

Finding your way in

**the Dutch
Literary Landscape**



02-757

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**Boekmanstichting - Bibliotheek
Herengracht 415
1017 BP Amsterdam
Tel. 6243739**

Stichting Schrijven
Herengracht 495
1017 BT Amsterdam
T 020-6254141
F 020-6383153

secretariaat@schrijven.org
www.schrijven.org

STICHTING **SCHRIJVEN**

BOEKMAN*stichting*

02-757

Studiecentrum voor kunst, cultuur en beleid



Herengracht 415
1017 BP Amsterdam
telefoon bibliotheek 020-624 37 39
fax 020-638 52 39
e-mail bibliotheek@boekman.nl
internet www.boekman.nl

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Said el Haji:

I hate the term migrant literatures - there is something disparaging about it.

Each publisher with his own list

some insights into the policies of various literary publishers.

World literature in the Netherlands

Two years ago, the writer Kader Abdolah was the main guest in the VPRO television program "Zomergasten" (Summer guests) and this confirmed something for the Netherlands: world writers live around the corner. An accident? Certainly not, asserts Louis Stiller. His point is that Dutch literature has changed markedly under the influence of exile writers. Big consequences have ensued. 'The most important thing by far is the result of the influx of new writers is a change in literature itself - the nature of our discourse.'

Ibrahim Selman:

Now the collection has sold out, while other publishers showed no interest.

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Of Samphire and a Frozen God - a poet's borderless workshop

In 1999, the poet Remco Ekkers facilitated a poetry workshop for migrant writers. What follows below is a challenging impression of what may happen during such a workshop. Even poets who were actually raised with skate sharpeners and Saint Nicolas may find this interesting.

Introduction

A small manual for writers without borders

You have spent hours at your computer. But where to go once the manuscript has been finished? And is there a place where you can learn how to write even better? Below, you will find the answers to the most frequently asked questions.

Taking charge of your own book

The struggle to master the language, to regain control of your own book. Daily fare for foreign writers who have decided to stay in the Netherlands for a while. Publishing for the Dutch market has a bearing on their style, their subjects and their careers. Two writers tell about their experiences in the delta, between two languages.

Training without borders

In December 1999, 13 people embarked on a unique experiment: teaching "writing without borders". 'It is not important that someone comes from another culture, what does matter, though, is that you become more conscious of your sources.'

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Introduction

Dear reader,

We are offering you this booklet as a small and concise guide for (aspiring) non-western writers who are living in the Netherlands and may be planning on starting a career in literature.

I was struck by the importance of having an informative and practical guidebook through the many conversations I had with authors for whom the world of literature in the Netherlands is unknown territory. Living in the Netherlands, I am frequently confronted with the fact that they are unfamiliar with the way publishers work. This may be the case in very practical matters: for instance, authors may not know that they should never submit their manuscripts in handwritten form and that large publishing houses may receive up to three manuscripts every day. But it also happens that authors do not know about that very crucial aspect of the publishing industry: the final editing process.

Working for the Foundation for Dutch Literature (FvDL), it is one of my responsibilities to advise

authors who have not yet started writing in the Dutch language about the best way in which they could make progress in their work. This can take several directions. I may draw an author's attention to the existence of writers' clubs and writing courses. I can also attempt to find a Dutch author, translator or poet who is prepared to support an author from abroad. In some cases, when an author has sufficient literary qualities, an introductory portfolio is made, in collaboration with the Foundation for the Production and Translation of Dutch Literature (NLPVF). In this way, the various funds for literature bring authors to the attention of Dutch literary publishers. A portfolio typically consists of a translated excerpt from and an introduction to the work and an interview with the author. In the course of the year 2000, five such portfolios were compiled and of the five authors thus presented four have been offered a contract by - or have established contacts with - publishing houses. Publishers who decide

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to bring the work of a non-western author to the market can request a translation grant from the NLPVF. Fine, some of you will think. Others may say: I will find my own way.

Whether you intend to send some of your work to the Foundation for Dutch Literature or plan to approach publishers independently, this guidebook is a practical source of information, a reference work, and a written impression of the world of Dutch literature.

What, in concrete terms, will you find here? There will be a few informative articles, for instance about the influence that non-western, foreign writers have had on Dutch literature and a survey of the policies the publishers have conducted vis à vis these authors. But you will also find interviews with some of the authors who have "made it", like Said el Hadji and Ibrahim Selman, and a discussion with Snežana Bukal and Nasim Khaksar about the dilemma of writing in two languages and from two cultures. You will be given a few impressions from the poetry

and prose courses that are on offer, especially for people from various cultures. And finally, there is a list of practical tips concerning the steps you can take if you wish to continue following the writer's path, along with addresses and other facts about various organisations, magazines, contests and related matters that may be relevant to writers like you.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Writing Foundation (Stichting Schrijven) for their loyal cooperation, which has made the appearance of this guidebook possible. Without their help, it would have taken much longer for this document to materialise. Some of the articles appeared earlier in a special supplement to the "Schrijven" (Write) magazine, which was entitled "Luiken Open" (Open the Hatches).

Christel Jansen
 Foundation for Dutch Literature

Two years ago, the writer Kader Abdolah was the main guest in the VPRO television program “Zomergasten” (Summer guests) and this confirmed something for the Netherlands: world writers live around the corner. An accident? Certainly not, asserts Louis Stiller. His point is that Dutch literature has changed markedly under the influence of exile writers. Great consequences have ensued. ‘The most important thing by far as a result of the influx of new writers is a change in literature itself - the nature of our discourse.’

by Louis Stiller

World literature

Some three years ago, the otherwise very sedate literary scene in the Netherlands witnessed a real debate. It was during a cultural evening in Amsterdam’s political and cultural centre De Balie that the writer and journalist Anil Ramdas made the claim that local Dutch writers were consciously keeping non-white characters out of their books. ‘How is it possible that contemporary novelists fail to see a million people?’ Further, even if there were non-local or migrant characters in Dutch novels - like in *De Buitenvrouw* by Joost Zwagerman or *Zionoco* by Leon de Winter - their role remained superficial, a stereotype. ‘Leon de Winter has failed to get the essence of this sole black women’s life. Therefore, she remains a shadow. You can bump into her without realising that you are dealing with a human being.’

Bookshelves

In spite of Anil Ramdas’ complaint, the Dutch literary world has seen a lot of changes in the last few

years - although this change has not taken place among the local writers. Rather, it is due to the arrival of many new writers who have come to the Netherlands from all corners of the world. It takes one look at the weekly literary supplement of your newspaper to notice that the literary scene in the Netherlands really has changed face. Well-read fellow countrymen like Moses Isegawa, Clark Accord and Lulu Wang take us on a journey to a world where white Dutch people are a minority. Publishers like De Geus in Breda and In de Knipscheer in Haarlem are entirely geared towards “authors with a foreign background who live in the Netherlands”. Those less fortunate need not despair: since last year, the Amsterdam-based Stichting Schrijven organises two courses, entitled “Grenzenloos Proza” (Prose Without Boundaries) and “Multicultureel Poëzietraject” (Multicultural Poetry) for multicultural writers.

As a result of all this we also find new authors outside the best-sell-

n the Netherlands

er lists. Take (former) refugees like Jana Beranová, Ibrahim Selman, Alija Music, Cao Xuân Tú, Nasim Khaksar, Yasmine Allas, Zaher Banai, Nasser Fakteh, Ahmed Essadki and Kameran Zadhe, all of whom saw work appear in the course of the last three years, brought on the market by various publishers including Ad Donker, Balans and Prometheus. 'Migration is of all time but never before has the literature of migrants been so prominently in evidence on the bookshelves as in the last decennia,' writes Michiel van Kempen in the preface to the literary magazine *Armada*.

Zutphen

What does it bring us, this new influx of writers and texts? First of all, we have the happy fact that world literature has travelled to these parts. In the past, it was up to initiatives like those literary series brought to us by NOVIB (a Dutch development organisation) to familiarise us with exotic writers and stories from Somalia, Tamil

Nadu or Costa Rica. Nowadays, our own world writers live in Beverwijk, Zutphen or Den Haag, their stories are about Uganda, Iran or Cambodia and we can listen to their stories by going to the local bookstore or library. Nowadays, we may conclude, world literature, also comes from the Netherlands.

Second, there is the remarkable fact that the old fashioned literary division between "original" and "translated" work is up for grabs. After all, in the old days, translated books were written by foreign authors who lived far away and whose work we could only read in translation. Sometimes, an author was brought to the Netherlands to promote his books but in many cases - like that of the Indian writer N.K. Narayan - we had to do with a few faint pictures from Madras. And now there is, all of a sudden, a third category of books and writers: Dutch authors who live in the Netherlands and are being guided by Dutch publishers but whose work still needs to be translated.

The difference between world writers like Narayan is that the works of Zadhe, Abdolah or Music are not written primarily for a Persian or Bosnian audience, but for Dutch readers. Kader Abdolah puts it like this, in the magazine "Literatuur" (Literature): 'It is odd that I should not write for my countrymen. I am still writing for Persian literature, even though I do not write in Farsi myself, but at the same time I write for Dutch literature - my wish is to leave something behind in this language. The Dutch language is my home country, not the Netherlands itself.'

All this produces an entirely new situation, as becomes apparent from the example of the Liberian Vamba Sherif, who came to the Netherlands in 1993 and made his debut six years later with "Het Land van de Vaders" (The Fathers' Country), published by De Geus. Publisher Reinjan Mulder had this to say about the event: 'The manuscript had been written in English, which makes one read it with a linguistic sensibility that differs from a

Dutch language situation. I found the atmosphere very beautiful. But the big question was how we were going to tackle it. This is why we decided to have the text translated first and then start the editing process. Upon completion of the translation, I was able to see clearly what was going on in the story and locate its weak spots.' This was a temporary situation because it did not take Sherif very long to achieve a pretty good command of the Dutch language. Mulder: 'Within a year, Vamba has become an author in the Dutch language. In the final editing phase, we got his additions in Dutch.' At the end of the day, neither the publisher nor the author regard "Het Land van de Vaders" as a translation of the original manuscript. 'It has become a different and better book,' says Mulder. 'There was an American agent who wanted the original English language version but Vamba and I decided against that. Now, Vamba is considering doing an English translation of this Dutch book.'

Vltava

The new authors bring a new category of books in the Netherlands. The most important result of this, by far, is a change in literature itself - the nature of our discourse. The main reason is that, in past years, we have been inundated with new themes, styles and genres. Take exile: being here and not being able to go there – that is a theme that was virtually non-existent in Dutch literature until now. Exile returns in many shapes and guises. There is not a single collection of short stories or poems by refugee writers that is not full of tram stops, bus stations, trains, like "Het Ministerie van Pijn" (The Ministry of Pain) by the Croatian Dubravka Ugresic or "Een voorproefje van Voorjaar" (A Taste of Spring) by the Vietnamese author Cao Xuân Tú. Here is another symbol of leaving: water, sea, rivers. The poems in the collection "Tussen de rivieren" (Among the Rivers) by Jana Beranová is filled with images of rivers that flow in one direction. Only memories can

move upstream. 'Oh those rivers Waal, Maas, Vltava. Back/ to the source on dreams that float.'

