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# 10

# Books



## from Holland and Flanders

no. 20-2 autumn 2011

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# A gripping, cinematic story set during WWI



**Publishing details**  
Post voor mevrouw Bromley (Mail for Mrs. Bromley, 2011)  
512 pp  
**Rights**  
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**Translations**  
*The Angel Maker* (De engelenmaker). English (Penguin,USA and Weidenfeld & Nicolson, UK, 2008)  
Also published in French (Héloïse d'Ormesson, 2010), German (BTB, 2007), Spanish (Alianza, 2009), Turkish (Destek, 2007) and many other languages.

## Stefan Brijs Mail for Mrs. Bromley

The first part of Stefan Brijs' new novel, *Post voor mevrouw Bromley* (Mail for Mrs. Bromley), is set in North London during the early years of the First World War. Student John Patterson refuses to yield to increasing pressure of advocates and patriots – and girls – to voluntarily join the army, as his best friend Martin Bromley, with whom he grew up, has done.

As a postman, John's father regularly brings sad news, but he can't give Mrs. Bromley the letter about Martin's death. In the second part of the novel, John joins the army after all. And, as the lieutenant's aide in Northern France, he himself can manipulate the mail. He discovers that Martin didn't die a hero, as the letter claimed, but that he was executed by his superiors. Shall he let Mrs. Bromley know, he wonders, before he'll be deployed in an offensive in which he might die?

*Post voor mevrouw Bromley* is a novel about lies, illusions and make-believe. In an excellently documented portrait of an era, Stefan Brijs exposes the gulf between the excitement about the war and the appalling reality of it, depicted in strong dramatic scenes in which courage and cowardice appear to be relative.

Brijs appeals particularly with convincing characters and a clever, carefully crafted plot in which various story elements have a surprising function and meaning. John studies English Literature and lives in a rarefied literary environment that contrasts sharply with the barbarism of the war. For a soldier who writes to his love and who will die soon, he quotes lines from love letters by John Keats, but he himself fails to express his unspoken love for the daughter of Mrs. Bromley – one of the threads that runs through the story - in time. *Post voor mevrouw Bromley* draws the reader into a gripping, cinematic story with exciting twists that last until the very last page.

### On *The Angel Maker*:

‘An exciting novel about the dangerous and tempting possibilities of creating life.’ *de Volkskrant*

‘An intelligently composed page-turner.’ *Stijl*

**Stefan Brijs** (b. 1969) wrote his debut, *De verwording* (Degeneration) in 1997. His international break-through came in 2005 with his novel *De engelenmaker* (*The Angel Maker*), which earned Brijs various important nominations and literary prizes at home and abroad, including the Gouden Uil Prijs van de Lezer 2006 (Belgium), the Prix des Lecteurs de Cognac 2010 (France) and the German Euregio-Schüler-Literaturpreis 2011, awarded by pupils from Belgium, The Netherlands and Germany. In 2011 *De engelenmaker* went to its twenty-fifth edition.





# A lonely adolescent has a heroic, spectacular plan



**Publishing details**  
Glijvlucht (2011)  
320 pp

**Rights**  
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## Anne-Gine Goemans Gliding Flight

Anne-Gine Goemans describes the isolated world of fourteen-year-old Gieles, who lives in an almost deserted spot right next to a new landing strip: the so-called polder runway, which his father is supposed to keep free of geese and other birds. Gieles has two geese of his own and he wants to teach them how to fly, following the example of ornithologist Christian Moullec, his great hero. His other great hero is Captain Scully, the pilot who made a successful emergency landing on the Hudson after a flock of geese disabled the engine of his plane.

Gieles prepares a heroic, spectacular plan involving his geese, with which he intends to win back his mother when her flight from Africa finally touches down. She seems to care more about the people in Africa than she does about him and his father. Of course, the future flight of the geese represents the boy's desire for freedom in this coming-of-age novel. This is contrasted with the limitations and constraints of development and modernisation, as experienced by Gieles's mother in Africa.

This desire for freedom also affects Gieles's mentor, Super Waling, an obese historian and journalist, who is shackled to his mobility scooter and has become stuck in his own past, which is closely connected to the airport. Waling may once have been a hero who helped to rescue passengers from a plane crash, but the full facts suggest an entirely different picture. However, as an anti-hero, he still proves to be an example for Gieles, the model of someone who takes a positive approach to his life.

