

Anne Vegter
*Holland's
first female
Poet Laureate*

Contemporary Dutch Poets

**'Anne Vegter's poetry has often been called surrealistic
and dreamlike, and disturbing in equal measure.'**

Jan Baeke, *Poetry International Rotterdam*

With her turbulent style and extraordinary themes, Anne Vegter is one of the most prominent poets in present-day Dutch literature. Her inimitable language and the peculiar conceptual acrobatics were the striking features of her first two collections *It Sprang* (1991) and *Shares and Obligations* (2002). She once remarked in an interview: 'I often find normal means of expression hopelessly exaggerated.' In her case, her lyrical ego may leap from a stairway while observing, *en passant*, that a calendar is hanging askew. Elsewhere, someone is listening to Bach with a frown on the back of his head. In her third collection, *Spamfighter* (2008), her work became more serious and sedate, despite the ongoing turbulence in the language and the abundance of fantasy. Her unique mixture of a keyed-up overtone and a melancholy and fragile undertone is perfectly expressed in a line such as: 'A ray of sunshine festively penetrates the windows of the clinic.' Particularly her last collection, *Island Mountain Glacier* (2011), contains tributes and litanies to life and love. The capricious and rich *joie de vivre* that transcends the shadow side of domestic situations is assigned a darker hue, like a face that is enhanced by creases: 'Your age scrubs your family coat'. Her apparent spontaneity in 'showing and tripping' – as her poems might sometimes be characterized – leans heavily on stringent selection: only the appropriate moment and the right words are allowed to participate in the performance.

Public appreciation of her work is increasing over the years, which has provisionally culminated in her appointment as Poet Laureate for the Netherlands, the most public function that a poet in the Netherlands can fulfil.

'Tumultuous work, in which the chaos can scarcely be tamed and much is possible that would not work in more concentrated poetry. Vegter's later books make it evident that the poetic principle of free and idiosyncratic use of language forms the basis of everything she writes.'

T. van Deel in *Trouw*

'Humour is never far away and the energetic will to live is the ultimate answer to all the reflective questions we pose ourselves in relation to the transience of everything.'

Jan Pollet

This brochure is part of the Contemporary Dutch Poets-series, featuring a choice of today's most interesting poets from the Netherlands. The series is published by the Dutch Foundation for Literature. If you would like to receive more information or other brochures from this series, please contact:

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Anne Vegter and over eighty other interesting Dutch poets are featured, with heaps of information and poems in English translation, at the Dutch Domain of: www.poetryinternationalweb.org

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Vegter abroad

Anne Vegter's poems have only been published in anthologies in English, French and Spanish so far. She has been invited to perform on several international stages, including the festivals of Rotterdam, Dublin, Buenos Aires and Medellín.

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Anne Vegter

Twelve poems,
translated by
Astrid Alben

From 12.15 to 13.00 o'clock*
All Inclusive**
Living Outdoors in Winter**
Checkpoint**
Under A Faithful Sky*
Wildcard**
Showing and Tripping*
Representations
Other News**
Moratorium*
Hit & Miss**
Island Mountain Glacier (fragment)**

From 12.15 to 13.00 o'clock

Today there was - during lunch break's break - someone who wanted to know how I work, where I get my ideas from. Tch I said, problem with ideas is

that problems begin where they got started, take this conversation here.

From underneath the leaves sounded a suppressed protest or call it cheerful,

but with hands clasped to the mouth. Splutter-laughing like a class of eleven year olds trying (not) to imagine what Miss does on the loo and if it would be possible to peep.

It could be I said, that something skims past (a magpie). Come evening

I knew what the correct answer sounded like, flying from the window: shrill and pure.

All Inclusive

What do you want to give? Or better ask what you last remembered, it could be worth your while. Are you attached to shopping?

Today I bought plain and simple green rice. I met an alderman in the supermarket who said: how quickly organisms recover!

Bad people too can easily survive. Our conversation had a Christian slant, we disagreed on everything else. At Christmas he prefers to dine in his semi-detached.

I called you love in word and deed and you fall down the stairs and crack your head your memories gush from your ears. Darling, silence does not always enlighten.

We shall have to find means and methods to fulfil our finiteness.
Don't turn your back on the rides. Bumping, gliding, diving, rolling, hanging
and vibration lengthens time.

Living Outdoors in Winter

We missed you only when your departure could no longer be delayed.
Later that day breaking news you on the backseat bolt upright

refusing point blank to comment. Is there a word for that
or would an audition do you good: studio space is available

a squeaky young coach with trivial tips. Everyone is gorgeous in the light,
someone fingers your points of view and I can almost touch you -

today by the way everyone excels in everything frightening.
A horse drops to its knees in the snow, you said that's how they'll find me.