Themes are not the only things that new writers have added to Dutch literature. Whole genres may be rehabilitated as well. Take, for instance, "Over de bergen" (Across the Mountains) by the Iranian refugee Kameran Zadhe, published by Ad Donker. The book opens in the Tehran of some years ago, in a laidback atmosphere that immediately brings to mind *The Stranger* by Albert Camus. But then the story of the flight begins, which will take up the remaining 176 pages of the book. What is presented here is a truly nerve-wracking tale, delivered in a beautiful sober style, no sentiment or frills. There is a passage in which the main character arrives in Greece, after a difficult expedition across the mountains, via Turkey. In Greece, he sees his whole plan fall apart when he surrenders to the police. 'Then I had to go into the cell. A big, spacious cell, no less than three by four metres. There

was a bunk to sleep on and a toilet facility. That night I slept like a child.' In form and style, "Over de bergen" is nothing more or less than an adventure novel - a genre that had become long extinct in the Netherlands. It is a distant heir to "The Count of Monte Christo" by Alexandre Dumas and the works of Jack London. It begs the question why this type of novel had all but disappeared from the Netherlands. The French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss has one answer: according to him, culture has an increased tendency to become deaf to the world, and more rigorous. This can be seen very clearly in Dutch literature. Although the craftsmanship of Dutch writers is beyond question and the literary world is alive and well, the literary works themselves have become homogeneous and restricted in terms of form and style. To the exclusion of almost everything else, Dutch writers publish realistic-psychological or autobiographical novels that have almost always been written in the

present tense. Other genres are all but dead. Fantastic stories are rarely written: the same is true for epic novels and prose poems. Even the short story is destined for oblivion, making way for the novel. And why? Because the Dutch literary world - frequently without anyone noticing - has become more rigorous, has become ever more demanding and as a result more uniform in nature, like school children who are only allowed to wear the correct designer brands in a bizarre effort to distinguish themselves. What is interesting about the newly arrived refugee authors (and all the other non-local voices) is that they take care of the reversal of this process of literary impoverishment. The Iranian exile Nasim Khaksar, who has lived in the Netherlands since 1983, audaciously includes a real prose poem ("Dodenschap", Ship of Death) in his story collection "Tussen twee deuren" (Between Two Doors) - a literary form that was invented by the French poets Charles Baudelaire and Arthur

Rimbaud but is hardly practised in the Netherlands.

Or take the poems by the Kurdish poet Ibrahim Selman in “Dans van een bevroren land” (Dance of a Frozen Country), published by de Geus. In the wonderful poem “De gast” (The Guest) he does something that Dutch poets hardly ever allow themselves to do: he delivers a throat-constricting sentiment. The six-line poem ends with “we have homesickness as our guest” - something you will never find in Dutch poetry anywhere because it moves towards the slippery slope to kitsch. But how apt, the word “homesickness” in that line! The word homesickness is, after all, a guest too, a loan word that has come directly from the German language, which closes the circle.

Mangrove

In prose, too, we see the mixing of old and new genres. For instance, in his first novel “Abyssinian Chronicles” (Abessijnse Kronieken, 1998), Moses Isegawa shows us that a narrative does not always

need to be a strict succession of action and reaction. It can also look like a dense mangrove forest with asides that take on the shape of stories that appear and then disappear and entangle the main story. Such a “Thousand-and-one-night” way of storytelling is something that you will not find in Dutch literature, barring rare exceptions like “Kapellekensbaan” by the Flemish writer Louis Paul Boon. And all this is happening while the novel “One Hundred Years of Solitude” by the Latin American author Gabriel Garcia Marquez has been a constant favourite of Dutch writers for many years. Still, writing something like that yourself - no, it simply does not work out, perhaps because one does not want to be branded a plagiarist or a copycat. It appears it takes an external figure like Isegawa to brush aside all these imaginary obstacles and simply try out this way of telling a story. The figures indicate that the attempt has been successful. Five months after “Abyssinian Chronicles” was published, it had sold 50,000

copies. In the year of publication, the book ended fourth on the list of best sold works of fiction; it has since been translated in many languages. What is the secret of "Abyssinian Chronicles"? Not the meticulous strategy of the publisher, because de Bezige Bij is much too sedate and civilised an organisation for that to happen. Nor the theme or the story, because that is not the way in which this book stands apart from the others - no, the only possible conclusion must be that the remarkable form and Isegawa's ferocious style are responsible for this massive success.

Mountain

We could describe the current situation of the Dutch literature as follows: if the mountain does not go to Mohammed, then Mohammed will go to the mountain. Because in spite of all these developments, Anil Ramdas' reproach is still as valid as it was then: the indigenous Dutch literature is a white suburb, where hardly any refugees, minorities or foreigners

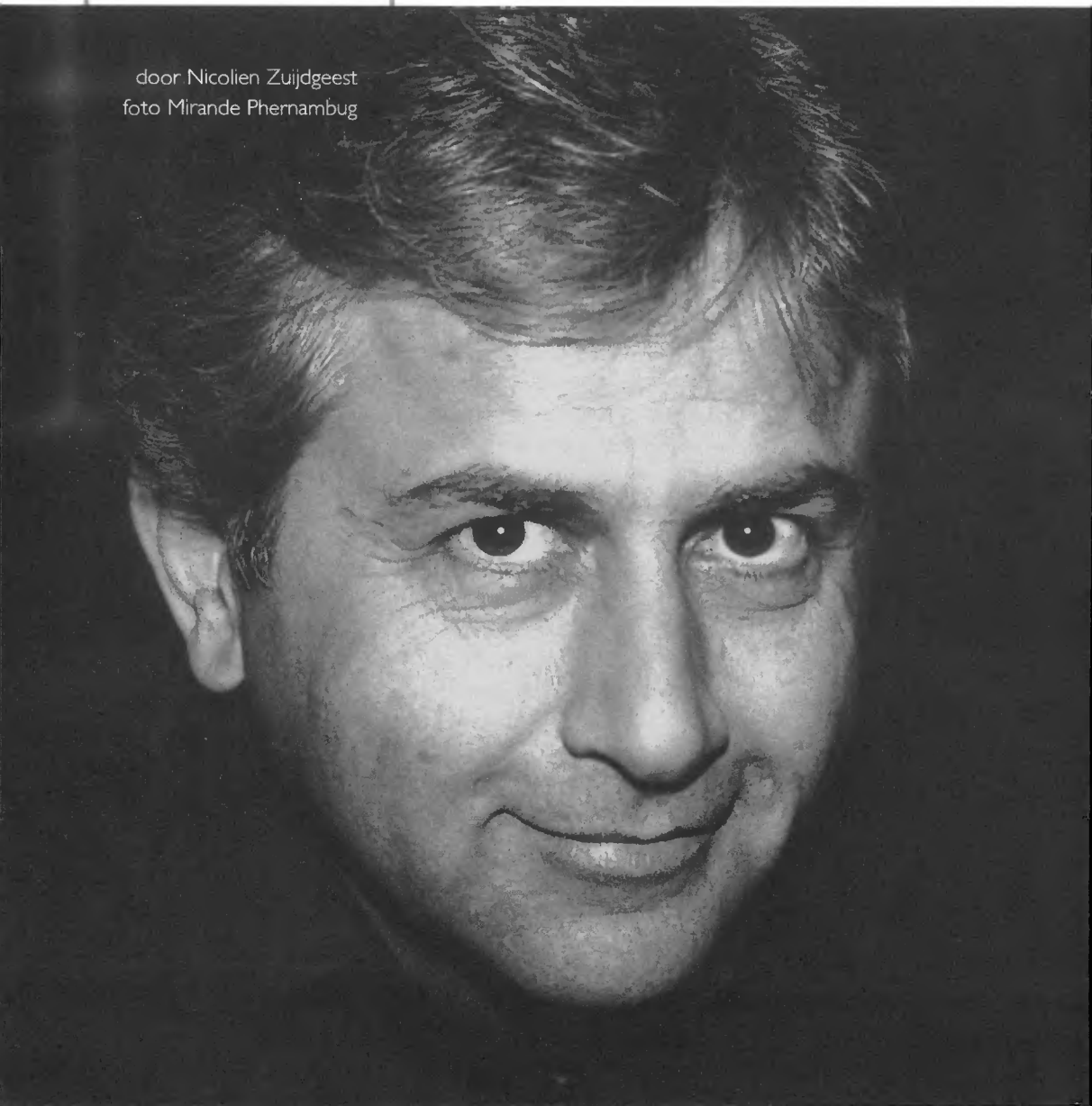
live. In this literary Suburbia, nothing reflects the massive migration that has taken the Low Countries by storm in the past decade. Novels and stories still deal with the problems the local whites face in the family or at the office, as Ramdas correctly observed.

Still, almost unnoticed, new streets have been built adjacent to this suburb. Here, the standard fare is not served up at six p.m. on the dot. Here, there are authors who will take us into worlds and forms, using styles that we have never heard about or have forgotten. 'One does not notice it so strongly yet, but I am convinced that Dutch literature will find itself considerably enriched by their presence, and certainly by the second generation.' These words are from former Secretary of State for Cultural Affairs Aad Nuis. The most intriguing aspect of his remark is the extent to which it has already been overtaken by the facts. ■

Now the collection
has sold out, while
other publishers
showed no interest.

Ibrahim Se

door Nicolien Zijdgeest
foto Mirande Phernambug



m a n

'As I wrote in my introduction to my novel "En de zee spleet in tweeën" (And the Sea Split in Two), my father really wanted me to write. During my adolescence I tried to write poetry, but that was an absolute failure. While studying in Baghdad I read many books by Dostoevski and Chekhov. One fine day in 1979 I was walking along the Tigris and I thought: "I am going to write a collection of short stories." Forty days later, I offered it to the Ministry of culture, which in Iraq is the only institution that publishes books. To my astonishment, they published the book. At the time, I wrote symbolic stories about everything that was happening to the Kurds.

I had a daily radio show for the state broadcasting corporation, which was done in the form of "Letters to My Loved One," by which I really meant my beloved country. My third book has been lost, because that was at the printer's when I had to run. Upon arrival in the Netherlands, in 1981, I first had to get over the story of

my flight by writing it down with lightning speed, in the Kurdish language. Ten years later, I started writing the story in Dutch. The novel appeared this spring.

I started writing poetry by accident. In 1990, the organiser of a multi-ethnic festival asked me if I knew Kurdish poets.

Unfortunately, I was unable to get in touch with them. I then took my notebook that had chronicled the flight and those notes I worked into poems, in Dutch. Five years later, I was returning from a literary evening, together with Astrid Roemer. She said I should look for a publisher; she introduced me to De Geus. They wanted to publish the poems and approached the Dutch Refugee Council to share the cost. Now that collection has sold out, while other publishers showed no interest.

Besides writing, I also work as a film and theatre maker. If you are able to make a living as a writer, you can multiply moments of spirituality. You can increase the rhythm of writing. Poetry is a

thought that arises from within you. You must grasp it immediately, then you can develop it into something better. Writing novels requires perseverance. In order to succeed, you must have a structure, a story and good characters. In the course of the writing, each character starts demanding more space, while others retire.

I am writing for myself. About things that I find interesting, like human interaction. Observe the street. There is so much that is bizarre out there. Nothing is more absurd than real life itself. I write in the Dutch language. After all, you think in the language in which you live. I write everywhere. Even if everyone around me is hammering away on something, it does not concern me when I write. The gods of fantasy are all around. In the toilet, in the car, in the mountains, or on the beach.

In Iraq I did not edit my stories. As a result of the dearth of authors, apparently everything I wrote was good. Now that I am here, I am constantly rewriting my texts. The

Van Ibrahim Selman
(Iraq/Kurdistan, `1952)
published:

'Dans van een bevroren land',

De Geus, 1998

'En de zee spleet in tweeën',

In de Knipscheer, 2000

'Vrijheid is dood',

In de Knipscheer, 2000



manner in which a story is told in the Dutch language is different. You try to avoid repetition, which sometimes prejudices the poetic character of a story. I have discussed my work in good consultations with the publisher's editor. My novel lost at least thirty per cent but I do not regret that. It is more compact now.

Writing has become a part of me. Without writing, my life would be worth a lot less. Writing gives one a feeling of eternity. I want to present my thoughts to people. I love human beings.

