

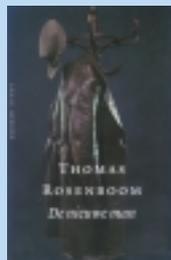
10 Books

from Holland and Flanders



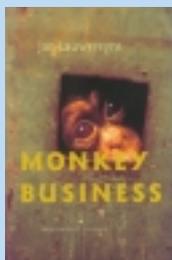
Arnon Grunberg

A.F.Th.



Leo Pleysier

Thomas Rosenboom



Jan Lauwereyns

Rascha Peper

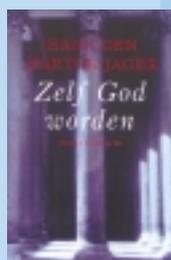
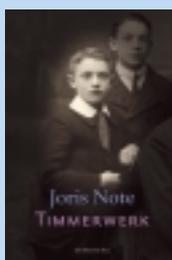
Arjan Visser



Nicolien Mizée

Joris Note

Hans den Hartog Jager

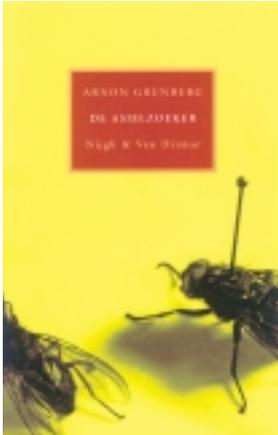


FOUNDATION FOR
THE PRODUCTION AND
TRANSLATION OF
DUTCH LITERATURE

A disturbing picture of modern man

Arnon Grunberg

The Asylum Seeker



ARNON GRUNBERG's mad literary universe has become increasingly grim over the last few years. Whereas in the early novels tragedy chafed under humour, this now seems to be reversed. After *Gstaad 95-98* (published under the pseudonym Marek van der Jagt), in which, to your horror, you have to admit that you feel sympathy for a totally loony, anally fixated child murderer, *The Asylum Seeker* again

exerts the same kind of 'guilty' effect on the reader for his disgust and compassion.

Grunberg's new novel is the story of the writer Christian Beck who in his work broached something that 'should have remained untouched, an anger, you could even call it blind hate, probably unfounded and explosive in nature.' This anger and hate frightened Beck so much that he decided to put down his pen and become a translator of operating instructions.

Beck lost faith not only in the power of writing but also in his own luck. He is a man without illusion and without feeling. He begins to feel that it is up to him to unmask self-deception; only the innocence of the woman he lives with whom he calls 'Bird' can touch him. They are well suited because Bird is inclined to bear the grief of the world on her frail shoulders. However much Beck wants to attach importance to innocence, Bird's compassion can amaze him. This amazement becomes total when Bird finds out that she has a fatal disease and tells Beck that she wants to get officially married – not to him but to an asylum seeker.

There is a concrete reason for the fact that Beck is willing to put up with the humiliating charity of his wife and share the last part of her life with a complete stranger. One day Beck, who visited brothels daily, had stuck a screwdriver – accidentally – into a whore's eye. When Beck told Bird, she flew into a rage, but didn't leave him, hence earning his everlasting respect. Therefore he indulges all her wishes, her wish to marry an asylum seeker, and her wish to 'learn to make goat's cheese herself' – until she dies.

With *The Asylum Seeker* Arnon Grunberg has again written a deadly book that plays satanically with prevailing social ideas. He has given a disturbing picture of modern man who passionately wants to come home somewhere but seems to thrive nowhere.



photo Klaas Koppe

Arnon Grunberg (b. 1971) made his breakthrough at the age of twenty-three with the novel *Blue Mondays* (*Blauwe maandagen*, 1994), which describes the world of prostitution with wry humour. Grunberg's subsequent novels, *Silent Extras* (*Figuranten*, 1997) and *Phantom pain* (*Fantoompijn*, 2000), strengthened both the readers and the critics' conviction that Grunberg is a great writer. Under the pseudonym Marek van der Jagt he published the successful novels *The History of my Baldness* (*De geschiedenis van mijn kaalheid*, 2000) and *Gstaad 95-98* (2002).

Thank God. Arnon Grunberg is only 32.
DE GROENE AMSTERDAMMER

We are lucky that this writer has been enriching the landscape of our literature for the past six years.

PZC

No less than a masterpiece.