Checkpoint

my father said I shouldn't attract attention while growing and I ate without weight
his father said the man that betrays his country flogs forgiveness for ovens
his mother said he who know his patrons can marry without god
my mother said the man who betrays his wife wants to give birth to a murderer
her mother said little red riding hood went to grandmother's to kiss her wolf
her father said she shouldn't be afraid because deeds are worth more than motives
my father said it's not because of an angel that parties split but dead animals

I said the presentation of the world was adjusted too late thanks to old decrees
I said the prophecy that came onto me lies like salt beaten on my head
I said in my dreams I escaped this and was loved by detainees
I said I ran on the tracks alongside my dreams, was grabbed that is correct
I said I met no one after such an accident, nothing that weighs more than nothing twice

Under A Faithful Sky

Your sweetheart counted intervals in your drinking-binge. Underneath the house
the robin ranted with robins that night and interesting subjects with effervescent sentences.

He cornered me (a trick). We had a feeble day. Something exploded, the city
sprung up. What then is the protocol for animal welfare, your sweetheart said.

Almost rhythmically, an admirable tone. I believed in generous ancestries,
even though I stood strangely with billowing hands and by now everyone was ranting

The city slurred to its knees. None for desperation, he said, or just a few.
First make victims. Some might think that easy, but I mean real ones.

Wildcard

A light-hearted lullaby this, not much happens that doesn't already happen somewhere else:

a garnet-red baby distends its tiny jungle mouth.
Recognisable to all who read them lullabies are

about kisses, Venetian blinds and parents/keepers.
Raging in the pillow, waking up like a statue of ash.

A parent is a house. Coochy coochy coo. Food, drink
tra-la-la. A lullaby pries open love,

cheer and light-heartedness. Filter light,
the air is of priceless purity.

Compared to wellbeing I daresay it's cloud-cuckoo land.
Parents/moods/components of the growth machine -

baby's first, baby's own, baby living it up. Cheerful,
light-hearted bellowing in sun drenched nursery: Done.

Hearts plead, hearts steam: Adonai -
give me back my stalemates, my baggy days,
my intact waters.

Showing and Tripping

It takes intense bliss in this dress to look at neighbours stashing their rubbish bag in a container around midnight with tenderness.

It takes intense bliss in this dress to flag down a taxi unwilling to take you to the edge of the city where broad-leaved trees propagate.

It takes intense bliss in this dress to make a sound that drowns out animals to catch the attention of a dolled-up queen.

It takes intense bliss for this dress to be carried to a show drunk and wide awake, blindly find the door through which to exit the stage.

It takes intense bliss in this dress to pop one, go on a balloon ride and look down on the mosaic of your country like a slow astronaut.

It takes intense bliss in this glorious weather to be killed with care. Voices scream instead of dress say shroud.

Representations

Ask how it happened that the summer lost its way in the man, couldn't find its way out and the man disappeared like rising dough, he lit up red and sparked, fell off.

Ask how it happened that the poet said the ambition of the mother is the abolition of desire, but her child tuned the back of the father like a speckled instrument.

Ask how it happened that the child fell down the stairs holding the book, lay at the bottom like a what's done is done, whoever unrolled him cracked, cracked: the book didn't say that.

Ask how it happened that desire curbed width, her aftertaste a memory and the not so self-evident glimpsing at "a pole dance for hungry intestines."

Ask how it happened the earth existed as an explosion, a colour wash, a breach, as an emulsion. As polymers. Look: Earth as hallmark. Earth as hall mark.

Other News

An urban environment, a bike ride
 someone drives off a pontoon into the river, dies
 you tell him what you saw
 was it an accident
 you speak about the ease of the word fate
 you speak about the situation at home, the love for a man
 the send-off prepared in spite of equipment, i.e.: money, child and goods
 you can already remember tomorrow's photograph in the 'Harbour News',
 saturated, bloated beyond recognition
 you ask your son what he makes of it
 is it male or female, he asks, a bin bag
 a small bathtub, a Lilo, a shop-window dummy
 he sees an awful lot, but what is it, he wants to know
 you cherish the intimacy

You point at what looks like steering wheel, finger, rope
 you speak about how death can take you by surprise
 you speak about your son's sloppiness
 now he's gone and lost his watch,

on Thursday it was his leather jacket
 as if you don't care about material things, you say
 he smiles, strokes your cheek
 giving scope to a religious matter
 you speak about the desire for subjugation
 you want a ride without a driver, fully automatic
 you say you're not sure who actually is pulling the strings
 you speak up about the incessant smoking
 that you're just mucking about, that you wish it'd end differently
 a successful attempt requires a certain expertise, you say

the willingness to go far

Moratorium

When we returned home after John's funeral there was no one who asked: did John actually want to live? (he was mad on funerals, always went, maybe suddenly had had enough of them).