The greatness of art lies in telling things in a simple manner, even when they are profound. That gives readers the chance to recognise themselves. There are writers who deliberately try to present things in a complex way, to show that they are intellectuals. It is not necessary. If you manage to touch a reader's heart, then his head will start working by itself. Literature is not supposed to be mathematics. What I write is not migrants' literature. I am not a migrant. I am a refugee but I am not a refugee

writer. Twice in my life I have had to flee. That is a fact, which has nothing to do with writing. You must not stigmatise until kingdom come. A writer's profession is a universal one and I write in Dutch. That must be sufficient to be able to regard things with respect.' ■



foto Marcel Molle

Antonije Zalina (1959) werd geboren in Sarajevo in een kunstenaarsgezin. In 1984 publiceerde hij zijn eerste boek, de dichtbundel *Tili*; in 1995 verscheen *Het spoor van de drakenklauw*, zijn eerste roman, die vertaald werd in het Pools en Duits. Hij is schrijver, theater- en filmregisseur: een kunstenaar met een grote scheppende energie. Zijn films *Eight years after*, *Angels of Sarajevo* en *Travelling children* zijn overal ter wereld op filmfestivals vertoond. Sinds 1993 woont hij met zijn gezin in Amsterdam.

Publicaties

Tili. Sarajevo: Svijetlost, 1984.
Twee zwaarte dase ('Het spoor van de drakenklauw'). Belgrado: B92 / Apotridi, 1995. De roman is vertaald in het Pools (Pogranicze, 1999) en verschijnt in 2000 in het Duits bij Persona Verlag. Verder verschenen er verhalen van Zalina in diverse verhalenbundels en tijdschriften, o.a. in de bundel *Een paard dat Pools graast* (Soeklo, Utrecht, 1998) en in *Raster*. De Poolse krant *Gazeta Wyborcza* publiceerde het essay 'Velika Aleja' ('De Grote Allee').

Voor meer informatie kunt u contact opnemen met Christel Jansen bij het FONDS VOOR DE LETTEREN
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Antonije Zalina

HET SPOOR VAN DE DRAKENKLAUW

Antonije Zalina's *Het spoor van de drakenklauw* kwam in mijn leven in 1995. Eindelijk had ik een schrijver ontmoet die zo het woord nam dat ik meteen koo zien, voelen en begrijpen wat me ook zonder dit boek obsedeerde en wat, zo zou blijken, een van de topoi en thema's van dit boek was: Sarajevo tijdens de bezetting van 1992 en 1993.

Zalina vertelt een verhaal over het leven van mensen die getroffen zijn door het lot, dat van Job; een verhaal dat bevrijd is van de bijbels, maar niet van de gewone sardse apocalyps, die tegelijkertijd geen apocalyps is, maar geschiedenis.

Toen ik de roman nlangs herlas, ditmaal bevrijd van de vreselijke druk van het samenvallen van het thema van de roman met de werkelijkheid, betrapte ik me erop dat ik soms hardop lachte om de bittere humor van Zalina. Zoals wanneer hij speelt met het visioen van God aan de hemel van Sarajevo in de pinksternacht, dat behalve door de hoofdpersoon door niemand zelfs maar wordt opgemerkt, omdat het verschijnt op het moment dat er opeens weer stroom is, in de tijd dat je vlug-vlug een hapje moet klaarmaken voor je kind dat wacht in de schuilkamer.

Zalina heeft met de klassieke vaardigheid van de meester van het woord, in levendige taal, een opwindend, afschrikwekkend en nntroerend verhaal verteld over eenvoudige dingen: over eten, over water, over honger en dorst, over de grond waarop je loopt, over het vuur, over de lucht, over het leven, over de dood. Over liefhebbers. Over haat. Deze briljante autobiografische roman - een van de beste die in de jaren negentig in het Servokroatisch is gepubliceerd - die zich niet bezighoudt met het uiteenvallen van het land, maar met het uiteenvallen van menselijke waarden, is niet gemakkelijk te classificeren. We zouden het een kroniek, een document, een historische notitie 'from below' eo een antropologische roman kunnen noemen - een poging op grond van een artefact 'de wereld van gisteren' te reconstrueren, zoals Danilo Kij schreef. Verspreide en verscheurde delen van de eigen herinnering aan het leven in het Vagevuur, het enige artefact waarover de figuren beschikken, zijn het skelet waarmheen Zalina, nadat hij zijn hoofdpersoon weer in de 'gewone' wereld heeft gezet - in vredig Amsterdam, in een kamertje aan het Westerpark, tegenover het groene IBM-computerscherm dat hij op straat heeft gevonden -, schrijft over de tijd. De tegenwoordige.

SNEZANA BUKAL, schrijfster

Antonije Zalina's *Het spoor van de drakenklauw* overtreft alle literaire en kroniekmatige notities en feuilletons over de situatie in Sarajevo na april 1992.

BEORAMA

Wat dit boek interessanter maakt dan de nu al talrijke getuigenissen van schrijvers over de hel van de oorlog, is het gedeelte waarin Antonije Zalina schrijft over de maanden die hij en zijn vrienden vlak voor de oorlog hebben doorgebracht... Ja, het boek is het ware bewijs dat de kunst aan de werkelijkheid kan voorafgaan.

NEZA VISNI

The struggle to master the language, to regain control of your own book. Daily fare for foreign writers who have decided to stay in the Netherlands for a while. Publishing for the Dutch market has a bearing on their style, their subjects and their careers. Two writers tell about their experience in the delta, between two languages.

by Kitty Peetoom

Taking charge

Gettin

Snežana Bukal is 42 years old. She and her two small daughters came from Belgrade to the Netherlands in 1992, fleeing the chaos that had engulfed their country. The first few years she lived in Amsterdam, a year and a half ago she moved to Maastricht with her partner and children. 'At first, I just wanted to rest with friends for a few months. Only later I decided to stay.' She began to learn Dutch and tried to find a publisher for the book of short stories, called "The Flying Deer" that she had taken with her from Yugoslavia. Now she has published the stories at De Bezige Bij and her first novel, entitled "Eerste sneeuw" (First Snow). Late September 2000, her first children's book was published by Kwintessens: "Waarom Dora Koen sloeg" (Why Dora Beat Koen). This is the first work that Bukal has written in the Dutch language. The other two books were translated from Serbo-Croatian. She had a great desire to be published in her new country. 'If I had not been able to write and publish

in the Netherlands I could not have lived here,' Bukal says. In the living room, there are three desks: on two of them is a computer, while the third is to 'sit and write at, with a pen.' The writer, who had already made a career as a writer and translator in her native country, led 'a mad double life' in Belgrade in order to satisfy her need to write: 'I got up at five in the morning, worked in the library from seven until three in the afternoon, took care of my children and then, at ten in the evening, I made coffee and that was the beginning of my day. I would write until very late, sometimes three or four o'clock at night. Nobody understood why I was doing this. But writing is not a hobby, it is the most important thing in my life.'

Farsi

The Iranian-born writer Nasim Khaksar has lived in the Netherlands since 1983. The place where he writes is tiny, a small room filled to overflowing with papers and books, perched on the top floor of

of your own book

ublished in a new language: challenge and stumbling block

an artists' studio building. Khaksar is 56 years old and fled his country to escape the death penalty. The writer was persecuted both by the Shah regime and by that of Khomeini. In 1991, his first book was published in the Netherlands. It is a volume of stories, entitled "De kruidenier van Kharzavil" (The Grocer of Kharzavil), published by Van Genneep. Since then, his book of theatre scripts has appeared. His fourth book, "Tussen twee deuren" (Between Two Doors) was published recently. Khaksar, who has translated a number of stories by Harry Mulisch, Remco Campert and Hugo Claus from the Dutch language into his own, writes in Farsi. The interview is conducted in English. He has no ambition to start writing in Dutch, although he reads it well and speaks it reasonably fluently. 'You must grow up with one language, in order to understand it truly. I grew up with Farsi.'

Like Bukal, Khaksar sees publishing on the Dutch market as a must. 'I

live here. I am part of this society. Through my exile, I have become a new person. Half of me lives here, half of me lives there, as if I am dreaming and half awake. That must be explained and understood. So from that point of view I cannot say: I only write for Iranian people who live outside their country.'

Translate

The fact that Khaksar and Bukal have found Dutch publishers may be called remarkable. Khaksar already had some ten books to his name in Iran. From the Netherlands, he published via Iranian publishing houses for his fellow country men in exile. He was discovered by accident, by the publisher Van Genneep, who had come across some of his stories in English translation. Van Genneep offered him a contract.

Snezana Bukal, on the other hand, devised a real plan to target the Dutch market. 'I went to the library. I did some research, to find out who had translated the Yugoslav authors whom I love and

respect. This is how I came across the name of Reina Dokter. I looked up her address in the telephone directory and sent her three of my stories. Soon after that, she let me know that she would very much like to translate my work, for free. That was my good fortune. I then went to look for the publishers who listed the works of authors I admire. One of them was De Bezige Bij. I sent them my stories, which had meanwhile been translated, and I got a contract.'

As a rule, it is not easy for foreign writers to have their work published. When publishers do not speak their language, which is very frequently the case with refugees from non-western countries, the obstacles on the road to publication become almost insurmountable. There is no way publishers can establish whether a book is interesting for them and a test translation is expensive and very risky. 'Independent initiatives on the part of the author - having your work translated by a well-meaning neighbour or attempt to

write it in English yourself - are usually detrimental to the quality,' says Christel Jansen, who works at the Dutch Foundation for Literature and is responsible for intercultural literature policy.

Foreign writers should have a chance on the Dutch Literary market for writers in the Netherlands. With this aim in mind, the Foundation has started producing 'introductory portfolios', in collaboration with the Foundation for the Production and Translation of Dutch Literature (NLPVF). The Foundations will then attempt to "sell" the authors using these booklets, which contain a biography, an interview with the author and a good translation of a passage from the work. The NLPVF also offers grants to publishers to meet their translation costs.

In June 2000, five of these portfolios were issued: one by the Sudanese novelist Raoef Moes'ad Basta, the Bosnian author Antonije Zalica, the Iranian author of children's books Ghodzi Ghazinoor, the Turkish feminist writer Nurci-

han and the Kurdish writer/ journalist Ayhan Uzala. Of these five, four have already found publishers, partly as a result of this project. Jansen hopes to be able to compile more portfolios, although she does concede that truly talented authors who qualify for immediate publication are few.

In the case of Khaksar and Bukal, their respective publishers take care of the translations of their books. Khaksar: "When the translation is finished, I check it for stupid mistakes." Some Farsi words have two meanings: month and moon are indicated by the same word and the word for "beautiful" is the same as the one for "fish". Khaksar can only read the words - literally. When it comes to the poetic feeling and the interpretation of the words in translation, he must simply trust both his translator and his publisher. 'When the translation is finished, I get together with my editor. Then we read the script, line by line. This is how we filter out the things that are not clear and arrive at a shared vision.'

Bukal can read, understand and interpret the Dutch language perfectly, which is small wonder with a Dutch partner and children who are in full command of the language. It makes it easier for her to master the language. As far as she is concerned, the most important characteristic of a translator is not that he or she possess the skill of transposing the words to another language, but is able to rephrase the author's thoughts. Khaksar makes that point too: 'A good translator is a new creator! In the Netherlands you will never see him on the book cover, but in Iran his name is sometimes printed even larger than that of the author.' 'However good a translation may be, it is and remains a translation,' Bukal thinks. 'There are certain things you simply cannot transmit. In "Eerste sneeuw", for instance, the character of Nihada is a Bosnian Muslim woman. In the original, you will notice that immediately, because I make her speak a Bosnian dialect. In the Dutch edition, I cannot let her speak with

her authentic voice.'

According to Khaksar, the advantage of being translated rather than writing directly in Dutch is that it enables him to better keep his distance from the Dutch literary market. 'When you write in the Dutch language, I think it is more difficult for you to avoid doing what the market wants you to do.' This drive to be independent probably relates to his background. 'It is a feeling that says: literature never gives up in its struggle with the authorities.' He does think, however, that his reading public would be larger if he could write and talk in Dutch. 'I think I would have had more invitations for lectures. In Holland, this kind of promotion is very important.'

Fish in water

The longer Bukal stays in the Netherlands, the more the Dutch language has become part "of her system". Her children and partner use it in their conversations. She speaks Serbo-Croatian with her children and English with her part-

ner since 'that happens to be the language in which we got to know each other.'