HET PAROOL

PUBLISHING DETAILS

De Asielzoeker (2003)
352 pp, 40,000 copies sold

RIGHTS

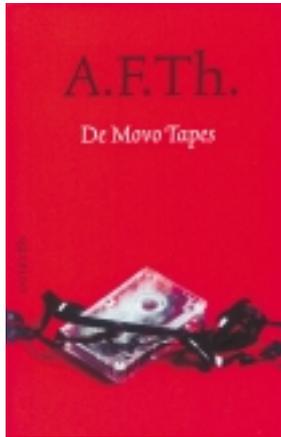
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www.grunberg.nl

OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Blue Mondays (*Blauwe maandagen*). New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997. Also in German (Diogenes, 1997), in French (Plon, 1999), in Spanish (Mondadori, 1998), and in many other languages.
Phantom pain (*Fantoompijn*). London: Secker & Warburg 2003. Also in French (Plon, 2003), in German (Diogenes, in prep.), in Swedish (Brombergs Bokförlag, 2002) and in Hungarian (Gondolat, 2002).
Silent extras (*Figuranten*). London: Secker & Warburg, 2000. Also in German (Diogenes, 1999), in Italian (Mondadori, 2000), and in Spanish (Grijalbo Mondadori, 2000).



Chockfull verbal fireworks



A.F.Th. The Movo Tapes

AFTER SEVEN YEARS of silence A.F.Th. van der Heijden has published *De Movo Tapes*, the 'zeroth' volume of the *Homo duplex* – 'split human' – series that, according to a list of titles in the front of the book, will extend over nine volumes.

Although a series of books in which everything connects up organically is typical of Van der Heijden, his new saga is fundamentally different.

Homo duplex does not look back at a recent past but takes place in an imagined near future. In addition, he endows his hero with distinctly mythical traits. In *Homo duplex* A.F.Th. will recreate the myth of Oedipus in modern times, not by following Sophocles' tragedy step by step, but by using the elements of the myth to create a sparkling new story.

The name of A.F.Th.'s modern Oedipus is Tibbolt Satink, born after his mother has a bizarre traffic accident on a car-free Sunday. Tibbolt, soon sure of his own special nature, seeks a transformation. He is convinced that he can saddle someone else with his death, but to do this he must himself first become someone else.

The story of Tibbolt/Movo is told in two intertwining narratives. One narrative has a character who can be identified as Apollo. This character, who will later adorn himself with the code name QX-Q-8, recounts how he was able to track down a box of cassette tapes in the basement archives of an Amsterdam publishing house after Movo's death. The tapes have deteriorated because of moisture and dirt, and QX-Q-8 has them restored in a laboratory; so that he can listen to Movo's spoken notes for the book about his amazing transformation: *A career as someone else*.

In the other story Tibbolt Satink himself speaks in raw, pointed monologues. He records these monologues on a dictaphone, sitting behind the steering wheel of his car. Agitated by the high speed, he philosophizes freely about time, the state of the planet, and his own life. Tibolt carries on a striking and constant inner dialogue on the tapes with Movo, his 'better self.'

The tirades remind us of the famous stream of consciousness in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Satink – aware of this link – speaks of a 'scream of consciousness.' A.F.Th. lets this scream reverberate with incredible imagination and stylistic power in an explosion of language that dizzies you and leaves you waiting tensely for the following volumes.

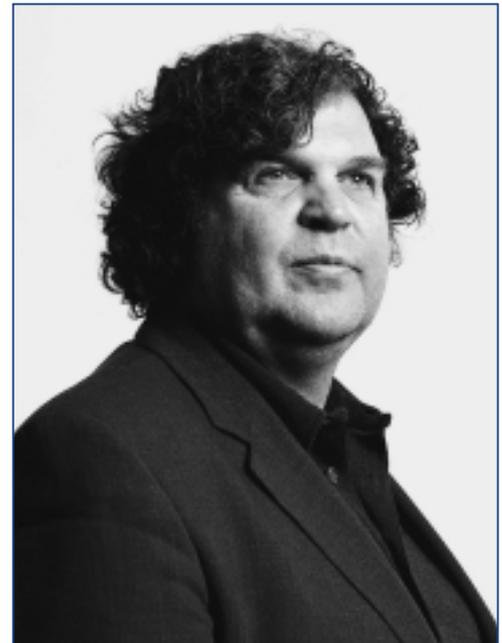


photo Michiel van Nieuwkerk

A.F.Th. van der Heijden (b. 1951) published his first two books under the pseudonym Patrizio Canaponi. He then began publishing under his own name. After *The Toothless Time* (*De tandeloze tijd*), a brilliant seven-volume saga about Amsterdam in the seventies and eighties, Van der Heijden has started another fascinating megalomaniac project.

There is not one author in the Dutch language who equals A.F.Th. in magically transforming high-flown philosophical theories into such sparkling prose, quivering with life.

DE MORGEN

Actually it's shamelessly over the top, that's plain as the nose on your face. But at the same time it is so well written, and with so much talent, that all possible objections are pushed away by all the qualities that are present in the text. A balancing act of the kind that one seldom encounters.

