

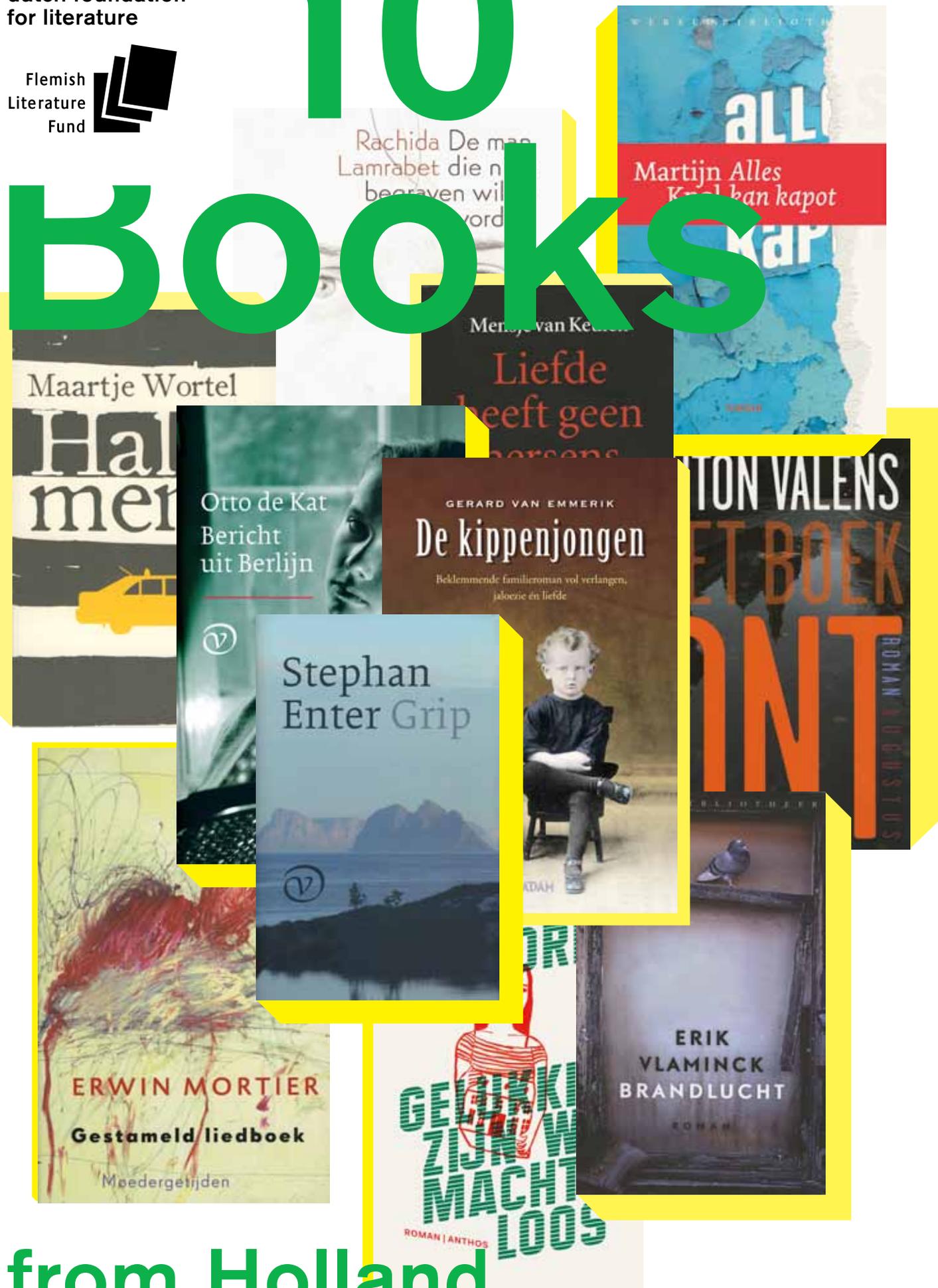
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Literature  
Fund



# 10

# Books



# from Holland and Flanders

no. 21-1 spring 2012

## Drowning in love and jealousy



Gerard van Emmerik (b. 1955) grew up on a farm in the rural Veluwe region. He made his debut in 1993 with the collection of short stories *Iets scherps, een priem* (Something Sharp, An Awl). Other collections followed, and he published novels such as *Mischa's koorts* (Mischa's Fever; 1998) en *De verzachters* (Softening the Blow; 2005). Van Emmerik teaches creative writing and is on the editorial board of the literary magazine *Hollands Maandblad*.

**Publishing details**  
*De kippenjongen* (2011)  
224 pp

**Rights**  
Nieuw Amsterdam  
Jan Luijkenstraat 16  
NL - 1071 CN  
Amsterdam  
t +31 20 570 61 00  
f +31 20 570 61 99  
info@nieuwamsterdam.nl  
www.nieuwamsterdam.nl



'A beautiful expression of loneliness, longing and love.' *De Gazet van Antwerpen*

## Gerard van Emmerik The Chicken Boy

Noor, an intelligent, artistic young woman, decides to marry Lucas, a solitary chicken farmer twice her age with the mind of a child. The match is not nearly as improbable as it seems. When Noor was a child, she left her younger brother unattended, and he drowned. In Lucas's love for her, she hopes to rediscover her brother's childlike innocence. Meanwhile, Lucas is looking for a mother to give him the affection that his own mother withheld.

Van Emmerik infuses new life into this transparently oedipal scenario with a fresh and surprising approach, describing the relationship between Noor and Lucas as if they really were mother and son, in bizarrely literal terms. They become inseparable, often to comic effect – for example, when Lucas is worried sick because Noor comes home ten minutes late from running errands.

As in much of his earlier work, Van Emmerik introduces a dramatic twist that turns the situation on its head. In *De kippenjongen* (The Chicken Boy), this is the birth of a child after twenty years of marriage. It's an improbable turn of events, and Lucas is not the biological father. The child, Jimmy, drives the two spouses apart; Lucas is no longer the most important person in Noor's life.

In short sentences, Van Emmerik conjures up a sinister, oppressive atmosphere of underlying tension and unexpressed feelings of love and jealousy. Through repetition and narrative echoes, the author emphasizes how suffocating love can be.

Although *De kippenjongen* takes place in the Dutch countryside, the characters are trapped as if in a Greek tragedy as the web of the story closes in around them. Yet it remains a mystery how this tale will end. Lucas manages a kind of escape, but through his self-inflicted death – an act of both jealousy and love – he sends a message to his illegitimate son. A message intended to convince Noor of his perfect love for her, and to give Jimmy a chance to escape from his mother's stifling grasp.

'Van Emmerik has no equal when showing how a psychological disorder can hold a family in its grip... The charged atmosphere is reminiscent of authors like Truman Capote and William Faulkner.' *Haarlems Dagblad*

'The deeply religious Veluwe region provides the bleak backdrop for this irresistible, almost magical story, which pulls you right in.' *Esta*

## A scintillating, superbly written novel

### Stephan Enter Grip

*Grip* is a classic psychological novel about three men in love with the same woman, Lotte, which ingeniously draws the reader into the lives of the characters. Vincent and Paul, both in their forties, are taking the Eurostar to Wales to see Lotte and Martin and their daughter and attend a reunion of their mountaineering club. Meanwhile, Martin is on his way to the station to pick them up. During their journey, the men think back to how they met, what life was like for them twenty years earlier and what they expected of each other in those days. These recollections reveal how much they have changed, and how much older they have become.