She has become obsessed with the Dutch language during the past eight years. But writing in that language often brings its own frustrations. 'I was always proud of my language. In it, I felt like a fish in water. I could do anything with it. This is not the case with Dutch. Sometimes, I want to write something and then I just founder in mid-sentence while normally I would not stop writing. I am struggling to learn it. I have a linguistic sensitivity and I am curious. I read an awful lot.'

So for the time being, Bukal prefers writing in Serbo-Croatian. In her experience, writing in Dutch is still a game. My linguistic capabilities in the Dutch language are at the level of a ten year old. So when I write in Dutch, I think like a ten year old child: much simpler and more rational than in Serbo-Croatian. Therefore, it was a very logical step to write a children's book, even though I am not a children's

Snežana Bukal

'Het vliegend hart',

Bezige Bij 1996

'Eerste sneeuw', Bezige Bij 1997

'VerjaardagsVerhalen',

verzamelbundel, Gottmer 1998)

'Dikke Pil', verzamelbundel,

Gottmer 1999

'Goed fout!', verzamelbundel

Kwintessens 2000

'Waarom Dora Koen sloeg',

Kwintessens 2000

Nasim Khaksar

'De kruidenier van Kharzavil',

Van Gennep 1991

'Reis naar Tadzjikistan',

Van Gennep 1994

'Weerhanen en zweepslagen',

Van Gennep 1997

'Tussen twee deuren',

Van Gennep 2000

author at all. It is a resting point, a break from my real work. In my own language, I can think at much deeper levels. But there again, everything can be so terribly complicated. After all, it is a language that is steeped in a lot of misery.'

Ever more frequently, Bukal encounters Dutch expressions - untranslatable ones - while she is writing in Serbo-Croatian. 'For example, I would love to use "dikke pech" or "en toch". These words appear out of nowhere. There is a great intimacy about "en toch". A lot of implications spring from it.'

Bukal is still surprised about her first book in Dutch. 'It is rather unbelievable, a little miracle.' For her children's book, she wrote all the dialogues directly in Dutch. The passages in between were a mixture of Serbo-Croatian and Dutch. 'As time went on, I translated these passages into Dutch, together with my partner. After all, he knows my way of speaking Dutch very well.'

In order to write in a new language, an author must have access

to the poetry of a language, the metaphors and the feelings that attach themselves to words. Even though Bukal has succeeded in doing this marvellously in her children's book "Waarom Dora Koen sloeg", she still believes that she has not yet reached that stage in her books for an adult audience. 'But it will happen. I can distinguish between various Dutch writers and explain which ones I prefer and why. There are moments that I can see the beauty of the Dutch language but I am not yet able to create it myself.'

The seventeen years that Khaksar has now spent in the Netherlands have not changed the way he writes, but they have changed the contents of his books. 'Life in these climatic conditions has leaked into the books that I have written here. You will see a lot of rain, water, canals. And my characters are frequently found talking in a bar. That is unusual in Iran.' Dutch fog has taken on a profound meaning in his books. He recalls the day he arrived here. 'It was the 30th of

September 1983. Night. There was this fog. I am always reminded of this night when the weather is like that. At some point, readers will notice this oppressive loneliness, they will feel it too.

Flying deer

Bukal reveals that she prefers writing poetry in Dutch – that is when she feels most at ease. ‘Poetry has no rules. With poetry, I have a feeling that I can do with the language whatever I want, that I am stronger. I can write it in my own Dutch. With poetry, I am not afraid of the language.’

Sometimes, she wonders whether her “feeling” for the Dutch language carries an entirely different “taste” than that of the Dutch themselves. ‘The way in which the Dutch say things is so completely different from my own language. There are words that I find very beautiful, like “allerlei” for instance. My friend thinks nothing of it, and neither do others. It probably sounds more beautiful in my ears than in yours. You are used to it and

that sometimes takes away the beauty of it. Sometimes I can feel it better and that can be an advantage, that distance between you and a language. It is an important task for a writer: from something small you make something wonderful, which enables your readers to see that miracle as well.’

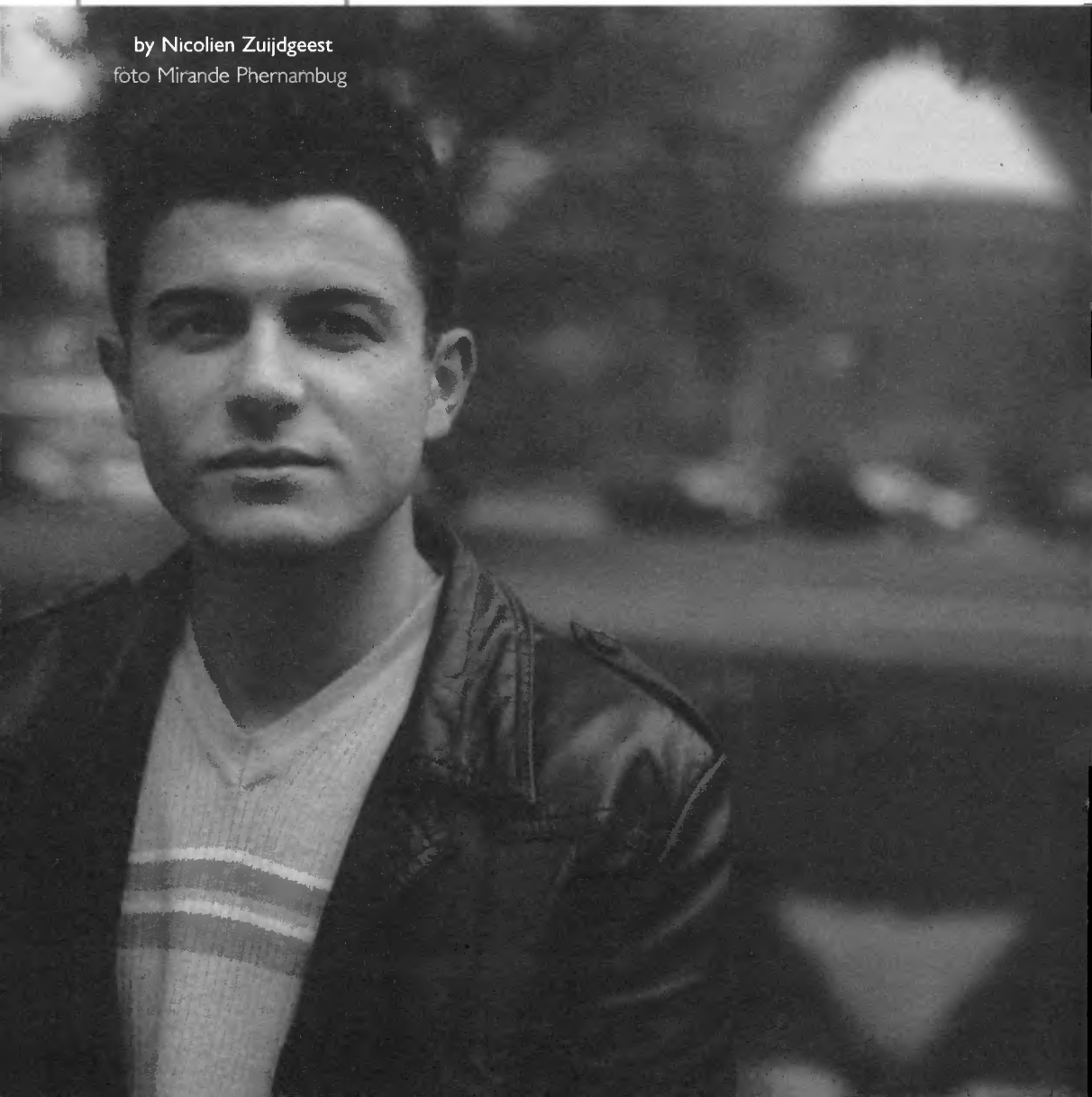
This passion for words can also be gleaned from the collection of dictionaries Bukal has on her shelves. She very often uses them while writing: thesaurus, etymological dictionaries, books of symbols and themes. Her first Serbian language dictionary, made in 1852, is her favourite literature. But it is not only Serbo-Croatian that attracts her. On the second shelf from the top are three generations of the large Dutch Van Dale dictionaries proudly displayed. The oldest dates back to 1950. Gingerly, the author takes the massive volume from the shelf. ‘It is so pleasant to discover the differences between then and now. For example, you find the word “neerdalen” (descend) only in the latest Van Dale edition. It does

not appear in the older one. “Het vliëgend hert” (The Flying Deer), the title of my collection of short stories, is the name of a beetle. But in the old Dutch language, the word “hert” was used to indicate “heart”. I found that out myself.’

I hate the term
migrant literature
- there is something
disparaging about it

Said El Haj

by Nicolien Zuijggeest
foto Mirande Phernambug



This is not the book I wanted to write. I knew what was going on with some Dutch-Moroccan writers. They are talking about “look how difficult life here is for us Moroccans.”. That was something I did not want, but every time I started writing that is where the motivation came from. So I had to start with it, otherwise I would never have been able to put anything else on paper. What I really wanted to do was to write something totally fictitious, show that I can write. But it seems my heart wanted to speak first.

I grabbed the bull by the horns when I returned from a world trip two years ago. There was nothing else I wanted to do but write. I started to study Dutch language and literature, in order to take my writing to a higher level. In April last year I started writing this book. I was just writing. As time went on, I noticed two things returning all the time: my father, and struggling with my faith. To me, literature replaces religion. It can not be a coincidence that the

moment I decided not to carry on living as a Muslim or a follower of any other religion was the moment I decided to start writing. My book is not an autobiography, but it is autobiographical. Every character in it has been given something that belongs to me. This I have done to infuse them with genuineness, to make them real. I have turned my own reality into fiction. The story has been growing out of sentences, phrases that were running through my head. I always carry notepads with me. Whenever inspiration comes, I write it down. Whenever I think “I will remember this” - well, it’s gone. That is when a fragment of the feeling leaves too. When your mood is a little sad, your writing will be sad too. A reader feels that, this is essential.

Last year, I competed for the El Hizra Literary prize. And hey presto, I got the incentive prize. Abdelkadir Benali was the master of ceremonies there. We have known each other since secondary school. After the prize giving ceremony, he introduced me to the

chief editor of Vassallucci. He liked the story and asked me if I had any more work. I sent them my short novel and they fell for it.

Vassallucci thought it could be turned into a novel and offered me a contract. I was so enthusiastic, if I had had it my way it would have signed immediately. But my publisher told me to take it home first and read it through. It was only after the contract business that I started composing and polishing. That was hard. At the beginning, I was writing intuitively. But now I had to consciously place myself before my computer and think about why this chapter should go here and that piece should go there. It felt so contrived. The publisher played a guiding role during the editing process. They want to motivate changes, so I could explain for myself why I had written something the way I had.

As far as writing is concerned, my study has not counted for anything. Rather the contrary, because you are so aware of the analyses and the models for interpretation.

They really can block you while you are writing. I do not want to pretend that I have created art, but still, that is something that I have wanted to do. I most certainly have literary aspirations.

I hate the term migrant literature. There is something disparaging about it. Literature by new Europeans – that sounds a lot better. I am suspicious enough to think that all the attention I am getting now is thanks to my background. If my book sells reasonably well, I want to halt my study temporarily, in order to work on a new book. I want to prove that there is more to me than this.'

Van Said El Haji
(Marokko/Nederland 1976)
verscheen:

'De dagen van Sjaitan', Vassallucci, 2000





foto Bob Bronsbeff

Nurcihan (Turkije, 1960) kwam twaalf jaar geleden naar Nederland. Met reeds een schiedkundebal op zak studeerde de schrijfster, journaliste en dichteres in Nederlandse bestuurskunde en pedagogie. In 1992 won Nurcihan in Turkije de schrijfwedstrijd die jaarlijks wordt uitgeschreven door de vooraanstaande Turkse krant *Milliyet*. Drie jaar geleden werd haar debuutroman *Waarheen wegen leiden* in Turkije gepubliceerd. Binnenkort zal daar ook haar tweede roman *De vrouwen van de spookstad* verschijnen.