Like her first novel *Ziekzoekers*, *Glijvlucht* features a historic component. While in her debut Goemans wrote about 'tulip fever' – the bulb speculation that saw so many wealthy Dutch people gambling away their fortune in the seventeenth century – here she describes the creation of the polders. This is presented in wonderful stories that Super Waling writes about his ancestors who helped to reclaim this land under appalling conditions – stories that he sends to Gieles as background information for a school project.

All of these different angles and stories make *Glijvlucht* a lively, exciting and funny novel, which is told with great energy and momentum. A completely convincing picture of the bizarre fantasy world of a lonely adolescent.

**Anne-Gine Goemans** (b. 1971) is a journalist and also teaches journalism at the Hogeschool Utrecht. She made her debut in 2008 with the novel *Ziekzoekers* (Unfurrowed Ground), which won the Anton Wachterprijs for the best debut.



‘A book you feel homesick for as soon as you’ve closed it.’ Peter Buwalda, author of *Bonita Avenue*

‘A hip regional novel that is every bit as good as *Joe Speedboat*.’ P.F. Thomése, author of *Shadowchild*

# Quest for the fragile essence of parenthood



**Publishing details**  
Tonio (2011)  
640 pp

**Rights**  
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**Rights Sold**  
German (Suhrkamp)

**Selected translations**  
*Die zahnlose Zeit*  
(Advocaat van de hanen, De gevarendriehoek, Het hof van barmhartigheid, Een keuze uit het werk, Onder het plaveisel het moeras, De slag om de

Blauwbrug, Vallende ouders, Weerborstels). German [(Suhrkamp, 2003).  
*Treibsand urban machen Movos Erben* (Drijfzand koloniseren. De erven Movo). German (Suhrkamp, 2008).  
*Die Movo-Tapes Eine Karriere als anderer* (De Movo Tapes: een carrière als ander). German (Suhrkamp, 2007).  
*La vida en un día* (Het leven uit een dag). Spanish (Peninsula, 1995), Finnish (WSOY, 1990), German (Suhrkamp, 1992), Swedish (Forum, 1991).

## A.F.Th. van der Heijden Tonio

A.F.Th. van der Heijden already had a number of ‘requiems’ to his name: for a childhood sweetheart, a cousin who died in an accident, his father, his mother and a good friend. He has proven himself able to use the subject of death to lend meaning to their lives, with great retroactive force. Looking back, these books were merely the prelude to his most recent ‘requiem novel’, a hefty book that overshadows everything that came before: *Tonio*.

Early on the morning of 23 May, 2010, Whit Sunday, Tonio van der Heijden, the only son of the writer and his wife, Mirjam Rotenstreich, was killed in a traffic accident. He was only 21 years old. It was a pointless event without any real culprits – Tonio had had a drink, he didn't give way on his bike, and the driver of the car that hit him was going a little too fast. In just one moment, this combination of circumstances turned the life of Tonio's parents into hell.

Almost immediately after receiving the news about their son – the doorbell shrieks through the hallway and two police officers inform them about the accident and Tonio's critical condition – Van der Heijden starts his own reconstruction of events, at first unconsciously, and later deliberately, in perfectly honed sentences that hit home, sharp as knives.

And yet *Tonio* is a novel. Not because Van der Heijden, with a cool detachment, probes into the smallest details of the ill-fated circumstances. Not even because this book is a razor-sharp, emotional and personal reconstruction of his son's life. Van der Heijden pulls no punches: he spares no one and nothing, least of all himself, and so his work carves deeply into the reader's soul.

No, this is a real novel because of the relentless way in which the author pushes the developments and brings them to their inevitable conclusion, interweaving the heartbreaking present with the horror of the accident. The composition of *Tonio* is raw, immediate, full of repetition, circular trains of thought, dark shortcuts and false trails – and so it represents the blueprint of mourning.

The conclusion of *Tonio* takes the reader's breath away. Because of the visit to the site of the accident, against the backdrop of a celebrating city. Because of the gradual revelation of the true nature of the relationship between Tonio and the enigmatic Jenny. But primarily because of the passage in which Van der Heijden uses his words to accompany his son on that fateful night, for the very last time. Warning him. Talking to him. Gently attempting, in fiction, to make him go the other way and come home safely: ‘I beg you: turn left.’