This touches on the central theme of *Grip*: the mutability of life, the loss of hopes and dreams, and the distorting power of time and memory. While travelling forward in time, you travel backward in memory. The subtle psychological portraits sketched by the author along the way are brilliant pieces of writing. Rarely has a child been captured as eloquently in words as the daughter of Martin and Lotte.

At the same time, *Grip* offers acute insight into a generation. The past relationships and frictions in this group of friends – along with a dose of coincidence and a few unfortunate decisions – laid down the path for their future. Their memories cover a period that is formative for many people: their university years.

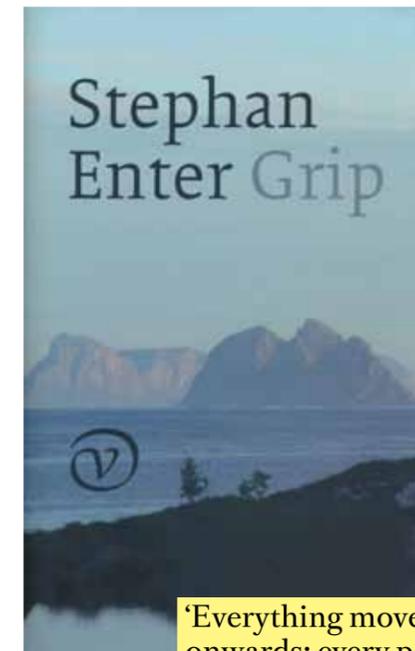
In *Grip*, only one thing is a match for individuals and their memories, and that is the force of nature. This theme comes to glorious fruition in scenes of the far north, where the mountaineers went on an expedition twenty years earlier. The northern lights, the thin air, the ice and the mountain peaks make a person feel small: 'No question about it – the sun would shine here even if no human had ever existed.' Their trip to Lofoten was a turning point in their lives. 'We'll never be that happy again,' Lotte says. One of them saves another's life, one makes a declaration of love to the wrong person, and one misses the opportunity of a lifetime. And all of them have different and contradictory memories of the trip. Twenty years later, a new confrontation with nature brings moments of epiphany. Suddenly they can clearly see their goals and the directions of their lives.

The outer world, economic realities and politics play no role in the work of Stephan Enter. He makes a plea for aesthetics. Without any concessions to the *Zeitgeist*, the author gives us the psyche of the aesthete exposed to the power of nature, in a display of stylistic virtuosity.

Stephan Enter (b. 1968) debuted in 1999 with his collection of short stories *Winterhanden* (Chilblained Hands). His third book, *Spel* (Game; 2007), demonstrated that he was already one of the foremost writers of his generation. The translation of *Spel* was a success in Germany. His third novel, *Grip*, made it onto many reviewers' best-book lists in 2011 and was sold in Germany (to Berlin Verlag), Italy (to Iperborea) and Norway (to Font Forlag).



'A classically structured novel in which Enter's style is complemented by flawless composition, compelling characters, existential themes and a magnificent climax – as well as two cliff-hangers.' *NRC Handelsblad*



'Everything moves and rolls onwards; every perspective differs; and yet the artist seeks to intervene, extracting frozen moments and weaving them together in his own prosody and rhythms. This was the classic drive behind Stephan Enter's great novel.' *De Volkskrant*

**Publishing details**  
*Grip* (2011)  
240 pp

**Rights**  
G.A. van Oorschot  
Herengracht 613  
NL - 1017 CE  
Amsterdam  
t +31 20 623 14 84  
f +31 20 625 40 83  
contact@vanoorschot.nl  
www.vanoorschot.nl

**Translations**  
*Spiel* (Spel): German (Berlin Verlag), Danish (Turbine, in prep.)

**Rights Sold**  
Germany (Berlin Verlag), Italy (Iperborea) and Norway (Font Forlag)

# Diplomats, the entanglements of love and a big secret

On *Man on the Move*: 'Reminiscent of Sartre's *Nausea* and Camus' *The Stranger* [...] This novel has a magical power of attraction.' – *Die Zeit*

On *Julia*: 'A masterpiece.' *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*

## Otto de Kat News from Berlin

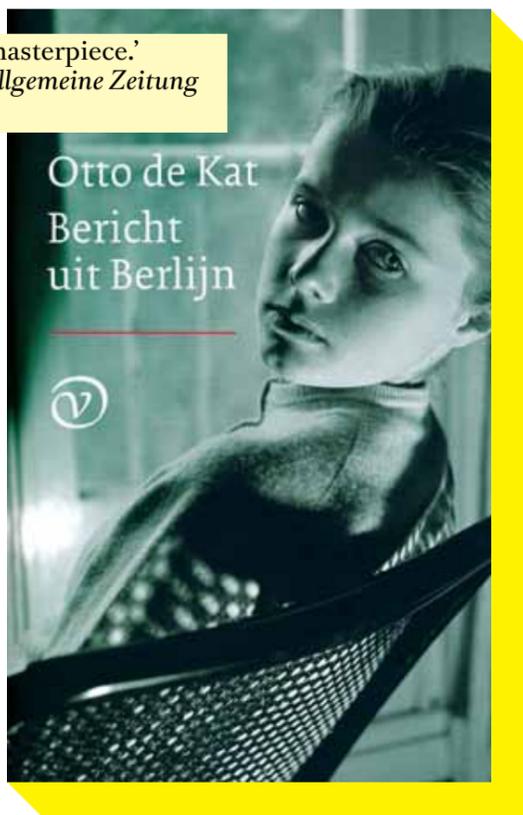
Bern, June 1941. Dutch diplomat Oscar Verschuur finds himself in neutral Switzerland. His family is spread across Europe, his wife Kate in London and their daughter Emma living in Berlin with her husband Carl, a 'good' German who works at the ministry of foreign affairs. The novel alternates between these three perspectives. Verschuur is the consummate diplomat, a 'professional obfuscator': 'At keeping secrets he was unbeatable; it had become second nature to him.'

By chance he hears about the imminent German invasion of Russia. What should he do? Warn the world, or put his daughter's safety first? The ticking clock makes the book a page-turner, its heart-stopping developments described with a subtlety that leaves much to the imagination.

Political circumstances influence personal relationships, while in turn personal relationships seem to influence the world. Oscar knows the secret of Operation Barbarossa because during a clandestine meeting in Switzerland, his daughter was unable to hold her tongue: 'I wanted him to know what we know.'

When his daughter makes her whispered announcement, Verschuur, preoccupied with an extraordinary woman, find himself suddenly wide awake. He does not dare make the information public. Even in London he says nothing, except to his wife. She implores him to act, and downplays the risks to their daughter. This difference of opinion is symptomatic of the married couple's estrangement.

Kate tells him the secret of a Congolese soldier, who knows that 'there was nothing you could do about war, it waltzed over the earth, impossible to stop, impossible to avoid; there was no limit to it'. This is the message left by the book: whichever capital city you may be in, you cannot escape a war. *Bericht uit Berlijn* (News from Berlin) is an exciting, filmic novel, written in Otto de Kat's characteristically restrained style.



**Publishing details**  
*Bericht uit Berlijn* (2012)  
216 pp  
**Rights**  
G.A. van Oorschot  
Herengracht 613  
NL – 1017 CE  
Amsterdam  
t +31 20 623 14 84  
f +31 20 625 40 83  
contact@vanoorschot.nl  
www.vanoorschot.nl

**Translations**  
*Julia*. English (MacLehose), German (Insel).  
*Man on the Move* (De inscheper). English (MacLehose), German (Suhrkamp), French (Le serpent à plumes), Italian (L'Ancora del mediterraneo).  
*The Figure in the Distance* (Man in de verte). English (Harvill), German (Suhrkamp).