Publicaties

Yollar Nereye Duser (Waarheen wegen leiden). Ankara: Bilgi Yayinevi, 1997.
Hayalel Kentin Kadimlari (De vrouwen van de spookstad). Ankara: Bilgi Yayinevi (in voorbereiding).

Voor meer informatie kunt u contact opnemen met Christel Jansen bij het

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Nurcihan

WAARHEEN WEGEN LEIDEN

April 1994, Istanbul. Op weg naar huis rijdt de jonge ingenieur Gülay met haar auto een opmerkelijke vrouw aan. Gülay trekt zich het lot van de vrouw aan en neemt haar mee naar haar woning. De vrouw, Nora, blijkt afkomstig uit een toekomstige wereld en is per abus in Istanbul terechtgekomen. Gülay en Nora worden vrienden en Nora maakt ook kennis met Suna, de boezemvriendin van Gülay.

De aanwezigheid van Nora leidt hij de vrijgevochten Gülay en Suna tot een confrontatie met hun eigen leven. Beide vrouwen leiden een niet-traditioneel bestaan. Gülay heeft een hoge functie bij een bank, deelt haar woning met haar moeder en heeft geen relatie. Wanneer Nora vertelt over haar geliefde Kena, een wezen dat het midden houdt tussen een man en een vrouw, ontdekt Gülay dat ze wel degelijk intimiteit mist. Suna, psychologe, heeft een LAT-relatie met de kunstenaar Ercan, maar die verloopt allerminst harmonisch. Uiteindelijk besluit Suna voor zichzelf te kiezen en zet een punt achter de relatie.

Waarheen wegen leiden is een psychologische roman met science-fiction-elementen. Het boek handelt over de man/vrouw-verbouwing in het huidige Turkije, waarbij de auteur Nurcihan haar ontvreemding hierover en haar sympathie voor het feminisme niet onder stoelen of banken steekt. Zo worden personages van het mannelijke geslacht veelvuldig afgeschilderd als wezens die zelfs onder de meest onmogelijke omstandigheden achter hun seksuele lusten aanhouden, maar Nurcihan slaagt erin dit elegant en geestig op papier te zetten.

Ook is de auteur als geen ander in staat onwaarschijnlijke gebeurtenissen waarschijnlijk te maken. Maar het is uiteindelijk haar meespendende stijl die de lezer zo inpalmt dat hij het sciencefiction-verhaal als logisch ervaart. Het onwaarschijnlijke is waarschijnlijk geworden.

HATICE KURSUN, *journalist*

In Waarheen wegen leiden wordt een uitzonderlijk verhaal op meesterlijke wijze verteld. In een opmerkelijke stijl en verteltrant worden de personages en gebeurtenissen op indringende manier ter hand genomen. Met deze roman wordt een nieuw genre aan onze literatuur toegevoegd. De drie vrouwen die de hoofdpersonen vormen, onderwerpen liefde, intermenselijke relaties, kinderen, familie en al wat leeft aan een diepgaande analyse. Nurcihan werpt met haar buitengewone verbeeldingskracht een bijzonder licht op tal van onderwerpen.

CUMHURİYET KİTAP

Bepaalde gebeurtenissen en personages in het boek napen ertoe om het in de categorie van 'phantasy' te plaatsen, maar toch is het niet zonder meer als sciencefiction te beschouwen. Het is een opvallend en inspirerend boek (...)
Een veelbelovend debuut.

YENI YUZI

Each publisher

Some

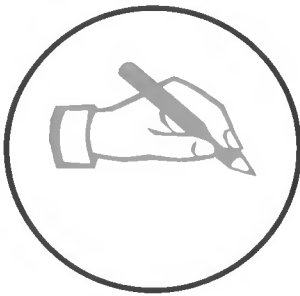
Holland's literary landscape looks as flat and uncomplicated as the polder landscape itself: on one side you have six million readers, on the other, one million (aspiring) writers and between them are some two hundred publishers. To quote a well-known cartoon character, 'that's all folks'. But appearances are deceptive, like the landscape of the Low Countries: in order to get your book published, more is required than just sending your manuscript to a random list of publishers.

Of course, nothing will stop you from doing it: pick an accidental name of a publishing house from the "Writer's Handbook", write a covering letter, put all the paperwork into a manila envelope, get yourself to the post office and hope that the whole parcel will not cost you more than ten guilders to send.

There is little wisdom in such an approach. It is like walking into a labyrinth with your eyes closed: you can walk about for hours, but in the end you will get nowhere. Strangely enough, it seems that a lot of writers at the start of their career

appear to have a preference for this labyrinth option. That is, if you are to believe the laments of the publishers. 'It is astounding how many "Celestial Promises" we receive even though we will never publish such a book,' says Wil Hansen, editor at the J.M. Meulenhoff publishing house. She is not alone. Week in week out, virtually all publishers find themselves despairing about this monumental lack of understanding. Here is Lidewijde Paris of Querido, another publishing house: 'You don't want to know how often it happens. Writers copy their manuscripts forty times, look up the addresses of publishers in the telephone directory and usually get ten rejections within the first seven days. It simply does not work that way.'

So how does it work, then? Paris confirms that this is not a question that is pertinent to multicultural, migrant or foreign writers alone. Dutch writers are facing the same problem. 'It is a general issue,' she says. To find a way out, the first thing one must realise is that not all publishers are prepared to throw just



by Louis Stiller

with his own list

insights into the policies of various literary publishers

everything onto the market. One publisher only specialises in popular American detective novels in translation, while another brings Dutch poetry. Yet others publish a broad range of books but have a special interest in authors who are slowly but surely working on a body of work with a certain consistency. Hansen: 'Knowledge of the various publishers' lists among most people is very limited, even though it is one of the most important elements in your quest to find the publisher who is right for you. You can really save yourself and the publisher a lot of trouble by selecting the recipients of your manuscript on this criterion alone.'

So what do you need to do to avoid wasting all this effort and having all this irritation? First of all, try and understand what the policy of the various Dutch publishers is. What kind of author is published by this publisher, what does the list look like, which genres, type of stories and styles are most prominent? A day at the library or one afternoon with a notepad in a large bookstore

will yield a sizeable chunk of knowledge about the publishers and the books they have on their lists. Have a talk with a bookseller or read the "Boekblad" magazine (it's in the library) for specific information. The Internet is another source of a lot of information. Most publishing houses these days have their own website, where they explain their publishing policies and show their lists, authors and books. You will find them through [schrijversnet](http://schrijversnet.nl) (www.schrijversnet.nl), the Royal Library (www.kb.nl), commercial book sites like Bol (www.bol.com), and the Belboek catalogue (www.belboek.nl/catalogus).

Even if you think you have found your publisher, sending a manuscript is not all that easy. What exactly should you send: the whole manuscript, a few pages, a few chapters? And what language should they be in: should you have it all translated first or do publishers have their own translation department? Again, there are no hard and fast rules here. But one thing is certain: never send a manuscript by e-mail, send it

by post. Secondly, when you are making first-time contact with the publisher, it usually is not necessary to send them your entire manuscript. One chapter will do: after all, you are only getting to know one another. As far as languages are concerned, most publishers have no problem with the major European languages, i.e. French, English and German. If you have written your work in one of these, you do not need to have it translated if it is the first time you approach a publisher. 'At the latest Frankfurt Book Fair, a literary agent gave me a few pages by a writer from Iceland. They had been translated into English - I do not speak Icelandic - and what I read was interesting and exciting,' Paris recalls. She asked the agent whether they had any more material by this author and fortunately there were a few more chapters available in a German translation. 'Based on that, I was able to make a decision regarding publishing it.' From the above, you could conclude that the best way to having your work published is to send a manu-

Here are the publication phases once again.

Acquisition: this is where it all starts. Your manuscript is acquired and many questions go with it, including: why is a manuscript accepted, who is responsible for this, how do publishers get your manuscript.

Decision to publish: who is taking the decision about publishing and what will be the consequences for you

Editing: here you will work together with an editor

Curious rounds of corrections: here the last t's are crossed and i's are dotted by the bureau editors, for you this is the last chance you have to intervene in the development of your manuscript

Production: design, printer's proof, last corrections and the printing of your book

Promotion and publicity: what can you expect of the publicity department and what can they expect from you

script. Again, this is based on a misconception. Much of what is published in the Netherlands has reached a publisher via a different route. Vassallucci's Oscar van Gelderen knows from experience that the threshold is particularly high for authors from other cultures. This is why his publishing house has been busy for some time trying to find new ways to discover talent. Vassallucci initiated free stages for performing writers ("open podia") and since March 1, 2000 it supports the Moroccan youth magazine Atarik.NL. Van Gelderen: 'We are active in two different scenes. At the moment, it is not common practice for talented writers from Surinam, Morocco, Turkey or African countries to send their work in. Often you really must literally discover them. This we do through contests, festivals, free stage events and so on.' In this way Van Gelderen "discovered" an author like Abdelkader Benali. He won the El Hizjra writing contest and then his first novel "Bruiloft aan zee" (A Wedding by the Sea) was published by Vassallucci. The same is true of the poet Mustafa Stitou.

Initially, Van Gelderen was in for a lot of criticism because of his approach, but that has since come to an end. 'Abdelkader Benali and Mustafa Stitou are examples of how this can be done,' says the poet Chrétien Breukers in the opinion weekly "De Groene Amsterdammer". 'They would have had a serious chance with other publishers. It is definitely to the credit of Vassallucci that they give non-indigenous writers a sporting chance.'

In the meantime, Vassallucci is most certainly not the only one focussing on writers full of talent who have a non-Dutch background. One can glean this from a visit to "Vers for de Pers", the bi-annual presentation put together by publishing houses in the Amsterdam centre De Meervaart. Apart from the usual "multi-cultural" publishers like In De Knipscheer, De Geus and Van Genneep, virtually all major publishers have put their feelers out. De Bezige Bij has the very successful Moses Isegawa on its list. De Arbeiderspers, another major publishing house, will issue the autobiographical novel by Nilgün Yerli, and that is quite apart from the work by the

DO NOT:

well-known Surinamese author Astrid Roemer and the new novel by Dutch-Indonesian author Marion Bloem. Earlier, the same house had published work by the young Moroccan author Hans Sahar.

Querido is another house trying to find new talent and devising its own ways to do so. For the theme of the most recent Book Week "Writing between two cultures", Querido issued a contest for the "New Dutch", entitled "Querido shows its true colours". Paris again: 'A good pile of material came in. There were poems, children's novels and even complete adult novels. We were immediately struck by the fact that this contest had appealed to far more people than we had expected. The writers just ignored all the buzz surrounding the event; they saw a change and they grabbed it with both hands.' In the end, a jury selected seven stories by authors from all corners of the earth: one from Russia, an Englishman, a Chinese, a Kurd, a Surinamese-Indian writer, one from Austria and a Dutchman whose parents are deaf. The prize for all of them was the same: more guidance in the

writing process. 'By the way, this is not the only way in which we are looking for talent,' Paris asserts. 'We also keep track of what appears in the magazines, one of our editors is a regular guest at the free stage events and of course we have many contacts through our own authors. 'We are trying to keep our eyes and ears open as much as possible. For instance, we had a visual artist who did illustrations for our children's books. Her name is Nelleke Zandwijk and it turned out she could write very well too. This is the kind of development that we are very receptive to.'

Book production phases

No matter how you gained access to a publishing house - be it through a contest, a free stage event, a course facilitator's recommendation or indeed because of the manuscript you sent - the phases that your book will go through, once acceptance is a fact, will follow the same path and have the same structure. The most important phases of book production are acquisition (together with the decision to go ahead and publish), followed by the

1. Send a lone diskette. A publisher receives many manuscripts every day and is not in a position to print out everything. Moreover, computer viruses tend to spread through unsolicited diskettes.

2. Present yourself at the publishing house with a manuscript and tell the person attending to you that someone should look at your work immediately, while you wait, because you are famous and all the rest of it. A publisher might have once enjoyed this kind of behaviour, but rest assured: many have gone before you.

