limbus Press, 2003.
The German Wedding (Duitse bruiloft). London: Atlantic Books, 2009. Also in German (Berlin: Aufbau, 2007) and in Russian (St Petersburg: Limbus Press, in prep.).

A dazzling dance novella



Christiaan Weijts

The window dresser

HAVING SOUGHT inspiration first in music (Article 285b) and then in the visual arts (Via Cappello 23), Christiaan Weijts has now opted for a third kindred art form of dance. In *The Window Dresser*, apart from giving a leading role to a dancer, he uses dance figuratively, in the rhythm and the cadence of his prose. 'At first, the complicated movements and transpositions got me off on the wrong foot,' he

explained in an interview, 'but then the turns and sideways leaps put everything back onto an even keel, so to speak, and it came to me that I could try to do the same thing in language: capture the fluidity, the suppleness of the dancers.'

Weijts has succeeded. *The Window Dresser* is not only a profound novella, it is a lithe and sinuous work. Victor Zuid, a gifted window dresser, has been commissioned by the director of Cocagne – the chicest department store in town – to design a series of windows for the coming season. Victor is no commercial salesman, but rather an artist who brings shop windows to life, creating theatre performances behind glass.

When Victor's girlfriend unexpectedly turns him out, he seizes the opportunity to take up residence in Cocagne for the duration. He rambles around the store as if he'd just stumbled into Cockaigne, that mythical medieval land-of-plenty. At one point, we see him comfortably ensconced under a duvet in the bedding department, mentally putting together a bold decorating scheme for the store windows. Suddenly he is startled out of his musings by havoc wrought around him by the action group PIG (Paint it Green).

To begin with, he is nonplussed to learn that one of the members of PIG is his old flame, the dancer Vita Laurier. Vita – not entirely by chance, her name is the literal translation of 'life' – threatens to scuttle his plans. She starts by revealing what lies hidden behind the splendours and delights of Cocagne: the director is involved in the gun trade, and his wares are fashioned by the tiny hands of child labourers.

What to do? Can Victor throw himself into the preparations for an enchanting show thereby helping to perpetuate such injustices? This is the dilemma sketched by the narrator, a Faustian angel who clings to his side, punctuating events as they unroll with a melodious voice of conscience.

Victor's reflections, along with developments between him, Vita and the director of Cocagne, combine to trigger a violent climax. But before that moment arrives, Christiaan Weijts serves up a combination of twists and turns guaranteed to wrong-foot the reader. He builds up the tension and sets you thinking. Altogether a staggering experience.



photo Peter Boer

In his earliest work Christiaan Weijts (b. 1976) demonstrated extraordinary talent. The much-praised novels *Article 285b* (2006) and *Via Cappello 23* (2008) are proof that he is capable of melding high and low, the exalted and the earthly in a single story. His sentences fly past, his narrative tone is feather-light, ironic, and humorous – and yet he also manages to take the reader to the nether regions of human existence.

The Window Dresser is a flawless ode to dance and Weijts' finest work yet. [...] If, as the British playwright John Dryden maintains, dance is 'the poetry of feet', then Weijts' prose is the 'choreography of the human mind'.

NRC HANDELSBLAD

A brilliant reverie

DE MORGEN

PUBLISHING DETAILS

The Window Dresser (2009)
159 p.

RIGHTS

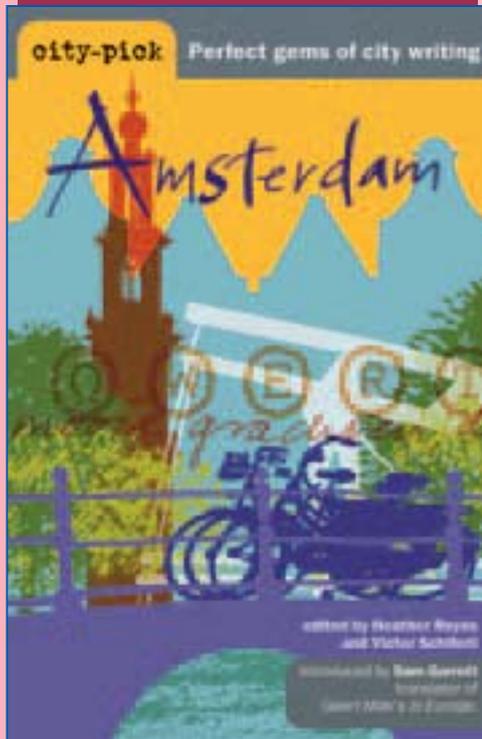
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OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

L. 285b (Art. 285b) Nova Gorica: Educa, 2008.
Also in German (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, in prep.)