Otto de Kat is the pseudonym of retired publisher Jan Geurt Gaarlandt (b. 1946). He published his first novel, *Man in de verte* (The Figure in the Distance), in 1998, followed in 2004 by *De inscheper* (Man on the Move) and in 2008 by *Julia*. Each of these novels is set in the 1930s and 1940s and each was favourably received and nominated for various literary prizes. De Kat has received particular praise for his observant, hushed style. He creates a rather detached atmosphere in which people travel the world without ever finding what they are looking for or escaping their fate.

# A refined psychological game

## Mensje van Keulen Love has no Brains



For many years, in relative silence, **Mensje van Keulen** (b. 1946) has worked on an oeuvre that stands solid as a rock in Dutch literature. Over the past four decades, since her astonishing 1972 debut with *Bleekers zomer* (Bleeker's Summer), she has published over twenty-five titles, including collections of stories and poetry, novels and children's books. Critics were raving from the start about the deceptive simplicity of her stories and the delicacy of her style. She has regularly been nominated for literary prizes and won several. In 2011 she was awarded the Charlotte Köhler oeuvre prize.

We find ourselves in a seemingly ordinary situation of the sort Mensje van Keulen favours for her stories and novels. She is a subtle storyteller with a sharp eye for significant, often slightly bizarre details that give her work a melancholy atmosphere and considerable power. Her characters are not superheroes, indeed they could be the man or woman next door. In *Liefde heeft geen hersens* (Love has no Brains) a slightly shabby block of flats serves as the realistic facade behind which all kinds of things turn out to be happening.

The heroine of the novel is called Romy. She was named after Romy Schneider by her mother, a fan of the 'Sissy' films. Van Keulen's readers will know that this is not without significance. Like her namesake, Romy appears sweet and charming, helpful and loyal, but she is not rewarded for it in her life. The very opposite, in fact. Loveable though Romy may be, it seems no one can stay close to her for long. Her deceased husband, kept in an urn in the bedroom wardrobe, was a philanderer; her children avoid her and her love life is going nowhere.

When Romy finds her elderly neighbour, a former ballet dancer called Irma for whom she cleans and does the shopping, dead in her own home one day, she panics. 'I'm not looking at a peaceful face with old, familiar features. It's not even empty, it's a face left, as if by a spasm, with a lasting expression of horror.' When Romy takes a good look around, she realizes a statuette is missing from Irma's flat and Freddy the black cat has vanished. Romy can't help suspecting her son Cristian, who stole something from Irma once when he was a boy. For help she turns to Harro, the caretaker, a former lawyer who still lives at home with his mother. She even decides to remove any cause for suspicion by sprucing up Irma's body a little. She's often seen it done during her time helping out as a hostess at the St. Francis cemetery in The Hague.

From this point on *Liefde heeft geen hersens* has the pace and suspense of a whodunit. We hear from a small parade of characters around Romy, each of whom turns out to have a hidden motive and might well have been involved in elderly Irma's death. As well as Romy's son, Harro seems to be involved in something shady. It becomes clear he is a voyeur who loves staring at images from the building's security cameras, and it's he who has been stalking Romy.

At the end of the book there is still room for dispute about exactly what happened. Mensje van Keulen keeps us glued to the book right to the very last line, playing a refined psychological game with her characters. An episode from the midst of the main character's life ends with a sigh that beautifully evokes a sense of tragedy: 'Rain brings oxygen, Romy. Stay there and take a deep breath, then another, and another. Just let it rain on these flats, this city; let all that water fall and applaud.'

'Van Keulen manages to make her damaged or deranged characters into people of flesh and blood so that, swept along by the book, we accept them as entirely normal. [...] Her prose reads as a loud 'no' to condemnation of our fellow human beings.' *Vrij Nederland*

**Publishing details**  
*Liefde heeft geen hersens* (2012)  
192 pp  
**Rights**  
Atlas  
Herengracht 481  
NL – 1017 BT  
Amsterdam  
t +31 20 524 98 00  
f +31 20 627 68 51  
mnagtegaal@atlascontact.nl  
umatten@atlascontact.nl  
www.uitgeverijatlas.nl

**Selected translations**  
*Posljednji gosti* (De laatste gasten). Croatian (Andrijić, 2008).  
*Die Glückliche* (De gelukkige). German (Arche, 2003 / Knauer Taschenbuch, 2005).  
*Ein trister Sommer* (Bleekers zomer). German (Bert Schlender, 1982).



'Technically perfect, stylistically beautiful, with searing content – what more could you want?' *De Groene Amsterdammer*

## Stilistic virtuosity and compassion

**Publishing details**  
*Alles kan kapot* (2011)  
 526 pp

**Rights**  
 Wereldbibliotheek  
 Spuistraat 283  
 NL – 1012 VR  
 Amsterdam  
 t +31 20 638 18 99  
 f +31 20 638 44 91  
 info@wereldbibliotheek.nl  
 www.wereldbibliotheek.nl



On *Aphinar*, A Romantic tragedy: 'Beautifully'  
*De Volkskrant*

'I feel the greatest kinship with writers who play with genres and conventions and constantly transgress or transcend boundaries: Multatuli, Nabokov, David Foster Wallace, Hafid Bouazza and, especially since *Homo Duplex*, A.F.Th. van der Heijden. But to be honest, I can feel just as much admiration for a Renaissance painter or a slapstick author, and I can get just as much pleasure out of a friend's anecdote or a well-written advertisement.' *Martijn Knol on his influences* (Passionate Magazine, February 2011)



**Martijn Knol** (b. 1973), a former stand-up performer and adman, is an unconventional and many-talented writer. Following *De duiker* (The Diver; 2003) and *Aphinar, een romantische tragedie* (Aphinar, A Romantic Tragedy, 2007), *Alles kan kapot* (2011) is his third and most ambitious novel. While it shows the influence of great authors like Céline and David Foster Wallace, Knol speaks with an authentic and deeply original voice.

A writer can make the most improbable – or even impossible – things possible, as Martijn Knol illustrates in passages where a character returns from the dead to demand a continuing role in the story. Moves like these disorient the reader, who must accept that not everything can be grasped by reason and is rewarded with a demonstration of why literature is so much more captivating than real life: because anything can happen.

*Alles kan kapot* contains brilliant passages, among the finest that Dutch literature has produced in some time. In this novel, the master stylist Knol shows us what literature is capable of, pulling out all the stops and performing audacious linguistic and formal acrobatics. And through it all, the book remains compulsively readable, thanks to his gorgeous, glorious way with language and his compassion for his characters, flesh-and-blood people who harm each other in horrifying ways, but also know how to love.