This is the cruel paradox of *Tonio*. None of the artist's weapons misses its target. Van der Heijden, increasingly mercilessly, nails his readers to their seats. But his son, his ‘best piece of prose’, will never return to him.



**A.F.Th. van der Heijden** (b. 1951) is one of the most important writers in Dutch literature. He has a large, critically acclaimed and award-winning body of work to his name. Two novel cycles form the core of his work: the semi-autobiographical and almost complete ‘De Tandeloze Tijd’, which depicts a ‘life in all its breadth’, and ‘Homo Duplex’, about a modern-day Oedipus.

# Ruthlessly plays on the fears of every parent



**Publishing details**  
Op zee (2011)  
192 pp

**Rights**  
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www.ljveen.nl

**Rights sold**  
German (Arche)

## Toine Heijmans At Sea

A slate-grey sky full of clouds, the tension of a sailing trip with an uncertain outcome, and every parent’s fear of losing a child: these are the ingredients of this incredibly gripping story. *Op zee* (At Sea) is a book that does not let go. The story is about Donald, a middle-aged man who has reached a dead end at work. Heijmans presents a perfect sketch of modern office life with its sales figures, mileage allowances, assessment procedures and pointless discussions with clients.

Donald heads off on a solo three-month sailing trip across the Atlantic and the North Sea and hopes to come back as a better husband for his wife Hagar. They have agreed that their seven-year-old daughter Maria will join him for the final stage of his journey, the 200 miles from Tyborøn to Harlingen. Having made it around England and the Kattegat, Donald finds the last 200 miles not that difficult. The weather reports are good, yet things still become tense. Almost home, with the harbour in sight, disaster strikes: he can’t find Maria. Hours of desperation follow, but Donald gets up to strange antics: climbing up the mast, rowing off in his dinghy. While the question remains: has he really lost Maria?

Ultimately, this short novel is about fatherhood. Donald constantly makes comparisons with motherhood: ‘Mothers have a head start and fathers can never catch up.’ And: ‘Fathers have to prove themselves.’ But this father is hopelessly failing, on a lonely adventure with his boat and everything going disastrously wrong.

The unreliable narrator provides many small clues to indicate that something is wrong with him. His name, for example, is a reference to Donald Crowhurst, whom Heijmans quotes. He was a solo sailor who died in 1969 during a round-the-world yacht race. He attempted to win by reporting false positions, but his boat was found abandoned on the Atlantic, with confused notes and logbooks. Sentences such as, ‘Reality could just be a dream as far as I’m concerned. And the other way round’ certainly set you thinking. In the final pages, when the perspective switches to Hagar, everything becomes clear. But it is not until the very last page – when a badly damaged boat sails into the harbour – that the disillusion is complete.

‘In this book, Toine Heijmans the novelist has arisen (...) exceptionally beautiful.’ *de Volkskrant*

‘In this sailing novel, Heijmans purposefully heads straight towards a chilling dénouement.’ *Elsevier*



**Toine Heijmans** (b. 1969) is a journalist with *De Volkskrant*. He has three children and goes sailing in his free time. He has previously written a non-fiction title, *La Vie Vinex*. *Op Zee* has received high praise from reviewers and booksellers and was reprinted after only two weeks. The translation rights for this debut novel were sold to Germany even before publication.

‘About the intense bond between parent and child and about the fear of losing what we hold dear.’ *Telegraaf*

# A epic love story against the backdrop of the Afganistan war



**Publishing details**  
Man meisje dood (2011)  
400 pp

**Rights**  
De Bezige Bij  
Van Miereveldstraat 1  
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## Rik Launspach Man girl dead

After his much-praised and filmed epic on the Flood Disaster, 1953, Rik Launspach has come up with a literary pageturner in the tradition of John LeCarré’s *The Constant Gardener* – a novel about an intense love affair and the eternal combat between men and women, against the background of one of the greatest conflicts of our time.

Amadeus de Ru is a brilliant student of linguistics in the Amsterdam of the 1990s. He supports himself by dealing in drugs on a small scale, meanwhile dreaming of the two most beautiful girls in the city: Tatja and Puck. To his great surprise – and Puck’s displeasure – he manages to make a conquest of Tatja. The idyll is disrupted when Tatja goes off to study in Venice and in order to stay close to her even so, Deus enrolls on a course of Dari, one of the languages of her native country. He then decides on an impulse to surprise Tatja in Venice, and is witness to her infidelity.