He visited us once more after that, two years later. Said: 'My mother won't stop harping on about that heater, don't hold it against her, she misses me. She believes payments help against the pain.'

When we crawled towards the exit you heard no one say that John had made a mess of things.

Just past the gate we kept a close eye on each other but every one stayed silent, as the dead tend to.

His mother perched high up on a branch, a little uncomfortable in the body of an Eagle-Owl.

The bird's real name is Bubo bubo, which experts say means 'I seize you'.

Hit & Miss

If it takes time, being Anne Vegter.
Keeping the plates in the air, I venture.

Of course, it's hit and miss with me.
Yesterday someone said either it fits or kiss it goodbye.

Someone said genes of interest
grow rampant / theorists want to waste!

It doesn't necessarily cost time but the brain
(thinking of the prostrate years, calling it an anti-
thesis of desire) protrudes.
Readers look for someone to take a breather in.

Island Mountain Glacier (fragment)

I

Even when you wake up over a death zone and you strap your kids in tight as belts: let me
take a look out the window see how bad, you can't see anything because it's a bird's-eye-war.

Even when a target waves at you from the ground after all and you long for pale stars
on that tiny brow, you taxi across the training ground of your grimaces and play every role.

Even when you walk up to the kids naked and say Schuld you know what Schuld means that you
did nothing but confess and you relinquish your skin, strip after strip, because it's a bird's-eye-war.

II

Even when her shaft contracts and tameably escapes her red welding, she fans
the fire that heats the system through and her brille dissolves to a yes! optimism, she stalls.

Even when her XXL-lucky size emerges above ground 'like a dead miner' (I first count
my women, then my days), she remembers the small methods of his hands.

Even when this happens to her and the ear is torn too bad like paper from her head
she crushes optimism like bouncy balls über her axles and conquers her breathing.

III

Even when I fail to grasp the breath-taking in your opinion and my mouth mimics the sound of breaking stone but not precise enough, too fine, startled, new, you fuck me.

Even when I fail to recognise the fickle meaning of the letter I (leitmotiv, layman, long stay parking) and I say lava to your salvo and or lover, it is only the I, you fuck me.

Even when I drop my Job's-grievance and you look up from your molehill with the uncertain eyes of 'so who can turn this street engulfing mud slide', you fuck me.

Even when someone rises up in me and lifts your sentences from our Procrustean bed and you stammer 'pleasure heals but what was whole heals not' etc, you fuck me even when that's me.

Even when I, in this minute of my kingdom, in this household of seasons (jan steen), in this temple (breath), leave it all to you (here sweetie, for you) I turn your thin meat into a spectacle.

Even when I touch the recollection of your hips, your hands tiger my uh-huh parts ingest me (tongue chest mouth) and I read my gape from your lips or should that be gave.

VII

Even when you place your powers above a law for love and it's me who takes your workmanship so that the same blossoms in my hands, I want how you hold back.

Even when you oblige yourself to me and beget the omnipotent once more and you say 'you remain unspoilt by what turns love into a product', I want how you hold back.

Even when you subject yourself to my shame and I run away from you through a landscape 'nobody will ever expect a postcard from this place', I want how you hear me.

VIII

Even when you flex your smallest joints in the unfolding of your scream, you are your shape's positive and what distorts the sheets, shy one, is the self-tonguing child.

Even when you scrape a final atom from your skin, you'd like to be a there there dodo as the last heart (island), as the last mountain (belly) or simply fabulous as a cunt (glacier).



Photo: Allard de Witte

Anne Vegter (b. 1958) is a very versatile poet and writer. In 1989 she made her debut with the children's book *The Lady and the Rhinoceros*, which was promptly awarded the Woutertje Pieterse Prize, an important prize for new Dutch literature for children. Her first poetry collection, *It Sprang* (1991), showed that a poet of stature had risen. Several more children's books and poetry collections followed, as well as a collection of erotic stories and several plays. In every genre the fact that she is first and foremost a poet glimmers through. In 2013 she was appointed Poet Laureate for the Netherlands.

'Vegter writes daring, personal poetry that sometimes teases language to the limit. One time her poems may consist of complex chess configurations, whereas at other times the poet can be trite, incoherent or even vulgar. It all contributes to the stimulating, grating feeling that someone is getting too close to you.'
Ron rijghard in *NRC Handelsblad*