## Martijn Knol Anything Can Break

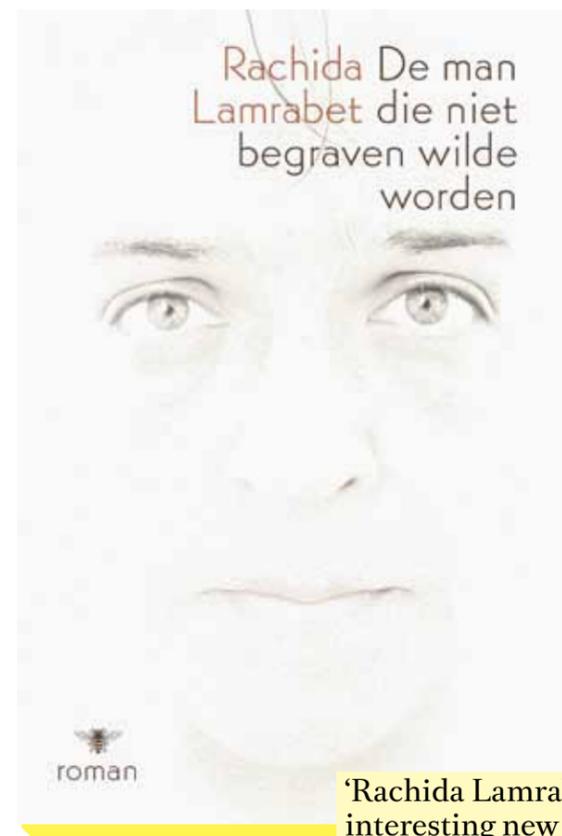
*Alles kan kapot* (Anything Can Break) moves between Arnhem, Germany, Vienna, Lesbos and New York and spans three generations in the life of a family. Starting in the present, we accompany the characters on a journey ever deeper into the past, witnessing the events that shaped them. The book ends in 1945, when Grandfather Ambrosius decides to make a fresh start and say nothing about the violence he saw and endured as a factory worker in southern Germany during the war. By that point, we know that this man will later damage his yet unborn daughter Merel, dooming her to a lifetime of silence and isolation. And even before that, at the start of the story in 2011, we have learned how Merel's experiences influenced her children; the sensitive Jonathan, who has no idea how to cope with his mother's pain, and the resilient Serafine, who learns to express herself through art.

Serafine is one of the pivotal characters in the book. The love of her life is the sensual Kat, who sometimes explodes into fits of violence, physically attacking Serafine and destroying her works of art. But Serafine remains undaunted, always using the shards to create something new. Her creations give rise to fascinating and sometimes hilarious reflections on the art world. For instance, the author quotes from fictitious reviews by a gallery of narrow-minded art critics who ascribe intentions to Serafine that are utterly foreign to her.

Knol himself understands the art of seeing like nobody else. His boundless curiosity and powers of observation give rise to a vivid, sensuous narrative style. A fall from a ladder, for instance, which takes a few seconds at most, is teased out into a blood-curdling passage that holds the attention for pages on end, culminating in an improbable but utterly credible dramatic resolution.

## The cultural divide experienced by migrants

'Lamrabet peels off skin after skin of the onion and does so in a magnificently compelling style.'  
*De Volkskrant*



'Rachida Lamrabet is an interesting new voice in European literature.'  
*Die Zeit*

**Publishing details**  
*De man die niet begraven wilde worden* (2011)  
 226 pp

**Rights**  
 De Bezige Bij Antwerpen  
 Mechelsesteenweg 203  
 B – 2018 Antwerp  
 The Netherlands  
 t +32 32 85 73 29  
 f +32 32 85 72 99  
 bieke.vanduppen@wpg.be  
 www.wpg.be/foreignrights

**Rachida Lamrabet** (b. 1970) writes prose and stage plays (*Belga*, 2009). In 2006 she won a literary prize with the story 'Mercedes 207', which was included in the collection *Kif Kif. New Voices from Flanders*. Her first novel, *Vrouwland* (Woman Country, 2007) saw her awarded a debut prize and nominated for a number of others. She received the BNG New Literature Prize for her story collection *Een kind van God* (A Child of God, 2008). Both books have been translated into German. In her new novel *De man die niet begraven wilde worden* (The Man Who Didn't Want to be Buried, 2011) she once again portrays the cultural divide experienced by migrants.



## Rachida Lamrabet The Man Who Didn't Want to be Buried

In *De man die niet begraven wilde worden* (The Man Who Didn't Want to be Buried), Rachida Lamrabet once more astonishes her readers with an unusual, penetrating and nuanced examination of the lives of people who are culturally uprooted, in some cases inwardly torn. Her characters are affected in their deepest being and in their most heartfelt emotions by the circumstances of their lives.

Moncif tells his story from an uncomfortable position: hiding under a table in the mortuary. As he waits for the guard to leave the building, he explains why he is there. His wife left him because he had distanced himself from Muslim culture and now that his brother has died in a car accident he has descended into deep despair. To his parents' dismay, Moncif's Western sister-in-law wants his brother to be cremated, going against Muslim tradition. Because he believes he has chosen the wrong path and needs to make amends, he decides to remove his brother's body from the mortuary at night and give it an appropriate burial.

Rachida Lamrabet's story involves far more than a head-on confrontation between Western and Muslim culture. Its central concern is with identity and integrity. The parents insist that their children's 'apostasy' only makes them more vulnerable; in view of the recent electoral success of right-wing extremism, they should not have any illusions. Moncif has his own ideas about adjustment to Western life, but nevertheless he reaches an irritable compromise between willingness to please, pride and resistance. Many of the characters' personal choices elicit social and generational conflicts that deeply disturb traditional family life. Even in marriage and the experience of sexuality, misunderstandings have tragic consequences. 'You can try to mix with the Flemings and live the way they do, but you'll never succeed in being one of them,' Moncif's father insists.

## Witty novel about impossibilities

### Anton Valens Man&Post

This is an unforgettable story whose author sustains a precarious balance between cheerful nonsense and high seriousness. The setting is Groningen, a city in the far north of the Netherlands, a buzzing centre of life amid endless flat meadows. The 500-year-old Martini Tower serves as an urban landmark and the people are sober, their dour character proverbial. Groningen, where Valens lived for many years, is conceived as a form of isolation, of being cut off.

Isebrand Schut is the central figure in the book. A former biology student, now out of work and suffering from a series of odd social phobias, has difficulty greeting people on the street and is afraid to open the post. He sets up a self-help group for fellow sufferers called *Man&Post*, bringing a mixed batch of letter-phobics together twice a month. Among them is the enigmatic Cor Meckering, who has a fascination for the prefix 'dis'. Having no specific meaning of its own, it occurs in words such as disclaim, disprove and discontinue. He wants to write a book about it: *The Book of Dis*. Isebrand offers to help.

It turns out to be an impossible task, but that is precisely the focus of Valens' novel: impossibilities, things that cannot be yet somehow are. Later Isebrand does find a job, as a lavatory attendant in the metro station. Groningen has no metro. Another illustration of the theme of impossibility is a remark by Meckering: 'The only argument for the existence of the Martini Tower is that it's there, but believe me, that's the only one.'

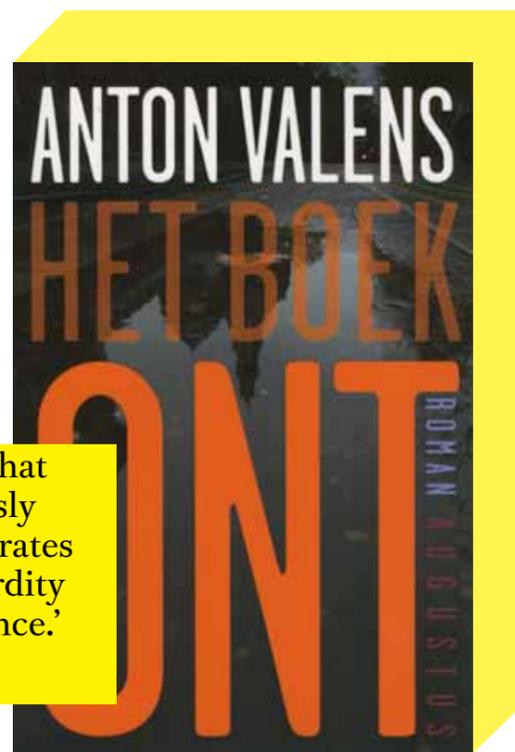
*Man&Post* is witty, intelligent and evocative, and so convincingly written that afterwards you begin to wonder whether all those impossibilities might be real-world facts after all. It takes a couple of mouse clicks to reassure yourself that Groningen does not have a metro. Valens' talent is to make his readers believe the impossible. An overwhelming achievement.