In an attempt at reconciliation, they all three decide to go to Turkey. There fate strikes: during a drunken drive Deus loses the love of his life in a car crash. Tormented by feelings of guilt, he leaves for Afghanistan, where he is taken care of by Daoud, a simple man scrabbling to make a living with his family. Surrounded by the barren mountains

and ancient traditions he works on his ideas concerning a new language, using figures that will remove all interference in human communication. Once again, however, a woman ensures that he has to flee.

Fifteen years later, Deus is back in Afghanistan as an interpreter, but very quickly the army command discover Deus’ revolutionary code, which seems a powerful weapon in the fight against the Taliban. Not only does he unintentionally put the Americans on the track of a rigorous way out of the impasse of the war but he also makes a discovery that places his time with Tatja in a different light. When he wants to dash off to the Netherlands to get at the truth, he is once more confronted with his former friends, with just one difference: this time *he* is the enemy.

‘Launspach is at his best when evoking the purely masculine world populated by combatants, a world where it always seems to be night and every other minute a rocket is fired, a world crammed with container camps full of equipment, in desolate regions.’ *de Volkskrant*

‘A whirlwind novel.’ *Het Parool*



**Rik Launspach** (b. 1958) is an actor, director and writer. He took part in such TV classics as *On Second Thoughts* (based on J.J. Voskuil’s novel) and *Old Money*, and in 1993 he won the Golden Calf award for his role in *Oeroeg*, based on the book by Hella S. Haasse. Since the late 1990s, Launspach has chiefly concentrated on writing scenarios and books before making his debut with *1953*, a novel about the disastrous flooding in the southern Netherlands. The book was well-received, with over 100,000 copies being sold. It was also successfully adapted as a movie with the title *The Storm*.



# The love of music in a rich and classical novel set in the 1910s



**Publishing details**  
Het grote zwijgen  
(2011)  
360 pp  
**Rights**  
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## Erik Menkveld The Great Silence

Erik Menkveld has made an impressive debut with a historical novel set in the Amsterdam music scene of the 1910s. The main characters are composer Alfons Diepenbrock and his wife Elisabeth. Diepenbrock is also involved with another woman, Jo. Another prominent character is Matthijs Vermeulen, Diepenbrock's protégé, who initially works as a music reviewer. The portrayal of these characters lends *Het grote zwijgen* all the allure of a classic psychological novel, in which the love of music permeates everything.

At first, the characters are full of high-minded artistic ideals, such as Beethoven's adage *alle Menschen werden Brüder* – with music as the unifying element. However, in addition to the romantic developments, which are in a sense a betrayal of these ideals, artistic rivalry also plays a role. Diepenbrock finds himself at odds with Willem Mengelberg, the acclaimed conductor of the Concertgebouw orchestra, who is accused by music connoisseurs of favouring a conservative repertoire. Although Mengelberg always expresses his admiration for Diepenbrock, he only rarely performs his work.

Above all of this hangs the shadow of the First World War, which becomes more palpable when Vermeulen leaves for Belgium as a correspondent. He reports from Louvain and Liège about the atrocities that the Germans are carrying out among the local population. The Netherlands is neutral, but the war brings about deep division, including in cultural circles. Everyone is anxious not to damage good relations with Germany, which is why no one criticises the Austrian Mengelberg for his pro-German stance, while Diepenbrock ends up in social and artistic isolation because of his disapproval of the Germans. After the war, both his ideals and his prestige have faded. He becomes embittered, particularly when his wife Elisabeth embarks upon a brief affair with Vermeulen.

Basing his work on biographies, letters, memoirs, newspaper articles and other historical sources, Menkveld brings his characters to life and presents an incisive picture of the artistic atmosphere of Amsterdam in the 1910s, full of colourful details about everyday life, prevailing attitudes and the social status quo.



**Erik Menkveld** (b. 1959) has worked as an editor for various publishing houses, for literary journal *Tirade* and as a programmer at Poetry International. He made his debut as a poet in 1997 met *De karpersimulator*, which won the C. Buddingh'-prijs and the Lucy B. en C.W. van der Hoogtprijs. This was followed by his collections *Schapen nu!* (2001) and *Prime time* (2005), which were also well received. *Het grote zwijgen* (2011) is his debut as a novelist.