3. Submit manuscripts that are all tied together with Sellotape or other binding or glueing materials. Should you make it through the selection and it needs copying for several people to read it, your way of holding all the pages together renders copying difficult.

1. Put your name and address on the envelope, letter and manuscript.
2. Send a covering letter in which you explain who you are, why you write and why you have sent this particular manuscript to this particular publisher.
3. Summarise the story if you have sent the whole manuscript and not just a few chapters. Explain the outline of your story in brief and indicate which passages in your story will present a good picture of what your story is about. This will enable the publisher to decide relatively quickly whether there are editors required to read your text.
4. Send your manuscript to a publisher with which you feel a certain affinity, one whose books you know, read and like. That will usually be the publisher where you will feel at home. Do not be deterred by big names on their list.
5. Enclose return postage, preferably on a stamped envelope addressed to yourself or tell the publishers that you do not want to have the manuscript returned to you if they do not like it. There is not a single publishing house that has published a book in an underhand way after having rejected it.
6. Send your manuscript on loose A4 pages, numbered, with your text printed with a 1.5 or 2 interval between the lines.
7. Let the other publishers know that one has offered you a contract, if you have sent your manuscript to several.

editing phase, the various correction sessions, and finally, the publication itself, with all the marketing and promotion.

In the very first phase, the question really is whether your book will be published and if so when and how. It is a rare occasion indeed when a manuscript is sent straight to the correction department and from there to printing and distribution. In almost all cases, there is extensive consultation about how your manuscript will be completed and what your future plans are. Sometimes

you have to reconsider your manuscript several times before a final decision is made. It is usually the publisher who has the final word, together with the acquiring editor, usually the man or woman you have had previously contact with. Then the real game begins: a contract is drafted, a planning is made and you are sent home with a thousand and one tips, suggestions for improvements and other ideas. Paris: 'What frightens many writers is that their book will be taken away from them and that things will happen to it that

they do not really want. This is not the case. It is just a very long drawn-out process: we indicate what we feel are the weak points in the manuscript and what the author should be doing to turn this into a really good book. Everything we do is done in consultation: from the final editing process to the cover picture. The writers get the chance to look at everything and give their opinion on what they see.'

As every publisher and writer who has been there will tell you, writing a book is a question of stamina. And you will do a lot of sitting on chairs before you are done. It is very rare indeed for a manuscript to arrive in a publisher's office and be published within a year. This is partly due to the commercial structure of a publishing house: to be able to sell a book, it must first be announced in a catalogue and then "presented" to various bookshops. And since there are only three of those presentations a year - spring, summer and autumn - there is only a limited number of opportunities to present your book to the outside world.

When your book finally does make it to the presentation phase, then

the last stations of the journey must be passed: getting the book ready for printing, composing, the printing itself, promotion and marketing. The entire text, now approved, will go to the final editor one more time and is composed (and the composed version is also checked, also by the author) and then, finally, it all goes to the printer.

Throughout, cultural differences do play their part. Paris explains: 'You have to take into consideration the fact that Dutch readers live in another world of thought and metaphor. For instance, there was a Russian author who used the word "asgrauw" (ashen) in her manuscript. She used it in a place where it could only mean something positive. For her, there was indeed a positive ring to it because it was a reference to the past. So I had to explain to her that for Dutch people, this word has a negative connotation. And those are the people who will read you.'

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Publishers - source
<http://www.boekboek.nl>

DO NOT:

- 4. Call the first week after you have received an acknowledgement of receipt, which usually is the first thing you will hear from a publisher. This first message from the publisher usually also contains information about how long the assessment of manuscript will take.**
- 5. Do not have a promotion plan, cover, poster ready to be taken on board by the publisher verbatim. This has the opposite effect of what you are trying to achieve. It is OK to want to stand out but there are better ways of doing this when presenting a book.**
- 6. Say at the outset that you do not want anything changed about the book. Be cooperative. Publishers do want the best for you; after all, they exist by selling books too.**
- 7. Send only the synopsis and the outline of your story: literature is about more than just a plot. Send a few chapter along with your précis.**
- 8. Do not send your manuscript to 20 publishers at the same time. It seems very efficient to do it this way because you have to wait for such a long time but where do you go when all 20 turn you down? If you are not satisfied with sending your work to just one, send it to two or three and take a good look at the comments you are getting from them. Use those comments to your advantage before sending your work to the next publisher. If a publisher sends you extensive comments on what you have sent them, then you can be sure that they have seriously looked at your manuscript. In that case, do not hesitate to send your improved/rewritten manuscript to the same publisher, referring to their previous correspondence with you.**

In 1999, the poet Remco Ekkers facilitated a poetry workshop for migrant writers. What follows below is a challenging impression of what may happen during such a workshop. Even poets who were actually raised with skate sharpeners and Saint Nicholas may find this interesting.

by Remco Ekkers

Of Sapphire

Writing in a **strange** language, a **strange** culture you did not grow up in, but a culture nonetheless in which you live and want to function, as you are, therefore also as a poet: how do you do that? Think and dream in a **strange** language but what you carry in your head is from then and there. Yes, you may think: people have more in common than their differences, they have a heart, lungs and five fingers on each hand, if there have been no accidents. But your mother looked **different** from the mothers here and the smells are **different** and there are no mountains, much in the same way as the special flowers that are nowhere to be found, the dusty roads, the evening air. People treat each other **differently** here, they greet and kiss in different ways, they talk about different things or they keep quiet. Still, you are in this culture and you want to be a complete human being and express your surprise, longing, sorrow, happiness, anger. You want to do all that in words, because you

love words, sentences, their sound and rhythm, metaphors. But the poetry here is also different, dryer, more barren, not as mesmerizing. Sometime you think: is there any real poetry here at all?

The first thing you must do is read, read lots in your new language

Like a painter who traipses through the museums, looking at the way colleagues are working, you must leaf through the anthologies and volumes until you have found the poems that make you say: Yes, that is poetry.

In 1999, the Dunya Foundation and the Writing Foundation (Stichting Schrijven) organised a course for migrant writers. The teachers were the poets Astrid Roemer, Henry Habibe and myself. The participants wanted to write poems in Dutch, present themselves as Dutch poets. Already they were poets in their own language but now they wanted to publish in their new environment.

and a Frozen God

A poet's borderless workshop

Together, during the course, we looked at the work of modern Dutch poets. We discussed them, we tried to understand and feel the meaning of each line. Which unwritten rules were at play here? What kinds of poetry can you distinguish?

We gave each other assignments. Readers of this article can do them too, by themselves, but it is better to do the assignments with colleagues, so you can support and incite each other.

First, we must get to know each other

Bring a poem of your own, in Dutch, read it out loud and listen to the questions your colleagues ask you. Return the favour and discuss other peoples' poems too. Let them hear how you read their poems. And you, poet, listen to how your lines are read. This is not a chance you get every day. Alright, once in a while your girlfriend or boyfriend may comment, but they are too close for comfort. Here you can listen

to strangers, who become acquaintances as time goes on, and find out what they think. Feel the benefit! Listen with empathy and insist on having a mind of your own - simultaneously.

Also, bring a poem by a Dutch poet, a poem you consider good. Try to explain why, even though you may not be able to come up with all the right formulations, still while talking it will become apparent what you want, both to you and your audience.

Make a note of the questions you want to ask your colleagues

They are there to look for possible answers and come up with new questions.

Choose assignments that are connected with our lives as poets

According to Octavio Paz, poetry itself is a source. The point where all converges. I have often said that poetry is in love with the moment

and wants to relive that moment by taking it out of the flow of time and turning into a pure here and now. This is another time, the time of permanent presence.

Write about a Frozen God

It is a theme that makes you think of your education, or your anger about what is wrong in the world, or a yearning for a better world. Write about a father, your father or your girlfriend's father. Take a look at how other poets are doing this. When you reflect upon it well, this assignment will uncover essential feelings. We all carry our fathers on our backs. You can (and sometimes must) turn against him; you can unearth a memory; you can think about the mysterious relationship that exists between a father and his child. What is it like to be a father? Write about a child's photograph, an old one or a contemporary one, one that really exists, one that is only inside your head, or one you wished would exist.

Choose an image, take a long time watching it, take notes, put the photograph away and start writing

Again, this is an assignment that relates to lifting a moment out of time. Observing well will make the words surface within you. Do not filter them out through a logical construction, rather listen to your gut. Write down the words without criticising them and then select from the entirety what you can use in a poem, because it surprises you, because you would like to know where it is leading you. The idea is not to represent the photograph in words, to craft an image using words. The photograph may be an emotional engine, a word-propellor.

Write about power and powerlessness

This assignment has a lot to do with the experiences of people who want to live in another culture or are forced to do so. Start from a concrete experience. Do

not use abstract words like power or powerlessness. Create a situation in which the reader will experience power or powerlessness. A highly personal experience can be universal, even though the scene and the backdrop are strange to the reader.

Write about fire or water

We in the 21st century do not differ a great deal from the people living in prehistoric times. Fire or water, experiences in their tangible form, have a profound bearing on the way we feel and think. You can evoke a variety of experiences: a campfire, a candle, burning yourself, a firebomb, a visit to an active volcano, burning letters, a house burning, or the metaphor: burning love or anger.

Write about how the earth smells

This assignment can evoke feelings of homesickness or disgust. Write about a new house. Again, feelings of homesickness or disgust may manifest themselves. A new situa-

tion, being homeless, or on the other hand being surprised by unexpected hospitality can be described in terms of engineering or architecture. You can let the reader experience the interior and bring forth a character's experience very lucidly.

Write about samphire

This is a theme that forces you to take stock of typically Dutch circumstances. Find this little plant that grows on the border between water and land, smell it, eat it, be inspired. ■

IK BEN HIER OMDAT IK HET WIL

Interview met Ghodsi Ghazinoor, 'de Annie M.G. Schmidt van Iran'

Door Hanneke Leliveld



Ghodsi Ghazinoor (1945, Iran) volgde in Iran de lerarenopleiding en de Academie voor Grafische vormgeving. Ze heeft in het onderwijs gewerkt en bij een onderwijskundig centrum als ontwerper van educatief materiaal voor kinderen. Verder was ze coördinator van de literaire tijdschriften Baharan (voor kinderen) en Bidaran. Ze woont sinds vijf jaar in Nederland, waar ze schrijft en schildert. Ghazinoor heeft 36 kinderboeken op haar naam staan, waaronder:

Parvaz ('Vliegen'). Teheran: Qatre, 1999.

Shadihai Kuchek ('Klein Geluk'). Teheran: Bidaran, 1986.

Zendegi ('De kleine slak'). St. Pavand, 1993. Verschenen in het Duits bij Horlemann, 1993. Het verhaal 'Aboud's drawings' is opgenomen in de bundel Stories by Iranian Women since the Revolution (Austin, Texas: Center for Middle Eastern Studies). Verder publiceerde Ghazinoor in het Farsi twee dichtbundels en twee verhalenbundels.

Er was eens een bange slak die het beter vond in het donker te zitten dan opgegeten te worden door een spreuuw. Uit angst voor alle mogelijke gevaren bleef hij zoveel mogelijk in zijn huisje. Toen ontmoette hij een andere slak. Die slak had heel de wereld gezien en was nog lang niet klaar met nieuwe dingen beleven. De nieuwe slak vond het leven van de bange slak maar een hel, altijd bang en altijd in het donker. Hij wilde snel verder op avontuur. De bange slak wilde niet alleen blijven en ging toch maar mee. En het was veel leuker en minder eng dan hij had gedacht.

De kleine slak is een kinderboek dat gemaakt is door kunstenaar/schrijver Ghodzi Ghazinoor. Het is tot nu toe het enige boekje van deze Iraanse vrouw dat in het Nederlands vertaald is, terwijl zij wel vijftig boeken geschreven heeft. In niets lijkt Ghazinoor op het bange slakje. Zij is juist de optimistische slak, die er het beste van wil maken. Ghazinoor heeft haar land verlaten en woont sinds vijf jaar in Nederland. Ze schrijft en schildert, net als in Iran.