Recent translations

City-Pick Amsterdam



One of the guides in the *city-pick* series from Oxygen Books is devoted to Amsterdam, offering a picture of the city in more than eighty translated extracts by writers including Abdelkader Benali, Alain de Botton, Albert Camus, Doeschka Meijnsing, Harry Mulisch, Ian McEwan, Geert Mak, Cees Nooteboom and Simon Schama. The pieces are grouped around themes such as old Amsterdam, the Second World War, tolerance, art and water. Translator Sam Garrett wrote the introduction and Heather Reyes and Victor Schiferli selected the extracts and edited the book. Translators who worked on the collection include Patricia Gosling, Susan Massotty, Jeannette K. Ringold, Paul Vincent, Laura Vroomen, Michele Hutchison, Adrienne Dixon, Brian Doyle and Barbara Fasting.

Kader Abdolah

Sändebudet. En berättelse

(The Messenger)

Translated into Swedish by Ingrid Wikén Bonde for Norstedts

Yasmine Allas

La habitación azul

(The Blue Room)

Translated into Spanish by Marta Arguilé Bernal for Lumen

Gerbrand Bakker

Là-haut, tout est calme

(The Twin)

Translated into French by Bertrand Abraham for Gallimard

Bernlef

Niewdzięczna pamięć

(Out of Mind)

Translated into Polish by Alicja Oczko for Nasza Księgarnia

Louis Paul Boon

My Little War

(Mijn kleine oorlog)

Translated into English by Paul Vincent for Dalkey Archive Press

Anna Enquist

Counterpoint

(Contrapunt)

Translated into English by Jeannette K. Ringold for UWA Publishing

Laia Fàbregas

Jenta med ni fingre

(The Girl with Nine Fingers)

Translated into Norwegian by Bodil Engen for Aschehoug

Willem Frederik Hermans

Temná komora Damoklova

(The Dark Room of Damocles)

Translated into Czech by Magda de Bruin-Hübllová for Host

Herman Koch

Middagen

(The Dinner)

Translated into Danish by Birthe Lundsgaard for Mrs. Robinson

Rachida Lamrabet

Frauenland

(Woman Country)

Translated into German by Heike Baryga for Luchterhand

Jan van Mersbergen

Demain, à Pampelune

(Tomorrow, in Pamplona)

Translated into French by Anne-Lucie Voorhoeve for Gallimard

Margriet de Moor

[(De verdrinkene)]

(The Storm)

Translated into Chinese by Qiang Zhaohui for Shanghai Literature and Arts Publishing House

Nescio

Vyžierač; Titankovia; Malý básnik; Mene tekell

(Little Poet; Young Titans; The Sponger; Mene tekell)

Translated into Slovakian by Adam Bžoch for Európa

Vincent Overeem

Misfit

(Misfit)

Translated into German by Christiane Kuby for Berlin Verlag

Annelies Verbeke

Komşunun tavuğu komşuya...

(Greener Grass)

Translated into Turkish by Kevser Canbolat for Aksel Yayincilik

Pieter Waterdrinker

The German Wedding

(Duitse bruiloft)

Translated into English by Brian Doyle for Atlantic Books

For other translated titles see:
www.nlpvf.nl/translations

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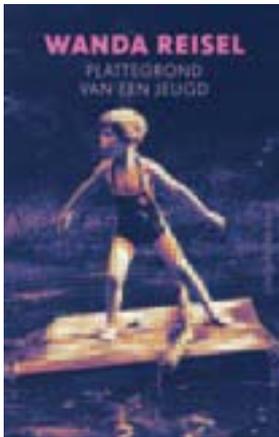
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Wanda Reisel

Blueprint of a Youth

IT WAS A MONUMENTAL five-storey building with sixteen rooms and a garden bordering on the Vondelpark in Amsterdam: a large, fairytale house in which you could meander to your heart's content. The writer Wanda Reisel and her parents, brothers and sisters lived in such a house between 1961 and 1974. It was a period in which the Second World War cast a shadow over

the young family (several of the Jewish family members had not returned from the war), without explicit reference to this ever being made. That was also the case with the death of the eldest son on Curaçao, a few years before the family came to live in Amsterdam. At the same time, the freedom of the sixties began to make itself felt.

Plattegrond van mijn jeugd (Blueprint of a Youth) is an original and creative novel in which Reisel takes the house itself as the leitmotiv. Memories surface in relation to the rooms, staircases, basements and cupboards. They are sometimes her own recollections and sometimes excerpts from the family history in combination with fictive passages in the form of short stories. The book is divided into sections with titles such as 'Basement', 'Piano nobile', 'First Floor', while the chapters bear names such as 'Pavement', 'Kitchen' and 'Hallway'. This calls to mind the novel *Life: A User's Manual* by Georges Perec: a novel like a house, built on imagination. The writer owes her authorship to her youth in this house and all the narratives embedded in it.

Reisel's memories are never sentimental; in contrast, they are playful yet intractable. How should you handle the great suffering of the previous generation? As the narrator remarks: 'If you, as child, have had to imagine the Shoah or Santa Claus, then the rest is no problem.' She explores imaginary boundaries and then transgresses them, as in the domain of love, where there is much hesitation and yearning.