*'Het grote zwijgen* presents a beautiful, almost nostalgic picture of Amsterdam one hundred years ago, when the polder practically reached the Concertgebouw. The novel gives an insight into the relationship between Diepenbrock and Mahler, and the later conflict between Diepenbrock and Vermeulen, while also revealing a great deal about the character of Willem Mengelberg and the musical conflicts of that era [...] I learned a lot.'

# The true meaning of Carnival



**Publishing details**  
Naar de overkant van de nacht (2011)  
176 pp  
**Rights**  
Cossee  
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foreignrights

**Translations**  
*Tomorrow Pamplona*: French (Gallimard, 2010), German (Kunstmann, 2009), English (Peirene Press, 2011), Turkish (in preparation).  
*How it Starts*: German (Kunstmann, 2010).

## Jan van Mersbergen To the Other Side of the Night

Van Mersbergen's work invariably focuses on characters who have a highly developed emotional life yet are barely able to articulate their feelings in concrete terms, let alone to change anything about their situation. They are therefore typical loners, who manage to inspire robust compassion in the reader, in novel after novel. With *To the Other Side of the Night*, Van Mersbergen demonstrates he has attained perfect command of his art.

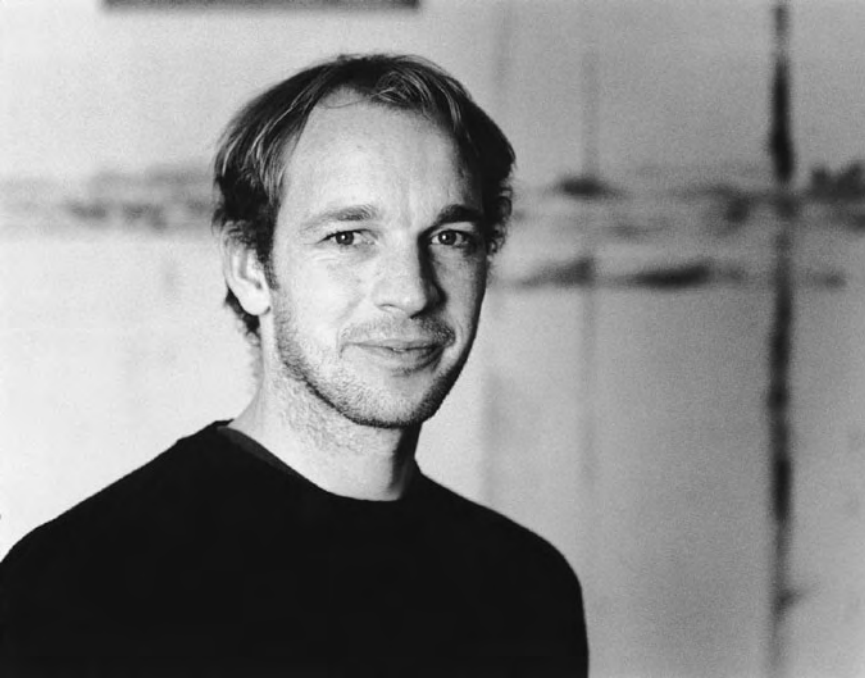
The novel is about carnival, or *Vastelaovond*, as people in Limburg call the festival on the eve of the forty days of fasting that leads up to Easter. Ralf has been persuaded by his uncle to come to his old hometown and celebrate. After having said goodbye to his girlfriend and children, he joins the revelry, dressed up as a ferryman. He soon loses track of his uncle in the bustle of brass bands and drunken crowds, and does not remain sober himself either.

In a fuddle of alcohol reminiscent of Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, he reports on many encounters, including one with a group of Mexicans, a sunflower called Sunny and someone disguised as a priest. The latter tells

him it's only at Carnival that people finally become who they are. As Ralf exhausts himself physically, he gets to the core of his existence, the most important feature of which is his desire to be a good father. What does he really want? Simply to care for his children, to give them 'love, warmth and apple juice'.

Van Mersbergen circles artfully around that core. The more Ralf drinks, the more powerful and harrowing his story becomes: the children are not actually his, the youngest two are deaf and blind, he cares for them at night because their mother no longer can, and so it goes on.

In this deeply moving story about ordinary people, celebrating Carnival means plumbing the depths and emerging purified.