Naast kinderboeken schrijft ze ook korte verhalen en poëzie. Een groot deel van haar werk is in het Iran van vóór de revolutie uitgegeven. 'In het Iran van toen was ik beroemd,' lacht Ghazinoor. Het onderwerp 'revolutie' is in een gesprek met iemand uit Iran haast onvermijdelijk. Ook Ghodzi Ghazinoors persoonlijke geschiedenis is niet los te zien van de geschiedenis van haar land. Tegelijk is het een gevaarlijk onderwerp. Erover vertellen kan

In December 1999, 13 people embarked on a unique experiment: teaching “Prose without borders”.

It is not important that someone comes from another culture, what does matter, though, is that you become more conscious of your sources.’

by Tamara Keasberry

Training with

Certainly, you cannot tell people’s cultural background just by looking at them. Still, the group that comes together at the Spielerij Complex in Amsterdam for the “Prose Without Borders” course is conspicuous by its whiteness. Two participants are from Surinam, there is a Chinese-Indian writer and one from Somalia. The other nine are Dutch. And that is remarkable, because “Prose With-out Borders” (or “Grenzeloos Proza” as it is called in Dutch) is not your average writer’s workshop. The course facilitators Pim Wiersinga and Norman de Palm offer a general course in writing. But together with the participants, they also want to explore the literary traditions of various cultures.

A small survey shows that most participants were not attracted by the multicultural aspect of the course, but by the “absence of borders” element. There is, for instance, Italian Dutchman Giovanni Nervo, whose work has been published in the “Opwenteling” magazine and the now

defunct multicultural magazine “Mix”. Nervo: ‘I was drawn towards the idea that different themes would be dealt with. And also, a course like this will always attract people who are open to other insights and visions. And that again has an impact on the discussions. People who follow these courses are prepared to look at things from a different perspective.’ Participant Méland Langeveld hopes to pick something up from the literary traditions by way of the other cultural traditions on offer here. For Ilse van den Bosch, the multicultural aspect is also an important trigger that prompted her to enroll in the course. ‘I have followed interviews and discussions and seen films in which - among other things - the problems were discussed that are related to multicultural matters. But I realise there is no time to discuss all of that, since so much has to be dealt with during these meetings. To me, the most important thing is that we continue to recognise ourselves as a group.’

out borders

Culture as confrontation

The frequently discussed paper “Culture as Confrontation” by the Dutch State Secretary for Cultural Affairs Rick van der Ploeg is at the foundation of the “Prose Without Borders” course. In his paper, Van der Ploeg says that institutions and schools must gear their policies towards the use, and towards people from minority backgrounds. Culture is no longer supply-driven, it is demand-driven. And if that demand does not exist it must be created. This is a challenge to the market of literary training courses: Dutch writing schools are predominantly “white”, at a time that the literary landscape is co-inhabited by “world authors” from a non-Dutch cultural background.

And so it came to pass that, under the banner of “Writing Without Borders”, a multicultural writing course was started in September 1999. According to the brochure, the course would “afford both local and foreign writers the unique opportunity to begin a journey along a multicultural writ-

ing track under the supervision of renowned teachers. The end result will be a publication.” But what exactly is a “multicultural writing track”?

In the wake of the debate that followed an article on the “multicultural drama”, by the current affairs commentator Paul Scheffer in *NRC Handelsblad*, the term “multicultural” is heavily charged. Aly Freije, one of the founders of the course, stresses that the “borderless” aspect is of greater importance than the “multicultural” side. ‘What is unique about “Prose Without Borders”,’ she says ‘is that you work with a mixed group. Exchange can be important for all parties. It is not important that someone comes from another culture, what does matter, though, is that you become more conscious of your sources. The point is that people get near to their own theme and story.’

The course has been set up in a well-thought out way (see box). Pim Wiersinga admits with pride that, indeed, the set-up is ‘pretty

uncommon. Norman and I have talked at length about how to construct the course in several blocks. I think that as far as the working methods are concerned, this comes close to the rhythm of the writing process, although this may not be the case for everyone.’ According to Wiersinga, a very good move was the inclusion, in the third block, of individual sessions. ‘People get a bit weary of looking at each other’s texts, and in the individual sessions the participants get specific attention.’ Still, in which way does this writing course differ exactly from the lessons at ‘t Colofon? ‘Here, the participants get a lot of time and attention, much more than at ‘t Colofon. At ‘t Colofon, the first emphasis is on discussing texts, while here at “Prose Without Borders”, a lot of consultation is about the content. Textual details come later. This is the result of the way the course has been set up. People who come to this course clearly have a story to tell. Our participants are less experienced in look-

ing at their own texts, unlike the participants at 't Colofon, who expect to do this as a result of the writing courses they have been following.'

Crime and punishment

Vigorous discussions, as a result of the multicultural angle, are inescapable. Is there not the danger of a cacophony of cultures? Wiersinga: 'At the end of the first lesson, there was a great debate, which led to considerable tension in the group. There were people who wanted to talk about what it is like to live in another culture. That was also the expectation they took to the course. But other participants said: "Yes, but we are here to learn to write, aren't we?" The course facilitator thinks that the intensity of the discussion is partly due to the fact that a lot of Dutch people feel that in discussions such as these they are pushed into the crime-and-punishment corner. He suspects that this effect could have mitigated by a greater balance among the participants, an imper-

fection, Wiersinga admits. 'The idea was to create as close a parity as possible between the native Dutch and the newly arrived Dutch. But you cannot tell from the registration forms where everybody comes from. Sometimes you can tell from the motivation. But it remains a problem to base your selection both on quality and the idea of a balance of numbers.'

According to Norman de Palm, the composition of the group during this particular course accounts for a marked difference with the groups he taught previously. 'It becomes apparent in the questions that are asked, the interaction among the people.' At the same time, he notes, there are more political discussions and anecdotes. In his opinion, it is not a carefree situation from which the people depart to take part in the course.

After the turbulent first lesson, it was exciting to see how the next one would go. One assignment got the group out of the impasse. They had to describe themselves as chil-

dren, growing up in another culture. For Méland Langeveld, this was, as he described it, an eye-opener. 'I portrayed myself as a four year old child growing up in a Chinese culture. Something very beautiful came out of that.' Eventually, it gave him the idea for the story he is working on at present, in which the main character also comes from a different culture. 'It does broaden your horizon; you look differently at the Netherlands.' Giovanni Nervo was also pleased with the assignment. 'In the beginning, it certainly was confusing because people asked themselves whether they should really be writing about another culture. After that passionate debate, I was pleased that the multicultural aspect was left behind a bit, that it took a broader view. After all, people do not only fail to communicate because they are from different cultures.'

Norman de Palm is happy with the way the group is developing now. 'This is a pretty rigorous group. They like to challenge one another

but in the end they have become a real group. Which is necessary in order to work well.' For their part, the participants have declared themselves satisfied with the facilitators. Nervo: 'The combination of Norman and Pim is a strong one. Norman looks more intuitively at a text, feels his way around it, and tries to find out what the story really is about. Pim looks at structure first'. Ilse van den Bosch is pleased with the fact that the two facilitators do their work like "human beings" rather than "teachers". 'It is the open way in which they work with your text, on an equal footing with you that I like very much. I have never seen that before.'

Guest lecturer

From time to time, guest lecturers make their appearance in "Prose Without Borders". The Dutch columnist Stephan Sanders wanted the participants to write about the worst thing that had ever happened in their lives. In preparation for reading these texts, Sanders set

out his vision on the writing process. His opening statement was this; 'One of the most important things about life is the interplay of shame and publicity. There is something incredibly uncomfortable about writing, and not even the writing itself but the publishing. Writing is a strange eye that you allow to get to your text.' Sanders thinks that the power and anxiety of writing are located in the move from the private to the public sphere. Everything is potential material. The first question should not be "how intimate is this?". The material itself is never intimate, the way in which you write something is.

The participants put their best foot forward for Sanders. Adultery, euthanasia, the sexual fantasies of a 14 year old girl; there were no holds barred. The method Sanders used was to ask for comments after each text had been delivered and then asking for reactions from other participants. It resulted in a lively discussion. 'The only thing that interests us as writers,' he

told his audience, 'is the search for those deeper feelings. That is the feeling we must grasp, put it on the table - and then start looking at it clinically, methodically. We must dissect it like a pathologist.' Sanders stressed the technical process of writing, fighting received expressions, turning them this way and that, and the control that a writer must have of the effects of what he or she writes. After the session, the course continued in a bar.

Norman de Palm is of the opinion that with guest lecturers, timing is essential. 'You have to put your feelers out when it comes to placing such a lesson in the program. This one by Stephan, I think, came at the right moment, just before the start of getting the final version ready. This assignment made it possible for people to retrieve their personal luggage and find out whether there was something left behind that they could pick up for the last round.'

When the course ended, a committee, consisting of teachers, a pub-

lisher and a book reviewer, compiled a volume with the best stories that had been written en route. The collection by the participants at the current course was published by the Atlas publishing house and presented at a literary and theatrical event. And even this festive final chord has a thought or two behind it. De Palm: 'In theatre it is essential that, as a writer, you are staged. Likewise, as a prose writer you ought to be read. In my opinion, when you remain unpublished, you are missing something that writing really is about.' Moreover, de Palm thinks that you will really find out what writing is about through this final process of having a third person read your text and make corrections.

Story

"Prose Without Borders" is a success. The participants are enthusiastic about the two facilitators, the assignments and the way in which they are being guided as they write their stories. So there is nothing at fault with the course. Well, there is,

of course, because as Wiersinga already remarked, it remains problematic to select on quality criteria and ensure that a sufficient number of Dutch and migrant participants are enrolled. For instance, what do you do when you have one more place available and you must choose between a native Dutch person who has more literary quality potential and a migrant who may not fly so high but who should be selected because of the balance argument? And is it really correct to promise a multicultural writing track and then focus more on the borderless aspect of writing?

Still, it is a fine initiative and the added value of a mixed group is very much in evidence. What is also clear is that "Prose Without Borders" continues to develop. Wiersinga and De Palm are busy thinking about a sequel course. The idea is to set up four courses, departing from the "borderless" angle, and give the participants a small course in storytelling in the first block. This would mean that writing from a "different" culture is

already incorporated in terms of form. This then would act as a basis for the subsequent blocks from which the participants may then choose: poetry, theatre, writing stories and storytelling.

When talking about this tentative set-up, Wiersinga mentions the word 'pioneering. I am not saying that we all must do it the way we go about it or that fellow institutions must adopt this method. But it would be nice if, in four to five year's time when we have rid ourselves of all the teething problems and have gathered our insights, other institutions would be able to benefit from our ideas. It would be nice if they realised that we have hit a little seam of gold that could really add something to the way in which writing is taught'

The course "Prose Without Borders" takes eight months and is divided into four blocks, that together add up to the 18 meetings. Every block is followed by a writing intermezzo, in which the participant must work on his/her own. During these intermezzos, interviews are held with each of the participants individually. The participants are guided by two authors, Pim Wiersinga and Norman de Palm. Some of the meetings are led by guest lecturers. Information: Stichting Aves, telephone 020 - 421 4049.

About the facilitators:

Norman de Palm (Aruba) is a poet and writes theatre plays and film scenarios. He has produced poetry collections, theatre plays ("Desiree", "Lippenschrift", "Stampij", "Hotel-Hotel" en "Lust"), musical theatre for the young ("Basta", "Bloedlink", "Bijlmer-express naar West") and scenarios for films, including "Tur Kos Bon Na New York" (All's Well in New York), "Desiree", "Almacita di Desolato" and "Ava & Gabriel" which won a Golden Calf ("Gouden Kalf"), the chief Dutch film prize. He gave courses in theatre play writing, together with the Dutch theatre maker Willy Westermann. The one-act plays that resulted from these courses were staged during the "Hollandse Nieuwe I en II" festivals, that were held in Theater Cosmic in Amsterdam.