**Anton Valens** (b. 1964) trained as a painter at the Rietveld Academy and the Rijksacademie. As a student he worked in home care services in Amsterdam, garnering experiences he later used in his debut novel *Master in Hygiene* (2004), about a young man who cleans houses for the elderly and infirm. The book won a number of literary prizes, went through several reprints and appeared in French translation. In 2008 Valens published both the story collection *Mop War*, in which he again draws upon his experiences in home care, and the travel story *I Wanted to Go to the Edge of Beijing*. The following year Valens made an indelible impression with his novella *Fish*, a tough, masculine tale written in a crystal-clear prose about an artist who has a rather unambitious attitude to life. When he joins a group of fishermen he is made to face up to his miserable position on the social ladder.

'A book that mercilessly demonstrates the absurdity of existence.'  
*Knack*

'The irresistible thing about *Man&Post* is first of all the relentless regularity with which Valens makes you grin to yourself every so many pages - no cliffhanger can compete with that.'  
*NRC Handelsblad*



**Publishing details**  
*Het boek Ont* (2012)  
320 pp

**Rights**  
Augustus  
Herengracht 481  
NL - 1017 BT  
Amsterdam  
t +31 20 524 98 00  
f +31 20 627 68 51  
mragtegaal@atlascontact.nl  
umatten@atlascontact.nl  
www.augustus.nl

**Translations**  
*Homme de ménage*  
(Meester in de hygiëne).  
French (Actes Sud, 2010)  
*Fisch* (Vis). German  
(Maren Schürmann, 2011)

## Indefinable fear



**Ivo Victoria** (b. 1971) graduated in media studies at the Catholic University of Leuven and now lives and works in Amsterdam. He made his debut in 2009 with *How I Never Won the Tour de France for Under Twelves (and regret it)*, in which the character Ivo Victoria returns chastened to the Antwerp suburb he left twenty years before, where as a child in the 1980s he was known as an incorrigible show off. More than ten thousand copies of that novel were sold in the Netherlands and Belgium. Ivo Victoria has since written stories and columns for various newspapers and magazines, and published a number of short story collections. The tone of his second novel, *Gelukkig zijn we machteloos* (Fortunately We're Powerless), is very different from that of his debut. It has been shortlisted for the 2012 Libris Literature Prize.

'With his second novel, Victoria takes a wide sweep and succeeds in capturing the fear and desperation of modern life in singing prose.'  
*Het Parool*

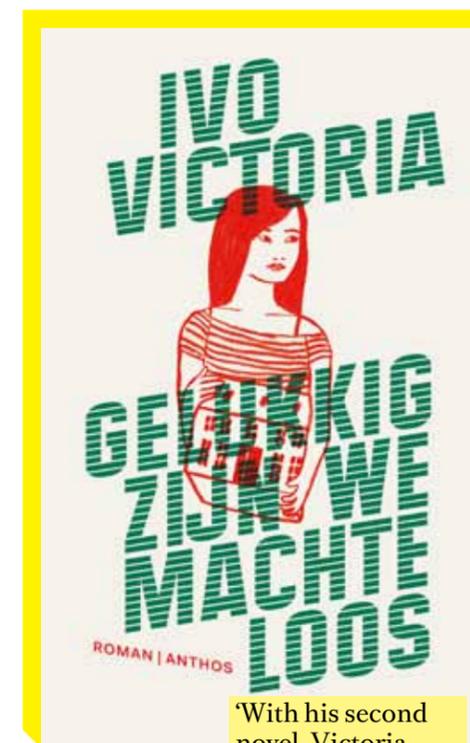
### Ivo Victoria Fortunately We're Powerless

Ivo Victoria's second novel, *Gelukkig zijn we machteloos* (Fortunately We're Powerless, 2011), is set during a family celebration. The pretence of family solidarity that the elderly mother and her three children try to maintain cannot disguise the tensions between them. Then there is the indefinable fear caused by the recent disappearance of several young girls and the mysterious white noise that people keep hearing.

The house has extra security, the garden is fenced, yet the family suddenly discovers that fourteen-year-old adopted granddaughter Billie is missing, as is their old family friend Uncle Lex, a former clergyman. All kinds of clues lead to suspicions and assumptions. In reality Billie has escaped from the oppressive gathering out into the fields nearby, Uncle Lex has gone to check she's alright and during a storm she is struck by lightning. Uncle Lex returns to the house distraught, Billie's body limp in his arms.

A strange scene opens the book. As Lex carries the unconscious (or dead?) Billie he is accompanied by a gannet. By fragmenting the chronology of his story, Ivo Victoria creates intriguing effects. He also adds a refined symbolism to unusual elements of the story at suitable moments: like gannets, people struggle to take off from the ground to escape their anxiety in free flight. And although appearances point to Uncle Lex as a suspect, he turns out to be the only person striving for a rational interpretation of the atmosphere of fear and insecurity: 'The world is neutral. We make it tragic by being unable to accept it the way it is. Our own spirit is a trap.'

The feigned cheerfulness of the family, the ambiguity of the characters' banal behaviour and the gathering storm all suggest something terrible is about to happen. Combined with the suggestive style of the book, this ominous tension keeps the reader spellbound. Ivo Victoria plays a shrewdly manipulative game with his readers, who eventually, soberingly, recognize distorted perception and blatant prejudice in themselves.



'With his second novel, Victoria takes a wide sweep and succeeds in capturing the fear and desperation of modern life in singing prose.'  
*De Standaard*

**Publishing details**  
*Gelukkig zijn we machteloos* (2011)  
242 pp

**Rights**  
Anthos  
Herengracht 499  
NL - 1017 BT  
Amsterdam  
The Netherlands  
t +31 20 524 54 11  
f +31 20 420 04 22  
mragtegaal@amboanthos.nl  
umatten@amboanthos.nl  
www.amboanthos.nl

## An enthralling novel about emigration and uprooting



**Erik Vlamincck** (b. 1954) is a theatre-maker and author of a large oeuvre, including the six-part family saga *Het schismatieke schrijven* (Schismatic Writing). In the tradition of Louis Paul Boon he writes with great psychological insight about family and ordinary people. His penultimate novel, *Suikerspin* (Candyfloss) was received enthusiastically by the press.

## Erik Vlamincck Burning Smell

In the little Canadian town of Saint Thomas there is a statue of the elephant Jumbo, star of a travelling circus, which saved the little elephant Tom Thumb from an oncoming train, so the story goes. Jumbo paid with his life, they say. A nice story, but only a myth. It symbolises the relationships within the Verkest family in the novel *Brandlucht* (Burning Smell), the surprising and moving tale of a family forced to live far from its native ground, its own language and history, in a place that will never feel like home.

The father, Gaston, is one of the many Belgians who moved to Canada after World War II to build a new life. There, he meets the Dutchwoman Mina and they have a daughter, Elly. To the neighbours they seem like a happy family, in which the child is mollycoddled.

For a long time, Elly trusts in her father, who is a fanatic pigeon fancier and likes to call her 'buttercup'. The pendant he gave her, a golden dove, is always around her neck. In her eyes, it is Mother who is the nasty one, the one ruining the marriage and spoiling things for everyone. Until suddenly Gaston goes away and stays away. He's gone back to Flanders.