The attractive feature of this book is the way in which the loose threads do not ultimately tie together. In this way, we see things from the perspective of an unhappy boy who is a postman, and from that of an escort girl who takes pornography videos to her father in hospital, ensuing in a poignant scene. These lives are connected to that of the main character in some way, but exactly what the link is remains a mystery. It is a matter of imagination and, just as the author conjures up her youth in this book, she simultaneously demonstrates how everything is a question of writing, compactness, literature.



photo Tessa Posthuma de Boer

Wanda Reisel (b. 1955) studied dramaturgy at the Theatre School in Amsterdam, and made her debut as a writer with *Jacobi's tocht* (Jacobi's Journey) in 1986, followed two years later by the novel *Het blauwe uur* (The Blue Hour). By then she had already written a number of plays. She still writes for the theatre and also sporadically for film and television. Other published novels include *Baby Storm*, which was nominated for the Libris Literature Prize in 1997, *Een man een man* (An Honest Man) which was nominated for the same prize in 2000, and *Witte liefde* (White Love), 2004, which won the Anna Bijns Prize and was nominated for the AKO Literature Prize. Her most recent publications are *Tien stuks* (Ten Pieces), 1984-2006, which is a collection containing her complete works for theatre, and the novel *Die zomer* (That Summer), 2008.

A collection of the most original and inspiring writer's memoirs I have seen. A literary perpetual motion machine that is as solid as a house, a mythical villa bordering the Vondelpark. NRC HANDELSBLAD

Regardless of how unpleasant certain histories may be, Reisel manages to introduce an appealing lightness into everything, thus managing to strengthen the dramatic effect even more. DE VOLKSKRANT

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Plattegrond van een jeugd (2010)
221 pp

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OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Die blaue Stunde (Het blauwe uur).
Berlin: Twenne, 1991.

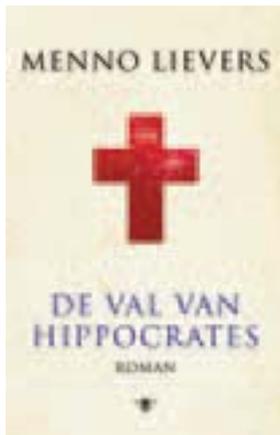


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Medical error or murder?

Menno Lievers

The Fall of Hippocrates



DE VAL VAN HIPPOCRATES (The Fall of Hippocrates) is all about guilt. As an adolescent, Erik Liefco, the main character, took his eleven-year-old brother on climbing trip in the Swiss mountains. His brother had a fatal accident, falling into a ravine during the descent. Erik has never forgiven himself, and has become a doctor in order to save lives. But life has not been particularly kind to him. He has a resident post in a hospital, but no opportunity to become a specialist. His girlfriend is quite justified in urging him to give up medicine and go with her to London where she can take up a lucrative job.

Just as in the television hospital series, such as *E.R.* and *Grey's Anatomy*, Lievers provides a quick-fire account of how a hospital functions: the pressures of work, the emergency cases, the mutual rivalry, and also the seemingly casual sex. Liefco inhabits this world and has become an alcoholic. Several patients die, but it is not always his fault. Naturally he makes mistakes now and again, but then there are difficult diagnoses involved, or errors in transferring a patient's dossier, poor advice, or simple bad luck. His superiors give him the benefit of the doubt, after all, his extensive medical expertise and commitment are major points in his favour. However, his illegal blood test after jabbing himself with an AIDS patient's needle, and unsafe sex are certainly unethical. In retrospect, the patients's deaths are no coincidence but deliberate actions, according to the prosecutors who accuse Liefco of multiple murder.

De val van Hippocrates is based on a notorious case in the Netherlands in which a nurse was erroneously accused of the murder of several patients, and imprisoned for six years before being acquitted. What turned out to be nonsense in the case of the nurse was, for Erik, an unfortunate, more complex combination of frustrated ambition, confusion, and the occasional slip up. It is a splendid basis for a novel and Lievers has elaborated on it with great subtlety.



photo Keke Keukelaar

Menno Lievers (1959) is a doctor and philosopher. He gained a PhD at Oxford for his thesis, *Knowledge of Meaning*. In 2003, Lievers published a philosophy book for children. He currently teaches philosophy at the University of Utrecht. In addition, Lievers is the editor of *De Revisor* literary magazine, and publishes regularly in the *NRC Handelsblad*, a national daily newspaper.

A fascinating work: a medical novel of the kind that seldom appears.

DE STANDAARD

On hypocrisy, failed leadership and the mistakes issuing from these.

TROUW

PUBLISHING DETAILS

De val van Hippocrates (2009)
283 pp

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OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

C'est vrai (Dat is waar). Paris: Hachette
Jeunesse, 2005. Also in Czech (Praha:
Albatros, 2005)



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