'That sensual and at the same time taut style makes *Tomorrow Pamplona* an intense reading experience. You feel something brewing underneath those ordinary words, those short sentences: the human inability to deal with life.'

**Jan van Mersbergen** (b. 1971) made his debut in 2001 with the novel *The Grass-Eater*. The years since then have seen the publication of *Power Over the Wheel* (2003), *The Sky-Rat* (2005) and *Tomorrow Pamplona* (2007), which has been translated and was nominated for a number of literary prizes. 2009 saw the publication of his novel *How it Starts*.

# A bizarre murder case in a novel full of ironic wisdom and wit – winner of the Libris Prijs 2011

## Yves Petry The Virgin Marino

*De maagd Marino* (The Virgin Marino), Yves Petry's fifth novel, is his most characteristic and ambitious to date. Petry derived his theme from a shocking murder case in Germany – a man asked his friend to castrate him, kill him and eat parts of him. Yves Petry doesn't reconstruct the case, but searches in his characters' states of mind for a possible explanation of what motivates people to do such things. Perpetrator Marino is a colourless technology nerd with a paralysing mother fixation. Requester Bruno was a lecturer in Literature, but he quit his job, disenchanted with the academic world and convinced of the uselessness of his discipline. Neither of them succeeds in having meaningful relationships with other people.

The story starts after Marino's conviction. While he is in jail, Bruno, the deceased, dictates a report. The author thus allows the character who is the hardest to justify to state his reasons. In doing so, Bruno also voices Yves Petry's thoughts on phenomena like religion, the study of literature, sexuality and pornography, and people who are adrift in an insensitive society. Again, Petry portrays man as little more than an indolent, 'molecular machine' – despite all his physical and emotional functions hardly a remarkable phenomenon.

Yves Petry writes with an absolute belief in the power of precise formulation and is clearly a believer in thorough, traditional writing. However, his prose is lent a special, unusual touch by his cynical sarcastic undertone, often embroidered with a touch of misanthropy, but equally often lit up by his hilarious, albeit cool, irony and gallows humour with regard to writing. Says literature specialist Bruno about writers' attempts to understand the world: 'We can't understand the world that exists. A world we can understand would be too simple for us to exist in.'

'Impressive novel' *de Volkskrant*

'Relentless and brutal, but also lyrical and evocative' *Trouw*



**Publishing details**  
De Maagd Marino  
(2010)  
288 pp  
**Rights**  
De Bezige Bij  
Van Miereveldstraat 1  
NL – 1071 DW  
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**Yves Petry** (b. 1967) studied Mathematics and Philosophy. He wrote his remarkable debut, *Het jaar van de man* (The Year of the Man) – about a young anti-hero leading a lethargic existence – in 1999. With *Gods eigen muziek* (God's Own Music) it became clear that this was an author with an unusual view of the nature and emotions of man. *De laatste woorden van Leo Wekeman* (The Last Words of Leo Wekeman, 2003) is set in the competitive world of journalism. For his novel *De achterblijver* (The Straggler, 2006), about artificial intelligence and human emotions, Petry received the Dutch BNG Nieuwe Literatuurprijs. His latest novel, *De maagd Marino* (The Virgin Marino, 2010) was awarded the prestigious Libris Literatuurprijs in 2011.

# The second coming of Jesus Christ in 21th Century Brussels

## Dimitri Verhulst Entry of Christ into Brussels

One day, the news announces that Jesus Christ is to visit Belgium on its national holiday, the 21st of July. During the same period, the narrator's mother dies and his relationship ends. Feeling low, and fluctuating between resentment, irony and cynicism, he reports on the events. The authorities squabble about the reception. From the asylum seekers' centre, they get a girl of eleven who can speak Aramaic with Christ.

As the date draws near, the whole city brightens up – everyone is cheerful and full of good will. On the 21st of July, hundreds of thousands of people take part in a party with an official reception committee, folklore, religious invocations and public penance while the eleven-year-old girl dreams of showing Jesus the grey areas of Brussels. But Christ doesn't appear. Everyone returns to their isolation and lethargy. A liveable society appears to be a 'pleasant lie'.