NRC HANDELSBLAD

PUBLISHING DETAILS

De Movo Tapes (2003)
715 pp, 60,000 copies sold

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SELECTED TRANSLATED TITLES

Die zahnloze Zeit (*De tandeloze tijd*). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003.
Die Schlacht um die Blaubrücke (*De slag om de Blauwbrug*). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001. Also in Russian (Inapress, 1999), in Bulgarian (Literarisches Forum, in prep.).
Ein Tag, ein Leben (*Het leven uit een dag*). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1992. Also in Spanish (Ediciones Península, 1995), in Finnish (Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö, 1990), in Swedish (Forum, 1991), in Bulgarian (PIC, 1997), and in Norwegian (Gyldendal, in prep.).
Der Widerborst (*Weerborstels*). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993.



Sensitive and personal

Leo Pleysier

The Thieves Have Already Gone to Sleep



THE THIEVES HAVE ALREADY GONE TO SLEEP consists of notes, diary fragments, individual thoughts, and short stories that fitted nowhere else: about Pleysier himself and his childhood, his children and grandchildren, his home and his garden, and especially about his attitude toward the world around him. These fragments are embedded in a controlled, well-considered structure, a mosaic from which the author's personality slowly emerges. A photographer who thinks

that the author looks 'surlly' and 'hurt' illustrates how he lives by himself and values privacy and detachment. His constant alertness – 'alarm is permanent' –, his sensitive observation, and his strong awareness of his surroundings – 'I have always seen and heard everything' – are surprising aspects of his personality. In this way the author creates a tranquil and slowed-down existence with an expanded awareness from which emerges an appealing depth of character. His most important theme is language, his instrument. 'Language transcends me. Language takes over from me.' He explains how his work comes about, how he writes, searching, until a certain direction into which everything then appears somehow to fit together purposefully. But at the same time language in a supercharged world is a weapon with which others can unthinkingly attack his sensitivity and intimacy. Pleysier feels that nothing is as intimate as a voice that penetrates the auditory canal. While he is known as taciturn, he manages to suppress his great anger about that very prevalent lack of consideration.

Pleysier expresses himself soberly and deliberately, but also penetratingly and in a way that makes an impression, with much feeling for the sound of the language and the social and cultural connotations of usage. 'Brikkaljon' is a Flemish word that he knows from his youth and the former brickworks in his native region. It refers to the multicoloured remnants from the brick firing and stone-cutting scraps, used to fill holes in the road or as raw building materials. In the same way this book is also a collection of loose fragments that Pleysier uses to compose a special and very personal structure in his oeuvre.

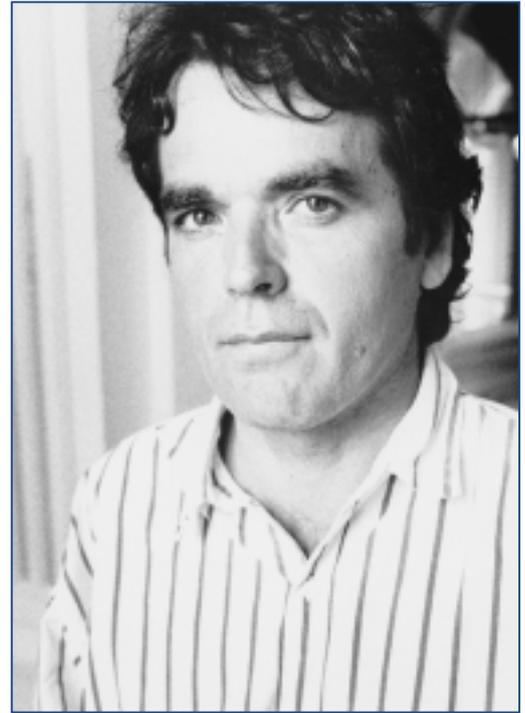


photo Chris van Houts

Leo Pleysier has been awarded several prizes for his work both in the Netherlands and in Flanders, the Culture Prize of the Flemish Community among others. His best works are those in which he lets his own family members speak so that they build up their own literary personality in their own language: his sister in *The Cupboard* (*De kast*, 1991), an aunt who is a nun in *The Yellow River is Frozen* (*De gele rivier is bevrozen*, 1993), and especially his dead mother in *White Is Always Nice* (*Wit is altijd schoon*, 1992). In *Next Year in Berchem* (*Volgend jaar in Berchem*, 2000), he lets all his brothers and sisters speak in a lively conversation about their father, and as the chronicler he himself remains, revealingly, speechless.

The staggered and associative nature of the fragmentary structure makes the reading a surprisingly stimulating experience.

TROUW

PUBLISHING DETAILS

De dieven zijn al gaan slapen (2003)
166 pp, 3,600 copies sold

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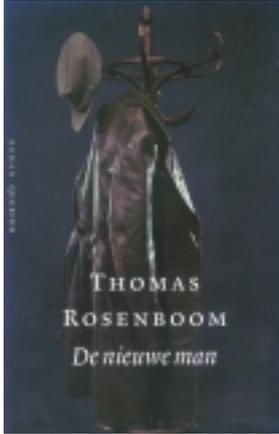
OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Der gelbe Fluß ist gefroren (*De gele rivier is bevrozen*).
Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1997.