As an adult, Elly still misses him. She seeks out her father in Belgium, where she is confronted with the truth. During the years he was in Canada, it turns out, he was still half-living in the country where he was born, where he even already had a family. Elly is bent on revenge and develops the habit of hurting herself, cutting herself to feel she is alive. 'You know, most of the time I feel I'm not at home anywhere. Not even in my own body'.

Only the third generation of Verkests, Elly's daughter Linda, is fortunate enough to feel at home in the new country. Linda no longer feels any connection with the Flemings in the town who 'wallow in nostalgia and indulge in village gossip, pigeon-racing and cycling. And swilling beer'. But Mina and Elly do not live to see that. The madness that always lurked around the corner in her father takes hold of Elly. To the point where she starts a fatal fire. In a dramatic turn of events, Elly and Mina lose their lives, which is where Linda begins hers.

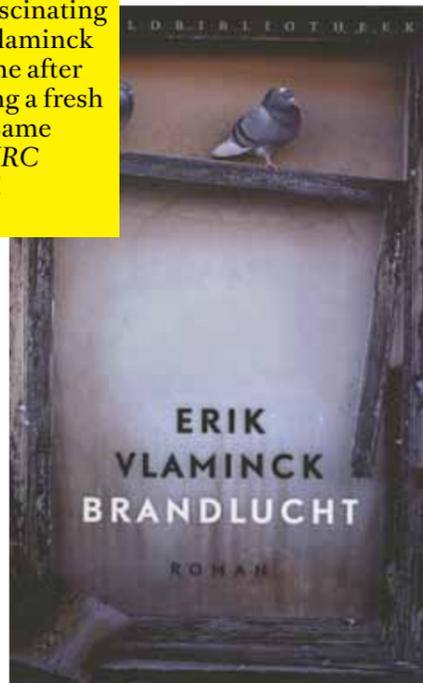
With sensitivity, a sense of humour and a great feel for language Erik Vlamincck shows the effect the uprooting of a family can have on a young girl's mind. It is the story of many emigrants all over the world, of ravaging homesickness, of the old world and the new country. With virtuoso skill, Vlamincck interweaves the voices of Elly, Linda, Mina and Gaston, each painted with a different palette. It produces an intense, highly-colourful portrait of a broken family.

**Publishing details**  
*Brandlucht* (2011)  
244 pp

**Rights**  
Wereldbibliotheek  
Spuistraat 283  
NL - 1012 VR  
Amsterdam  
t +31 20 638 18 99  
info@wereldbibliotheek.nl  
www.wereldbibliotheek.nl

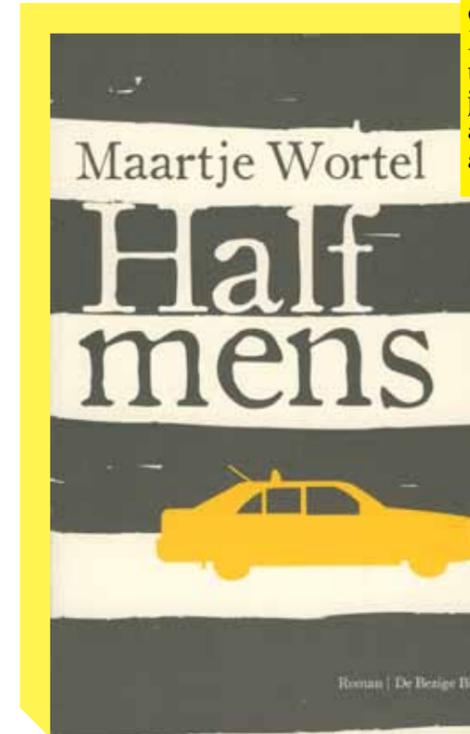
'The master of the popular novel [...] who succeeds in empathically narrating the lives of social outcasts as no other. Vlamincck is heir to the great naturalistic prose.' *Knack*

'There is hardly an insignificant detail to be found in *Burning Smell*. What, in particular, makes this novel fascinating is the way Vlamincck succeeds time after time in giving a fresh view of the same situation.' *NRC Handelsblad*



## Entwined by fate

'Wortel plays with the phenomenon of the blind spot. She holds to her course all the way to the surprising ending with great virtuosity. Her language is a joy.' *Vrij Nederland*



'Often seen in a café or restaurant: a man and a woman who have nothing to say to each other. Often thought: they imagined a life very different from this. After reading *Maartje Wortel I* now understand that we should resist rushing to judgment, since not sharing anything can sometimes indicate an inner bond.' *De Volkskrant*

**Publishing details**  
*Half mens* (2011)  
192 pp

**Rights**  
De Bezige Bij  
Van Miereveldstraat 1  
NL - 1071 DW  
Amsterdam  
t +31 20 305 98 10  
f +31 20 305 98 24  
h.deinum@debezigebij.nl  
www.debezigebij.nl

## Maartje Wortel Half-Human

In her earlier work Maartje Wortel proved herself a storyteller utterly unlike any other. Her first novel, *Half mens* (Half-Human), lives up to that promise, showing her to be one of the most original and talented voices of her generation.

The setting is Los Angeles, City of Dreams, a place where making human contact requires considerable effort. The millions of residents criss-cross in a random pattern, their lives never touching. Out of the corners of their eyes they observe each other's stories. Then one day the narratives of three different people literally collide.

Michael Poloni is a 41-year-old Mexican who came to Los Angeles long ago with his mother and brothers. He gets on alright at his job, but beyond that his life seems empty. He smokes cigarettes, watches television and regularly visits doctors in his search for something he continually feels is missing: himself. One day, on the way to work by taxi as usual, he is involved in a traffic accident with a Dutch girl called Elsa Helena van der Molen. The results of the accident are horrific. The girl's leg has to be amputated. Also caught up in the incident is James Dillard, called in for jury service in a lawsuit brought by Elsa's Americanized parents.

In immaculate, sparkling prose, Wortel describes two lives entwined by fate. While the maimed Elsa tries to build a new life for herself with the money from the court case, hoping that men will still find her attractive, Michael thinks he can see in her the person who, in a Platonic way, will make him complete. He is prepared to go to any extreme to make that happen.



In 2007, **Maartje Wortel** (b. 1982) won the Write Now! literary talent competition. Her story collection *Dit is jouw huis* (This is Your House, 2009) saw her awarded the Anton Wachter Prize for the year's best literary debut. *Half mens* (Half-Human) was nominated for the BNG New Literature Prize.

*Half mens* is suffused with a realization that all this might equally well never have happened, that history is a matter of chance. The author plays with this fact beautifully, for example by providing short biographies of random passers-by. The acknowledgment of historical contingency raises the primal question of why we are here. While we all busily and intently search for the meaning of life every day, Wortel asks a simple but troubling counter-question: Hasn't it been right there in front of us all the time, if only we would notice? The resulting novel is inspiring, witty and wise.

# An overwhelming portrait of his mother's deterioration

## Erwin Mortier Stammered Songs

'My mother gave me a dusting today. She thought I was furniture.' *Gestameld liedboek* (Stammered Songs) is one of those rare books that grab you by the throat from the first sentence and never let go. After Erwin Mortier's mother falls victim to Alzheimer's disease at the age of 57, he becomes the chronicler of her slow deterioration. His observations and meditations are couched in the scintillating, lyrical prose that has become his trademark.

In arresting images and sentences like strung pearls, he traces the slow breakdown of his mother's mind and its impact on her husband and children. The patient and those who love her enter a shadowy realm between life and death, narration and disintegration, language and silence. The resulting book is a fragmentary portrait of his mother's illness.