About Dimitri Verhulst:

'This is the better writing.'  
*De Groene Amsterdammer*

'Great stylist, ruthless view.'  
*NRC Handelsblad*

**Dimitri Verhulst** (b. 1972) made his debut in 1999 with the collection *De kamer hiernaast* (The Room Next Door). This was followed by *Niets, niemand en redelijk stil* (Nothing, No one and Reasonably Quiet, 2001) and *De verveling van de keeper* (The Boredom of the Goalkeeper, 2002). His novels *Problemski Hotel* (*Problemski Hotel*, 2003) and *De helaasheid der dingen* (*The Alasness of Things*, 2006) were very successful and have been translated into many different languages. In 2008 *De helaasheid der dingen* was made into a film, which was well received at various festivals and in different countries. Verhulst then wrote *Mevrouw Verona daalt de heuvel af* (*Madame Verona Comes Down the Hill*, 2006), *Godverdomse dagen op een godverdomse bol* (*Goddamned Days on a Goddamned Sphere*, 2008) and *De laatste liefde van mijn moeder* (*My Mother's Last Love*, 2010).



**Publishing details**  
De intrede van Christus in Brussel (2011)  
192 pp

**Rights**  
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**Other titles in translation**  
*Problemski Hotel* (*Problemski hotel*), English (Marion Boyars, 2005), French (Christian Bourgois, 2005), German (Claassen,

2004), Spanish (Lengua de trapo, 2008), Italian (Fazi, 2006), Hebrew (Carmel, 2006) and many other languages. *The Alasness of Things* (*De helaasheid der dingen*). English (Portobello Books, 2011), French (*Denoël*, 2010), Norwegian (*Pax*, 2011), German (*Luchterhand*, 2007), Korean (*Open Books*, 2011) and many other languages. *Madame Verona Comes Down the Hill* (*Mevrouw Verona daalt de heuvel af*). English (Portobello Books, 2009), German (*Luchterhand*, 2008) and Croatian (*Andriji i*, 2009).





# Welagen writes like a painter



**Publishing details**  
Porta Romana (2011)  
160 pp  
**Rights**  
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nijghenvanditmar.nl

## Robert Welagen Porta Romana

Fifty-plus and single, Emilio Lastrucci wakes up in hospital with severe memory loss. What has happened? He has only vague memories of the past. Who can tell him more about himself? His character’s quest leads from Vevey in Switzerland to Rome and Florence and takes him from hotels and lodgings to old houses, friends and one close relative. He also meets an old flame, a woman he lived with for three years. ‘Look at me,’ she whispers. ‘Can’t you see who I am?’

It takes Lastrucci a great deal of effort to rediscover himself, but in the house where he was born a peaceful sensation comes over him. With instinctive haste he decides to buy the house, despite its neglected state. *Porta Romana* is a classic story of the search for identity, a subject Welagen has touched upon before. Most striking, however, is his clear, perfectly composed way of telling a story. There is not so much as an echo of the pace and character of today’s world. In fact it rather seems as if Welagen has modelled Lastrucci’s story on images from old films: ‘A bag blew against his leg and then tumbled on over the paving stones.’

The atmosphere is reminiscent at times of the masterworks of 1970s Italian and French cinematography. It has a grainy restraint, while also being sexy in its own remarkable way. In any attempt to describe Welagen’s novel further, the term ‘retro’ becomes unavoidable as a way of making clear that we are dealing not with old-fashioned prose but with work in which the author purposefully makes use of images and styles from another period and discipline.

Welagen performed the same feat in his earlier novels. There it was contemporary art that inspired him to create his muted images and it has been said he ‘writes like a painter’. *Porta Romana* demonstrates the same unusual way of working, manifesting artistic richness and great expressive power.

**Robbert Welagen** (b. 1981) completed his studies at the Art Academy of Den Bosch in 2004 and wrote a series of stories. Later he embarked on a study of art history and published his first prose in literary magazines. His debut, a sensual novella called *Lipari* (2007), won him the Selexyz Debut Prize. In 2008 he published *Philippe’s Afternoons*, again a novella dominated by pictorial melancholy. For his work up to that point Welagen was awarded the Charlotte Köhler Stipendium, a prize designed to encourage young talent. His third novel, *Distant Friends*, appeared in 2009.