A shipbuilder's dazzling downfall

Thomas Rosenboom



The New Man

THOMAS ROSENBOOM is the master of downfall. In his work he steadily guides his characters to their inevitable destruction. In his previous novel *Public Works* (*Publieke werken*, 1999) the pharmacist Anijs and the violin maker Walter Vedder slowly but surely fall under the spell of their delusions. Likewise, in *De nieuwe man* the director of a shipyard and his foreman fix each other in a stranglehold.

Berend Bepol is the director of a small shipyard in the 1920s and 1930s. He has two burning wishes: he wants a husband for his daughter and a successor for his business, and he manages to combine these in one fell swoop by asking his foreman Niesten to marry his daughter and become a partner in the business. When Niesten agrees Bepol's problems seem to be over, but in fact they have just begun. Bepol doesn't understand what it is that he really wants; slowly it becomes obvious to the reader that he wants to get closer to his foreman.

This becomes slightly ridiculous. Bepol has a house built for his daughter and her new husband right across from his own house, in the grounds of the shipyard. Subsequently he haunts the house and peeks inside. Once Niesten finds him at the back door late at night, and his wife catches him climbing on the saddle of his son-in-law's motorbike. This intrusion on Bepol's part inevitably only serves in widening the gap between him and Niesten.

In addition, when difficult economic times hit, Bepol's attempts in making an impression on Niesten as a successful businessman are in vain. When Niesten on his own initiative brings in a large order for the shipyard, Bepol's pride is hurt and he refuses to clear the slipway. Niesten doesn't take that lying down and starts building an enormous tugboat next to the shipyard, in the middle of the meadow. When Niesten, at the advice of Bepol, also pulls in the order for the built-in motor, the ship turns out to be too heavy to be pulled into the water. It remains mired for eternity in the clay.

This tragic plot, which Rosenboom has clearly enjoyed preparing, adding a wealth of telling details and insightful scenes, drives the plot of *De nieuwe man*. The dazzling failure of the undertaking and the comical yet tragic development of the relationship between master and servant, between two men who are completely at each other's mercy and go down together, keep the reader glued to the pages of this novel to the very last line.



photo Jerry Bauer

Thomas Rosenboom (b. 1956) made his debut in 1983 with a collection of short stories called *Those at Home* (*De mensen thuis*), for which he received the Van der Hoogt Prize. The prodigious and brilliant historical novel *Gewassen vlees* (*Washed Flesh*, 1994), which won him the 1995 Libris Literature Prize for the best novel of the year. The historical novel *Publieke werken* was published in December 1999 to great acclaim and with over 100,000 copies sold, it has become his biggest selling book so far.

His narrative has great expressive power. When I finished the novel and wanted to review or go over it again in my mind, countless scenes jumped out. (...) No less than a masterpiece.

TROUW

Rosenboom is and remains a masterful stylist (...) De nieuwe man brims over with scenes and expressions to make his readers grin and chuckle.

DE VOLKSKRANT

PUBLISHING DETAILS

De nieuwe man (2003)
315 pp, 80,000 copies sold

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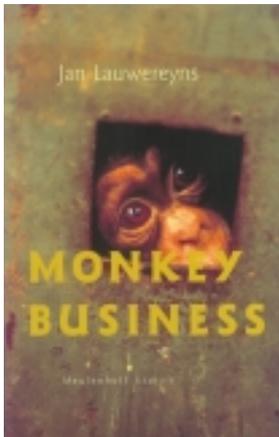
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OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Eine teure Freundschaft (*Vriend van verdienste*). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.
Offentlige arbejder (*Publieke werken*). København: Gyldendal, 2002. Also in English (Faber and Faber, in prep.), and in German (Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, in prep.)
Das Liebeswerk (*Gewassen vlees*). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000. Also in Spanish (Grijalbo Mondadori, 1998).



Vigorous indictment against monkey research



Jan Lauwereyns

Monkey Business

MONKEY BUSINESS is set in a laboratory in Japan. The Western researcher Rorensu – a Japanese version of ‘Lauwereyns’ – is part of a team that is carrying out neurophysiologic experiments on monkeys. The crown of their skull is replaced by a kind of helmet with a funnel through which needles can be placed into

the prefrontal cortex. The helmet can also be screwed with bolts into a frame in order to investigate eye movements in reactions to visual stimuli, a part of research into trial-and-error learning processes. Despite these painful and nasty experiments, a special bond grows between Haruki the monkey and the researcher. There is even rumour of a kind of communication.

The remarkable thing about this book is that it is told from the point of view of the monkey, several hours before it will be killed. And in one of the chapters the roles are reversed: people take the place of monkeys and vice versa in the description of the surgical lifting of the crown of the skull and of fixing the head inside the stereotaxic instrument by means of iron rods in the mouth, the ears, and the eye sockets. It is immediately obvious how ‘inhuman’ such surgery and treatment are. Turning the monkey into a character that consciously registers and interprets its surroundings and also reflects seriously on its own situation is unusual and daring, but is strikingly effective.