The stammerer in this story is not only the mother, as language gradually slips away from her, but also the author, so distraught by his mother's condition that he finds himself utterly incapable of writing – until he began work on this book.

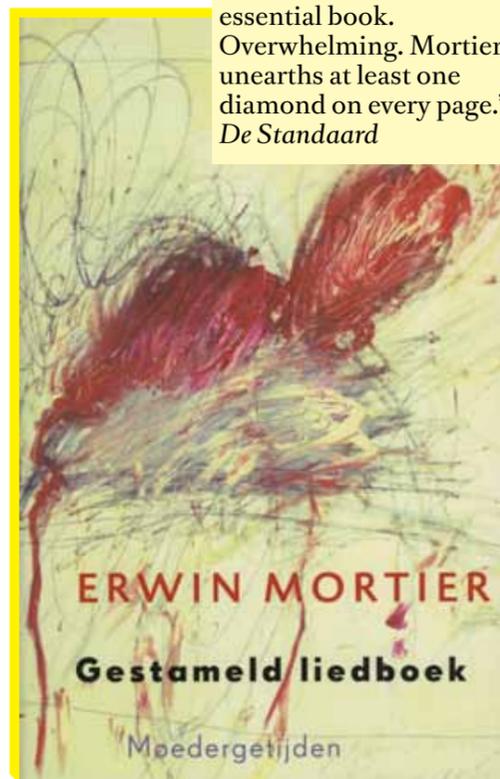
*Gestameld liedboek* is not solely about mourning, but also about language, and above all about love. Mortier's book is an essential, universal lament, bitter and razor-sharp yet pure and sublime in its beauty.

'Erwin Mortier captures his mother's dementia in sensitive and elegant prose. The splendid sentences in which he frames her deterioration in fact produce an unexpectedly stark effect.' *Trouw*



**Erwin Mortier** (b. 1965) made his mark in 1999 with his debut novel *Marcel*, which won several prizes and was nominated for the most distinguished Flemish and Dutch literary awards. His subsequent novels *Mijn tweede huid* (*My Fellow Skin*, 2000) and *Sluiterijd* (*Shutterspeed*, 2002) and the novella *Alle dagen samen* (*All Days Together*, 2004) quickly established his reputation as one of the leading authors of his generation. For *Godenslaap* (*Divine Sleep*, 2008), a novel set against the backdrop of the First World War, he was awarded the prestigious AKO Literature Prize 2009. A consummate stylist, he offers evocative descriptions that bring past worlds brilliantly to life.

'Erwin Mortier has excelled himself. This is more than just immensely touching confessional literature about Alzheimer's disease. It is an essential book. Overwhelming, Mortier unearths at least one diamond on every page.' *De Standaard*



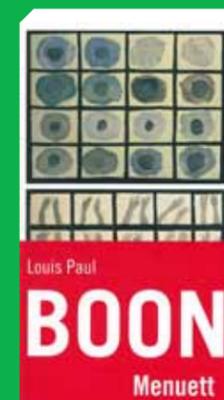
**Publishing details**  
*Gestameld liedboek*  
(2011)  
190 pp

**Rights**  
De Bezige Bij  
Van Miereveldstraat 1  
NL – 1071 DW  
Amsterdam  
t +31 20 305 98 10  
f +31 20 305 98 24  
h.deinum@debezigebij.nl  
www.debezigebij.nl

**Selected translations**  
*Marcel* (Marcel). English (Harvill, 2001 / Vintage, 2003), Bulgarian (PIC, 2001), French (Fayard, 2003), and German (Suhrkamp, 2001)  
*My Fellow Skin* (*Mijn tweede huid*). English (Harvill, 2003), German (Suhrkamp, 2004), and French (Fayard, 2004)  
*Shutterspeed* (*Sluiterijd*). English (Harvill Secker, 2007), German (Suhrkamp, 2007), and French (Fayard, 2005)  
*Les dix doigts des jours* (*Alle dagen samen*). French (Fayard, 2007)  
*Sommeil des dieux* (*Godenslaap*). French (Fayard, 2010), German (DuMont, 2010) and Spanish (Acantilado, in prep.).

# Translated classics

Dutch and Flemish literary classics seem at the moment to be enjoying a revival abroad. Over the past year, a score or so of translations of classic novels appeared, including the Turkish translation of *Cheese* by Willem Elsschot, the Swedish translation of *Elias or the Struggle with the Nightingales* by Maurice Gilliams and the Spanish translation of *The evenings* by Gerard Reve. Of works by Slauerhoff the Spanish translation of *Foam and Ashes* and the Slovenian translation of *The forbidden kingdom* appeared. And the Turkish translation of *Return to Oegstgeest* and the Slovakian translation of *Turkish Delight*, both by Jan Wolkers, saw the light of day.



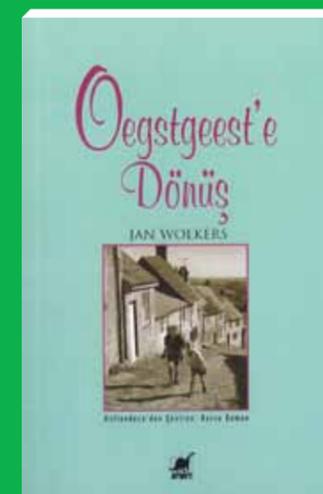
**Louis Paul Boon**  
*Menuett* (Minuet)  
Translated into German by Barbara and Alfred Antkowiak for Berlin



**Willem Frederik Hermans**  
*Už nikdy spánek* (*Beyond Sleep*)  
Translated into Czech by Magda de Bruin-Hübllová for Host



**Willem Frederik Hermans**  
*[Nan yi rushui]* (*Beyond Sleep*)  
Translated into Chinese by Guoliang Guo for Yilin



**Jan Wolkers**  
*Oegstgeest'e Dönüş* (*Return to Oegstgeest*)  
Translated into Turkish by Burcu Duman for Ayrinti

*Chapel Road* by Louis Paul Boon was translated into Turkish, and in Germany a new edition of his book *Minuet* was published. The Hungarian translation of *The Sorrow of Belgium* by Hugo Claus was published by L'Harmattan. In Indonesia *The hidden force* by Louis Couperus appeared, and in Poland the translation of his story 'De binocle' ('The binoculars'). In addition, the Spanish translation of *The Johanna Maria* by Arthur van Schendel and the Serbian translation of *Pijpelijntjes* by Jacob Israël de Haan came out. *Beyond sleep* by W.F. Hermans was translated into Hebrew, Czech and Chinese in 2011. His book *The darkroom of Damocles* was also published in China. And by the same author, the first publication of the translation of *The Safe House* recently appeared in Germany.

Lastly, this year the English translation of Nescio's *Amsterdam stories* appeared in English – and an Italian translation of the book is also in preparation. German translations of *My little war* by Louis Paul Boon and *Bint* by Ferdinand Bordewijk as well as the English translation of *The forbidden kingdom* by Slauerhoff are all due to appear shortly.