‘An unfashionable but impressive novel.’  
*Financieel Dagblad*

‘A real Welagen.’ NRC

‘Superior.’ *Het Parool*

‘Robbert Welagen manages to make the loneliness of his Emilio Lastrucci understandable in a very restrained and controlled way.’ *Boek*

# Open Landscape, Open Book

As country of honour, the Netherlands was centre stage at the Beijing International Book Fair 2011 (August 31 - September 4). Just before the fair opened, the Chinese translations of *De wandelaar* (The Walker) by Adriaan van Dis (Publisher Hunan Literature and Arts), *Nooit meer slapen* (Beyond Sleep) and *De donkere kamer van Damocles* (The Darkroom of Damocles) by W.F. Hermans (Yilin) and *Het diner* (The Dinner) by Herman Koch (Shanghai 99) were published. Both economically and culturally, the fair has been a great success. Scores of Dutch titles were sold, and in particular Chinese translations of non-fiction as well as children’s books are due to be released very soon.

[www.helanwenxue.org/books/](http://www.helanwenxue.org/books/)

## 开阔的风景

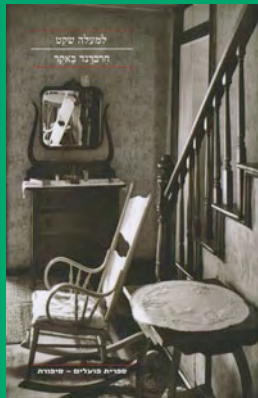
OPEN LANDSCAPE – OPEN BOOK

## 开阔的图书





# Recent Translations



**Gerbrand Bakker**  
[[*Boven is het stil*]]  
(The Twin)  
Translated into Hebrew  
by Rachèle Liberman for  
Hakibbutz Hameuchad  
– Sifriat Poalim



**Maurice Gilliams**  
*Elias eller Kampen med  
näktergalarna*  
(Elias or the Struggle with  
the Nightingales)  
Translated into Swedish by  
Per Holmer for CKM



**Tom Lanoye**  
*Sprakeloos*  
(Speechless)  
Translated into Afrikaans  
by Daniel Hugo for Protea  
Boekhuis



**Charlotte Mutsaers**  
*Kutcher Herbst*  
(Coachman Autumn)  
Translated into German by  
Marlene Müller-Haas for  
Carl Hanser



**Charles den Tex**  
*Clonato!*  
(Cell)  
Translated into Italian by  
David Santoro for Edizione  
e/o



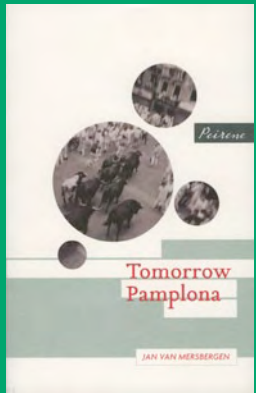
**Jan Wolkers**  
*Turecký med*  
(Turkish Delight)  
Translated into Slovakian by  
Adam Bäch for Slovart



**Anna Enquist**  
[[*Contrapunt*]]  
(Counterpoint)  
Translated into Arabic by  
Ahmed Haidar for Arab  
Scientific Publishers



**Otto de Kat**  
*Inquietudine*  
(Man on the move)  
Translated into Italian by  
Franco Paris for L'Ancora  
del mediterraneo



**Jan van Mersbergen**  
*Tomorrow Pamplona*  
(Morgen zijn we in  
Pamplona)  
Translated into English  
by Laura Watkinson for  
Peirene Press



**Willem Jan Otten**  
*Specht și fiul*  
(Specht and Son)  
Translated into Romanian by  
Andrei Anastasescu for  
Humanitas



**P.F. Thomése**  
*Izak*  
(Izak)  
Translated into French by  
Annie Kroon for Actes Sud



**Laia Fàbregas**  
*Dokuz parmaklı kız*  
(The Girl with the Nine  
Fingers)  
Translated into Turkish by  
Güngör Ufuk for Kavis



**Ernest van der Kwast**  
*Mama Tandoori*  
(Mama Tandoori)  
Translated into Italian by  
Alessandra Liberati for ISBN  
Edizioni



**Margriet de Moor**  
*Der Maler und das  
Mädchen*  
(The Painter and the Girl)  
Translated into German by  
Helga van Beuningen for  
Carl Hanser



**Jan Jacob Slauerhoff**  
*Espuma y ceniza*  
(Foam and Ashes)  
Translated into Spanish by  
Julio Grande Morales for  
Textofilia



**Tommy Wieringa**  
*Caesarion*  
(Caesarion)  
Translated into English by  
Sam Garrett for Portobello  
Books



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