Additional scientific and ethical questions arise when the experiments are accorded little appreciation or scientific value. Because the researcher dies and it is better for the new employee to start with a new lab animal, Haruki is doomed to die, and all the efforts and painful experiments have been worthless.

Monkey Business is a vigorous indictment against scientific experiments on animals – ‘The truth is that monkey research is criminal’ –, but in the last hours before its death, the monkey’s thoughts go well beyond its own existence. It reflects on the meaning and the folly of life, about alienation from one’s own life, about scientific accuracy in contrast to human – and animal? – emotions, about the significance of memory and of storytelling. Because of this the story takes on the air of an allegory about the meaning that people try to give their existence.



photo Victoria University of Wellington

Jan Lauwereyns (b. 1969) made his debut in 1999 with *Nagelaten sonnetten* (Sonnets left behind). His third volume, *Buigzaamheden* (Flexibilities) was awarded the Hugues C. Pernath prize in Antwerp in spring 2003 at about the same time as the publication of his first novel, *Monkey Business*. Lauwereyns has spent time in the United States and in Japan and now works as a neurophysiologist at the University of Wellington in New Zealand. Although he has been living away from his native language for some time and the articles he writes for professional journals are in English, Dutch remains his preferred medium for poetry and prose.

I was impressed by the imposing details we are given, and also by the fact that Lauwereyns succeeds in making Haruki piteous or pathetic as well as sympathetic.

HET PAROOL

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Monkey Business (2003)
158 pp, 1,500 copies sold

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Impressive, imaginative and moving

Rascha Peper Embarkation



SINCE HER DEBUT *De waterdame*, a collection of short stories, Rascha Peper has steadily published stories, novels and novellas that are strikingly controlled and lucid. Her reputation continues to grow among both the critics and the general reading

public. With *Wie scheep gaat*, a broadly structured novel in which various lifelines intersect, her craftsmanship is definitively proved.

The book is about a woman who seems, puzzlingly, to have vanished, sealed in a shipwreck somewhere on the seabed, and mourned in The Hague and in New York. In the 'flower district' of The Hague, fifteen-year-old Emma identifies with her vanished aunt. In Manhattan, her former lover Gerard shuffles around 'like a corpse, but of a different nature, a living corpse'. With great affection, the writer zooms in alternately on the budding *femme fatale* and the cautious, bruised scientist. Their respective experiential worlds are sketched vividly and imaginatively, as are their loved ones and tormentors. Peper's approach is empathetic, psychologically realistic, compassionate, and, occasionally, mildly derisory, and humour shines through in several subsidiary character sketches, including one of a gentleman in a pinstriped suit who yearns for ladies' underwear. The force of Peper's writing lies in the sharpness of her observation and the precision of her style: it's sometimes as if this is the film of the novel. She easily succeeds in holding the fascination going the whole five hundred pages: what did actually happen there on the seabed? At the same time she places the human condition in a melancholy light that will haunt the reader for a long time.



photo Chris van Houts

Rascha Peper (pseudonym of Jenneke Strijland, b. 1949) made her debut with a collection of short stories, *De waterdame* (1990). Of the novels that she subsequently published, *Oesters* (1991), *Rico's vleugels* (1993), *Russisch blauw* (1995), and *Een Spaans hondje* (1998), the first two made the greatest impact. In *Oesters* (Oysters), she narrates simply but suggestively, the story of a lost love; *Rico's vleugels* (Rico's wings) covers the relentless love of an older man for a young boy. In 1999, Peper surprised her readers with the enchanting novella *Dooi*, in which a shape from the 'other side' tears a bargeman loose from his secure existence. Peper once remarked in an interview that she is fascinated by people who hold on to their ideas against all the odds. She regards herself as a 'romantic narrator'. Her characters are passionate in a reserved way, persevering in yearnings that cannot be fulfilled and which ultimately bring them to grief.

Rascha Peper is the queen of retrained passion.
DE GROENE AMSTERDAMMER

An impressive, imaginative and moving novel.
DE VOLKSKRANT

With apparent ease, Peper commands all the story lines and astonishingly finely woven threads, so that a tender universe arises in which the reader becomes deeply moved.
HET FINANCIËLE DAGBLAD

A wonderful read. *DE TELEGRAAF*

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Wie scheep gaat (2003)
480 pp, 30,000 copies sold

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OTHER TITLES IN TRANSLATION

Das Mädchen, das vom Himmel fiel (Dooi). Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2001.
Russisch Blau: Roman (Russisch blauw). München: Luchterhand, 1998.



Extremely absorbing novel about religious mania

Arjan Visser

The last Days



IN NOVEMBER 1910, Professor P. Rijniere was startled by a telegram about a case of religious mania. This telegram heads a psychiatric report in which the professor has tried to reconstruct the circumstances of the murder. A man posing as a minister supposedly got a hold over the family of a fanatically religious arable farmer. The minister preached on the farm, was supposedly possessed by the devil, and one

evening was gruesomely murdered in the unbearably hot kitchen. 'Struck down by God's hand.'