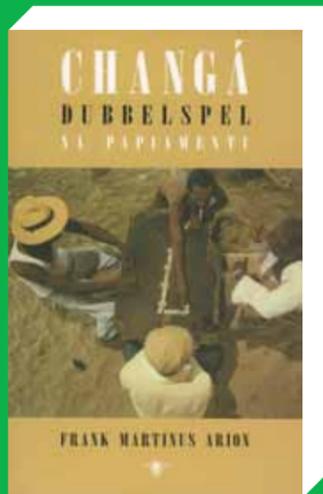


**Jan Jacob Slauerhoff**  
*Espuma y ceniza* (*Foam and Ashes*)  
Translated into Spanish by Julio Grande Morales for Textofilia

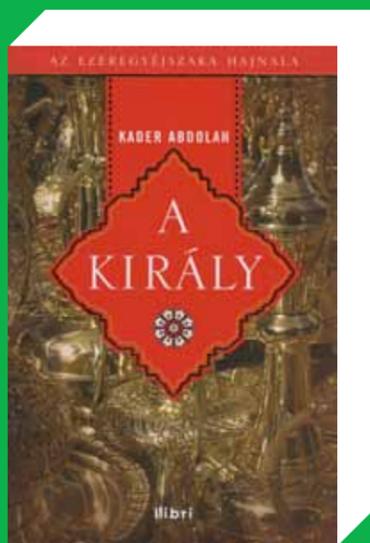


**Nescio**  
*Amsterdam stories* (*De uitvreter; Titaantjes; Dichtertje; Mene Tekel*)  
Translated into English by Damion Searls for New York Review of Books

# Recent Translations



**Frank Martinus Arion**  
*Changá (Double Play)*  
Translated into Papiamentu by Lucille Berry-Haseth for De Bezige Bij



**Kader Abdolah**  
*A király (The King)*  
Translated into Hungarian by Szabolcs Wekerle for Libri



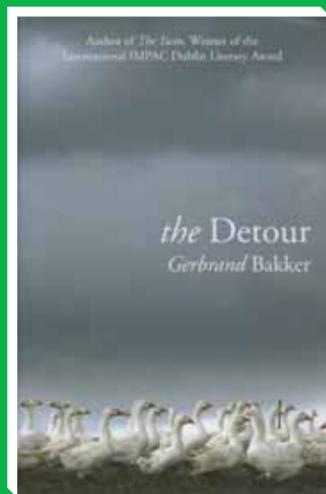
**A.F. Th. van der Heijden**  
*Tonio, Ein Requiemroman (Tonio)*  
Translated into German by Helga van Beuningen for Suhrkamp



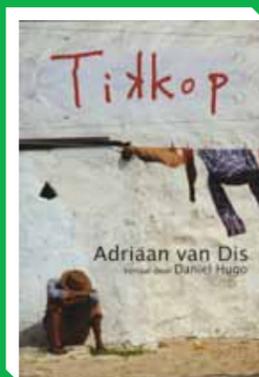
**Otto de Kat**  
*Julia (Julia)*  
Translated into English by Ina Rilke for Maclehose Press



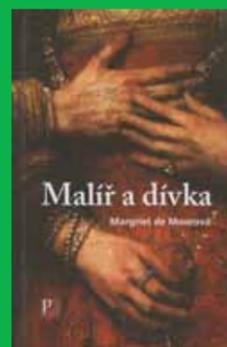
**Herman Koch**  
*Middagen (The Dinner)*  
Translated into Norwegian by Hedda Vormeland for Pax



**Gerbrand Bakker**  
*The Detour (De omweg)*  
Translated into English by David Colmer for Harvill Secker



**Adriaan van Dis**  
*Tikkop (Tik Kop)*  
Translated into Afrikaans by Daniel Hugo for Protea Boekhuis



**Margriet de Moor**  
*Malíř a dívka (The Painter and the Girl)*  
Translated into Czech by Magda de Bruin-Hüblová for Pistorius & Olsanska



**Marente de Moor**  
*Die niederländische Jungfrau (The Dutch Maiden)*  
Translated into German by Helga van Beuningen for Suhrkamp



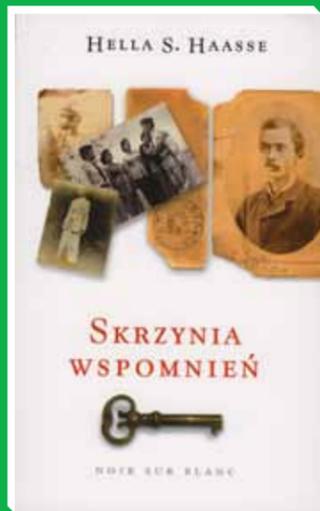
**Anton Valens**  
*Fisch (Fish)*  
Translated into German by Gregor Seferens for Maren Schürmann



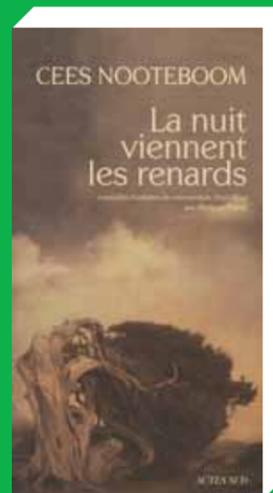
**Arnon Grünberg**  
*Mit Haut und Haaren (Every Scrap)*  
Translated into German by Rainer Kersten for Diogenes



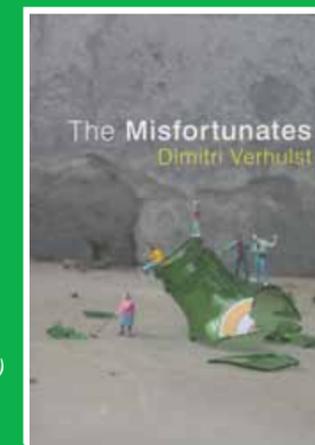
**Jan Brokken**  
*Nella casa del pianista (In the House of the Poet)*  
Translated into Italian by Claudia Di Palermo for Iperborea



**Hella S. Haasse**  
*Skrzynia wspomnień (Eye of the Key)*  
Translated into Polish by Alicja Oczko for Noir sur Blanc



**Cees Nooteboom**  
*La nuit vient les renards (The Foxes come at Night)*  
Translated into French by Philippe Noble for Actes Sud



**Dimitri Verhulst**  
*The Misfortunates (De helaasheid der dingen)*  
Translated into English by David Colmer for Portobello Books

## 10 Books from Holland and Flanders

is published jointly by the Dutch Foundation for Literature and the Flemish Literature Fund. The bulletin is distributed free of charge to foreign publishers and editors. If you would like to receive **10 Books from Holland and Flanders**, please contact [post@letterenfonds.nl](mailto:post@letterenfonds.nl).

### Editorial board

Koen van Bockstal, Barbara den Ouden, Greet Ramael, Victor Schiferli, Pieter Steinz

### Contributors

Onno Blom, Jos Borré, Karin Broer, Joris van Groningen, Jasper Henderson, Marlies Hoff, Daniëlle Serdijn, Judith Uytterlinde, Maria Vlaar

### Translation

John Irons, David McKay, Liz Waters

### Editor in chief

Dick Broer

### Design

Kummer & Herrman, Utrecht

### Print

Drukkerij New Goff



Generaal Van Merlenstraat 30  
B4-42600 Berchem  
t +32 3 270 31 61  
f +32 3 270 31 60  
[info@fondsvoordeletteren.be](mailto:info@fondsvoordeletteren.be)  
[www.fondsvoordeletteren.be](http://www.fondsvoordeletteren.be)

**N**ederlands  
letterenfonds  
dutch foundation  
for literature

PO Box 16588  
1001 RB Amsterdam  
t +31 (0)20 520 73 00  
f +31 (0)20 520 73 99  
[post@letterenfonds.nl](mailto:post@letterenfonds.nl)  
[www.letterenfonds.nl](http://www.letterenfonds.nl)

visiting address  
Nieuwe Prinsengracht 89  
1018 VR Amsterdam