This psychiatric report in turn forms the prologue of *The last Days*, the first novel of Arjan Visser who already has a reputation as a gifted journalist. Surprisingly, this apocalyptic novel is not at all journalistic. Arjan Visser has written a real novel. This is due to his exciting style and, especially, to the novel's surprising and fascinating structure. *The last Days* contains a chronicle of a death foretold, yet tension is sustained throughout the story.

Visser tells two separate stories that become entangled in the last part of the book, before the violent ending. The first is that of Cornelis D. Boon, a family doctor addicted to opium. The doctor takes advantage of his female patients and is severely punished for this by his wife Nella. When a young woman announces one day that she is pregnant with the doctor's baby, Nella buys off the woman and gives the baby to another woman. Only eighteen years later does Nella tell her husband that he is the father of a son, an announcement that unhinges the doctor – who was already unbalanced by great quantities of opium. He leaves the house and never returns.

The second story takes place at 'Witte Sluis', Simon Kapteyn's farm. After years of deep-rooted faith in God and a life of iron regularity, Simon becomes dissatisfied. His wife Louise is sullen and spiteful. She fills her son with hate against his narrow-minded father, and doesn't stop – not even when her husband's health deteriorates. Simon pins his hopes on Johannes Peregrino, a prophesying drifter who one day walked onto his land across the frozen river. The coming of this prophet turns out violently, as predicted, but differently from what one would expect. *The last Days* is more than a smoothly flowing and exciting novel, it is also an impressive and moving work about the destructive power of the imagination.



photo Mark Kohn

Arjan Visser (born in 1961) is a journalist and radio producer. Since 1998 he has been publishing interviews on the basis of the Ten Commandments in the national daily *Trouw*. He produces the programme *Spiegels* (Mirrors) for RVU radio. *The last Days* is his first novel. The novel is short-listed for the AKO Literature Prize.

An extraordinarily clever achievement.
NRC HANDELSBLAD

An ingeniously composed, extremely absorbing novel about religious mania.
DEVENTER DAGBLAD

Literature from a real writer. Arjan Visser writes carefully and with enormous compassion for his often unintelligent and unworldly characters.
DE VOLKSKRANT

PUBLISHING DETAILS

De laatste dagen (2003)
220 pp, 5,500 copies sold

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A dislocating view of reality

Nicolien Mizée

Then Mother came with a knife



NICOLIEN MIZÉE made her debut three years ago with the original novel *Voor God en de Sociale Dienst* (For God and the Welfare Department, 2000), in which Cilia, thirty plus, searches for the main-spring and point of her existence. She does this by sending rambling faxes to Sam, who taught her how to write scenarios. In these faxes, she dredges up her past and asks existential questions ironically and light-heartedly. Am I lesbian? Why can't I work and why won't I? What difference does motiva-

tion? Why should other people look after you? The divine Sam could reply but holds his peace, as befits a true God.

In her second novel, *Then Mother came with a knife*, Mizée settles her dislocating view of reality on a well-to-do, artistic family whose members are burdened by an excess of good taste. The painter and decorator Ida attempts to extricate herself from the yoke of her eccentric and sporadically deranged mother. At the same time, she is incapable of looking after herself and is tormented by obsessive thoughts. Her Uncle Melchior, a small businessman dealing in pianos and fighting bravely against degeneration and over-commercialisation, supports her in his own way. Mizée's characters balance on the verge of madness, sensitive as they are to dirt, damp, and other forms of everyday unpleasantness.

Just as in her debut novel, *Then Mother came with a knife* radiates a cheerful, tightly suppressed despair. There must be a deeper meaning to everything, but then again, why? With her keen eye for the absurd, however, Mizée never gets too heavy. Ida does eventually share in the happiness that she surmised might exist among the despised petty bourgeoisie.



photo Chris van Houts

Nicolien Mizée (b. 1965) made a surprising literary entry with the novel *Voor God en de Sociale Dienst* (2000). Her original, funny, narrative tone made an immediate impact. Interviews have indicated that Celia's maladjustment is actually very similar to her own. After living on welfare for several years, Mizée was officially declared unable to work, on psychological grounds. In the meantime, however, she seems to have found her purpose in life with her writing. For *Then Mother came with a knife*, she took her inspiration from her mother's family, a line of renowned artists. She says: 'My books deal with people of good intentions. It's all about finding a truth, because you find something new there, time and again.'

Nicolien Mizée sketches an oppressive world, but does it surprisingly buoyantly.

DE VOLKSKRANT

In *Toen kwam moeder met een mes*, Mizée draws with a pleasantly light touch.

NRC HANDELSBLAD

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Toen kwam moeder met een mes
(2003)
207 pp, 4,000 copies sold

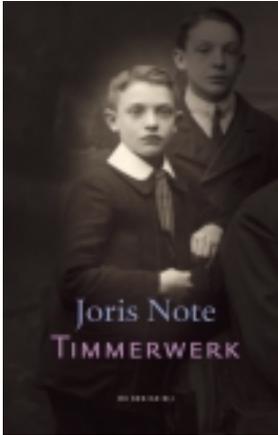
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Subtle portrait of a father

Joris Note Carpentry



THE NARRATOR in Joris Note's three books looks back on his oppressive past and asks himself about the true influence of that past and its after-effects in his memory, but he succeeds only with difficulty in freeing himself from the moral cocoon in which his personality was compressed. In *Carpentry* Joris Note uses broad strokes to trace his ancestry which determined who he has become. *Carpentry* is in fact a

portrait of the writer's father who was trained as a carpenter, but in 1929 as a young twenty-year-old chose a career as a customs official. He worked his way up, studied, and took exams, and was finally promoted to lieutenant at the age of sixty three. The writer-son collects his own memories of his father but also searches for information from long before that. He visits the houses and places where his father lived, sifts through the books and documents that he left, and, above all reconstructs the social and cultural developments of twentieth century Flanders, developments that shaped and supported his father's social, Catholic, and Flemish convictions. Note composes an engaging portrait of the era, a concrete, varied and characteristic cultural history of Flanders in the last century, using examples of pious literature from that period, books about religious marriage doctrine, the actions of the Vlaamse Beweging (Flemish Nationalist Movement), the Christian labour movement, and accounts of life during two world wars.

At the same time he probes the personal codes of his father and his single-mindedness. He calls him 'impressionable, humble, convinced of his shortcomings,' and describes him as pious, with a sense of duty, industrious and upright, not expressive, meditative, introvert.' Because his determined ambition was not always properly rewarded, he became an aggrieved and 'sour old man'. His son recognizes his own attitude toward life in the story of his father, sticks up for him between the lines, and concludes: 'I can find no fault in this man.'

The distance and objectivity in this view of his father are intentional; Note doesn't want his story ruined by sentimentality. The distance that remains between them is marked by differences in development, particularly in the language of father and son. Yet in this subtle, carefully constructed, considered portrait of a period and of a father there is great personal sensitivity, evidence of a great hankering for acknowledgement and love.

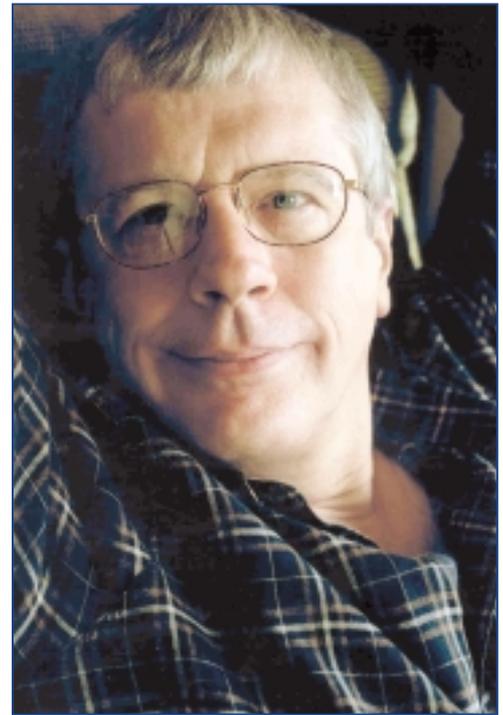


photo Serge Ligtenberg

Joris Note is greatly respected as a profound and penetrating literary critic and columnist. In 1992 he made his debut as novelist with *De tinnen soldaat* (*The Tin Soldier*) and he also published two collections of stories *Het uur van ongehoorzaamheid* (*The Hour of Disobedience*, 1995) and *Kindergezang* (*Children's Singing*, 1999). The life and experiences of a Flemish boy are central to these books; he is conscientious, has a sense of duty, and is saturated with a strict Catholic upbringing. In his fourth book, *Carpentry*, Joris Note undertakes a socio-cultural quest for the past from whence he came.

A monumental Flemish novel, devoted to both my father's person and his century.

TROUW

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Timmerwerk (2003)
288 pp, 1,500 copies sold

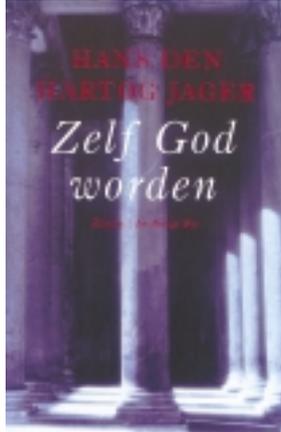
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Sublime narrative on the surplus of images

Hans den Hartog Jager



Becoming God

WITH *BECOMING GOD*, Hans den Hartog Jager has written a novel that reads like an exciting detective novel. It is a book with the allure and virtuosity of Paul Auster's New York Trilogy. A search for the genesis of images and significance, and an exploration of the way they persistently elude us. The structure is that of the classic detective novel, with the reporting of a disappearance. The young, successful art-gallery owner Thomas Locher informs the

French police that the renowned artist Lucas Thorvaldsen has vanished into thin air after their ascent of Mont Saint-Victoire. This mountain, in the vicinity of Aix-en-Provence, on the foot of which Pablo Picasso was buried and which was immortalised by Paul Cézanne on countless canvases, marks both the start and the end of modern art.

Locher suspects that the disappearance of Thorvaldsen is a work of art, an ultimate attempt to assign significance to the vacuum that perplexes him. Thorvaldsen seems to aspire to invisibility in order to be subject to endless interpretation – just like God who also disappeared from His creation – and thus become immortal. He needs a witness to spread the story. But does Locher understand what he is witnessing? Thorvaldsen subtly informs the gallery owner that he had missed the essence of the painting that once awakened his interest in art: 'The Fall of Icarus' by Pieter Breughel. The body of Perdrix, murdered by Daedalus, which is concealed under the bushes, was only seen for the first time in 1935. For centuries, it formed a blind spot in art criticism – it had also escaped the art historian Locher.

Anxious not to miss further significance Locher's imagination begins to run riot. He becomes increasingly entangled in possible interpretations of Thorvaldsen's intentions. Locher ultimately believes that, during the ascent of the mountain, he even has to murder the artist as a component of the latter's artistic plan to vanish. Locher's craving for interpretation infects the reader, who begins to ask just how much credence ought to be attached to Locher's account. This all makes *Becoming God* a fascinating and enjoyable novel, due to the ironic descriptions of the art scene in which fashion, social refinement, and presentation are more important than content. Moreover, Den Hartog Jager relates his narrative with verve. The dialogues are sharp, while the descriptions are light-footed and convincing.



photo Bert Nienhuis

Hans den Hartog Jager (1968) writes for the NRC *Handelsblad* national daily newspaper, in which he published articles on Menno ter Braak, Gerhard Richter, and Lucian Freud. In 2003, he published *The Essential Van Gogh*, a short monograph on the life and work of Vincent van Gogh. The author is currently working on a book on Dutch painting, which will appear in the course of 2004, and on a new novel. *Becoming God* has been nominated for the *Debutantenprijs 2003* – award for the best debut.

Besides being an exciting and seductively sweeping story that draws the reader into a play of semblance and suggestion, this novel is an allegory of modern times.

DE MORGEN

A sublime narrative on the omnipresent surplus of images.

HET PAROOL

How does one become God? Creating 363 pages of captivating literature that surpass the ancient gods is an excellent beginning.

DE STANDAARD DER LETTEREN

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Zelf God worden (2003)
363 pp, 3,100 copies sold

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Recent publications

A.F.Th. van der Heijden
The Toothless Time



German publisher Suhrkamp published the complete cycle of seven novels *Die zahnlose Zeit* (The Toothless Time) by A.F.Th. van der Heijden. 'Those who know Amsterdam can indulge themselves. Not only the topography but the whole atmosphere of seventies Amsterdam, with its squatters and junkies, bars and misplaced artists, the whole 'lost generation' is evoked with unequalled skill.', wrote Dutch paper Trouw.

H.M. van den Brink
Spanien: mit Leib und Seele

(Spain: Body and soul)

Published in German by Sanssouci

Krabbé, Tim
The vanishing

(Het gouden ei)

Published in English by Bloomsbury

Couperus, Louis
**Psyché; Fidessa:
contes et légendes littéraires**

(Psyche; Fidessa)

Published in French by
Presses universitaires du Septentrion

Moor, Margriet de
Kreutzerova sonáta

(Kreutzeronate)

Published in Czech by Paseka

Möring, Marcel

Mendel

(Mendel's Inheritance)

Published in German by Luchterhand

Elsschot, Willem

Fromage

(Cheese)

Published in French by Le Castor Astral

Mulisch, Harry

The Assault

(De aanslag)

Published in Hindi by Vani Prakashan

Grunberg, Arnon

Phantom pain

(Fantoempijn)

Published in English by
Secker & Warburg

Schogt, Philibert

Der Chocolatier

(Daalder)

Published in German by List

Hart, Maarten 't
**Die Sonnenuhr, oder das geheime
Leben meiner Freundin Roos**

(The Sundial)

Published in German by Arche

Verhelst, Peter

Tonguecat

(Tongkat)

Published in English by
Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Hemmerechts, Kristien

Jeudi, 15 H 30

(Thursday Afternoon: Three Thirty.)

Published in French by La Différence

Hertmans, Stefan

**Comme au premier jour:
roman en récits**

(Like The First Day)

Published in French by Bourgois

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

For a complete list of translations of Dutch fiction, please consult our website: www.nlpvf.nl

10 BOOKS FROM HOLLAND AND FLANDERS

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