Pim Wiersinga wrote the novels "Honingvogels" (1992), "Gracchanten" (1995) en "Tropenzomer" (1999), which have been published by Meulenhoff. He teaches at the school for professional writing 't Colofon in Amsterdam and a similar institution in Rotterdam. He wrote "Het prozaboek", (The Prose Book), together with Bert Jansen. In this book, the many trappings and the finer points of writing prose are discussed.

A small m

You have spent hours at your computer. But where to go once the manuscript has been finished? And is there a place where you can learn how to write even better? Below, you will find the answers to the most frequently asked questions.

How do I know if my text is good enough to be published?

As a matter of fact, nobody can tell you. If you have any doubts about the quality of your text, it might be a good idea to have it read by a literary specialist. He or she may be a good friend, a teacher of literary writing, or someone who reads professionally. In the Netherlands, there are some twenty agencies that specialise in assessing manuscripts. They read, judge and - sometimes - improve collected works of poetry and prose manuscripts. A reminder: this concerns work written in the Dutch language. The most important agencies are Script+ in Amsterdam, SKVR Schrijversschool in Rotterdam, Bureau Script in Noordwijk, Stichting Schrijvenderwijs in Hoofddorp and Het Koorenhuis in Den Haag. If you are not prepared to pay for an assessment of your work you can also join a writing club (schrijfgroep). This is a small group of authors who get together every week or month to look at each other's work. Virtually every Dutch town has got one. You can find the addresses of the literary assessment agencies and the writing clubs in the "Literary Writers Handbook" (Handboek voor Schrijvers) or on the Internet. Of course, nothing deters you from starting your own writers' club: just place an advert or call some of your writing colleagues for a meeting.

Where can I send my manuscript?

There are many publishing houses in the Netherlands and Belgium. Children's book publishers alone number well over 50. Do not send your text to all these publishers but make a pre-selection. Have a browse in a book shop and a library and find out what kind of publishers there are, who among them publish books that resemble your own (in terms of subject, authors, character), and which of them have been bringing "world literature" onto the market. There are a few publishing houses in the Netherlands that have a history of issuing books by "writers without borders", including De Geus in Breda, Vassallucci in Amsterdam and In de Knipscheer in Haarlem (a company that has traditionally published a lot of Caribbean and Indonesian literature). But other publishers, like Meulenhoff, Contact, Querido, Van Gennep, Prometheus and De Bezige Bij have also presented the public with books from this group of authors. You will find the addresses in the "Literary Writers Handbook" (Handboek voor Schrijvers) or on the Internet.

The publishers' introduction policy

The Foundation for Dutch Literature has developed an introduction policy for non-western authors who have not (yet) been published in the Netherlands. The aim is to draw the attention of literary publishers to the existence of talented writers. To this end, the Foundation has created a system of "introduction portfolios". Such a portfolio typically consists of an interview with the author and/or an

annual

for writers without borders

introduction to the work on offer and a translated excerpt.

Publishers who decide to publish a work can request a translation grant from the NLPVF. To qualify for an introduction portfolio, you should come from a non-western country, live in the Netherlands and have no works published in the Dutch language. Your work will be presented to literary experts from the relevant linguistic zone. An important criterion will be literary quality. Only the work of a limited group of authors will be featured in an introduction portfolio. Some authors may be talented but have yet to produce work that will be strong enough for publication; they are referred. The rule is: everyone who submits his or her work will be advised about the quality of that work. Before you submit your work, reflect on how well-prepared you are to take criticism.

How do I approach those publishers? What are procedures?

Publishers receive piles of manuscripts on their doorstep, all of them unsolicited. As a rule, they will send you a letter within two weeks acknowledging receipt of your manuscript. Between two and eight months later, you will get another letter, in which they will almost invariably explain that your manuscript “does not fit with the list”. In other words; your work has been rejected. This will leave you with four options: give up, look for another publisher, improve the work or publish it yourself. There are a few things you must bear in mind when you submit work to a

publisher. Never send a handwritten text, but do not send it on a floppy disk or by e-mail, either. These will, in the main, never be read. What you do is work out your entire manuscript at the computer and send a printed copy to your publisher. Another thing you must not forget is that you rarely need to send the entire manuscript of your book: sometime it may suffice just to send one chapter and a synopsis of the story. Never send the original and always put your name and address in the cover letter and on the manuscript itself. If you are writing in your own language and not (yet) in the Dutch language, make sure you have a synopsis available in Dutch (English, French and German are also allowed). In addition, have one passage that represents your work really well translated by an accredited translator. This last may cost you some money but it might pay off later.

How do I find a good translator?

This is a problem. There are enough translators as working in English, French, Spanish and German, but with other languages this becomes more difficult. One suggestion is to look for translators on the Internet (for instance, take a look at <http://www.alletalen.nl/vertalers.html> of <http://www.vertaalguids.nl/>). Another is to consult one of the addresses in the list below or ask the Foundation for Dutch Literature for advice.

Suppose a publisher is interested in your work

This does not mean your work will immediately be ready for printing. First of all, an editor and/or the publisher will review the text thoroughly. This may imply that you will need to rewrite your manuscript, sometimes more than once. If you do not (yet) write in Dutch, chances are that you will have to review your work, together with the translator and the editor.

How about rights and royalties?

If your manuscript is approved, you will enter into a contract with your publisher.

Most often, this is (a version of) the Model Contract of the Dutch Publishers. In it, there is a precise description of how the book will be published and the kind of rights and obligations you have. You will often get an advance (most frequently between one and two thousand Dutch guilders). Royalties will follow after the financial year in which your book was published. Most publishers who work with the model contract pay a royalty at the rate of 10 per cent of the official retail price for the first 5,000 copies sold. The Model Contract is available through the Dutch Literary Association (Vereniging voor Letterkundigen, VvL).

Who decides what the cover will look like, what the title of the book will be and what the print

In principle, the publisher or editor will decide these matters. This is usually stipulated in your contract. But you are of course at liberty to contribute and make suggestions.

Can I publish the book myself?

Indeed you can, many authors do just that. "Independent publishers", as they are called, have the advantage that they can publish their work in a manner which is exactly to their liking, taste and pace. The disadvantage, however, is

that you must have sufficient money at your disposal, you must also do your own editing and distribution, and you will not have the network of contacts that a professional publisher has. A (cheaper) solution is to make use of a so-called "Publishing On Demand" service through the Internet, like Gopher (www.gopher.nl) and Bergboek (www.bergboek.nl). Here, you will pay a fixed amount for the preparation of the digital file - usually between 300 and 1,500 Dutch guilders - and you will receive royalties for each copy sold.

How do I protect my manuscript? Should I request an ISBN number or copyright?

An ISBN (International Standard Book Number) is requested by a publisher in order to make it easy to order the book, or find it in a library. To have your literary text protected, you do not need to do anything. The Netherlands (and other countries) has copyright laws that take care of this. Copyright laws make it unnecessary for authors - or for that matter, creators of unique works of art in general - to do anything to get these copyrights. As soon as you have written a unique work as an independent artist, these rights are automatically yours. Mind you: if you create this work as part of a paid job, these rights go to the company where you work. Otherwise, you do not have to register or lodge anything.

Does that apply to professional authors only or writers who have joined a union?

No. The 1912 copyright law does not make any distinction between professionals and amateurs. Anyone who has created a unique work of art is protected under this law, whether you have just written your first poem on a scrap of paper or confidently finished your fortieth bestselling novel.

As a writer, do I need to be a member of a writers' association or a writers' union?

This is not necessary in the Netherlands. In principle, publishers, translators and magazine editors will work with anyone who has demonstrated being capable of producing high literary quality. Still, there is a union of sorts for literary authors, the Dutch Literary Association (“Vereniging voor Letterkundigen”), which advocates their interests.

Are there any contests and performance opportunities that are open, specifically for writers without borders?

Definitely, there are quite a few. For instance, you have the El Hizjra Literary Award for Arabic writers (check <http://www.elhizjra.nl/ehp/EHP200.htm>) and the Dunya Poetry Prize (check www.dunya.nl). And as far as performance opportunities are concerned: every first Sunday of each month, the Cosmic Theater and the publishing house Vassallucci organize an open stage for upcoming literary talent. It is called the Cosmic Lounge and is held in the Nes, Amsterdam. For more information, call Marijse Binsbergen at Cosmic, telephone number 020 - 623 7234.

Are there courses for writers without borders?

There are dozens of courses and workshops dealing with writing without borders. Most of these are announced in the bimonthly magazine “Schrijven” (Writing, check www.schrijven.org). In addition, there are three multi-annual courses: at 't Colofon in Amsterdam and Maastricht, the College of the Arts (Hogeschool der Kunsten, HKU) in Utrecht and in Leuven (Louvain), Belgium, there is WeL. A special course for world writers is called “Writing Without Borders” (Grenzeloos schrijven), offered by the Aves Foundation and the Writing Foundation.

How can you earn money as a writer: are there any scholarships or grant schemes?

They do exist but it is difficult to get one. In the Netherlands, most grants are extended to authors by the Foundation for Dutch Literature. The Foundation manages the government money that has been earmarked for literary grants and also decides who qualifies. There are scholarships for work, travel and stay (for extensive information, check the website at www.fondsvoordeletteren.nl). There are other sources you can attempt to access, apart from the Foundation, such as the various local and provincial art funds and the Foundation for Special Journalistic Projects (address below), if your work is journalistic rather than literary in nature.

Is that all?

No, there is a second possibility, in the form of the WIK (Wet Inkomensvoorziening voor Kunstenaars), a government benefit. This law is aimed at providing visual artists (and related professional groups) with an income, should this be required, but writers have also started using this facility. You need to be satisfied with a gross monthly income of no more than 1,100 guilders. The advantage is that you are allowed to earn extra money with your literary work and you are not required to apply for a job - this is an obligation you must meet when you are on income support.

(with thanks to Sander van Vlerken)

Important addresses

Al Farabi, Arabisch Cultureel Centrum, Postbus 11659, 1001 GR Amsterdam, <http://www.vreemdelingenland.com/alfa.htm>. Al Farabi organises, among other things, the annual Al Farabi Children Festival, Amsterdam's largest intercultural festival, and the Al Farabi Round, an comprehensive program, which includes public debates, performances and a market.

Schrijversvakschool 't Colofon, Reijnier Vinkeleskade 53, 1071 SW Amsterdam, tel. 020-6707077, e-mail: colofon@xs4all.nl. This is a four year part-time course in the following disciplines: Theatre, Poetry, prose, Scenario writing and Litterary Non-fiction. There are also courses at various levels that begin three times a year (autumn, winter and spring). These include Theatre, Film and television, Journalism, Poetry, Prose, Scenario, Instruction in Writing and a special course together with Cosmic-theatre on writing for theatre.

Nederlands Literair- Produktie en Vertalingen-Fonds (NLPVF of Foundation for the Production and Translation of Dutch Literature), Singel 464, 1017 AW Amsterdam, tel. 020-6206261, office@nlpvf.nl, www.nlpvf.nl. The NLPVF, among other things, promotes Dutch literature abroad and has a special incentive facility for publishing houses that are marketing non-western authors who live in the Netherlands.

Dunya Festival, William Boothlaan 4, 3012 VJ Rotterdam, tel. 010-2330910, fax 010-4332463, website: www.dunya.nl. This festival presents well-known and lesser-known artists: world musicians, story-

tellers and poets. There is also a Dunya poetry Prize, Womex and the Dunya Children Festival.

El Hizjra, Singel 300 A, 1016 AD Amsterdam, tel. 020-4200568, e-mail: info@elhizjra.nl, website: www.elhizjra.nl. El Hizjra is the cultural centre for Arabic/ Moroccan art and literature. It also has a bookshop and a literary prize. Also: poetry courses.

Fonds Bijzondere Journalistieke Projecten (Foundation for special Journalistic Projects), Korte Leidsedwardsstraat 12, 1017 RC Amsterdam, tel: 020 6386295, e-mail buro@fondsbjp.nl, www.fondsbjp.nl. This Foundation supports and has grants available for (investigative) journalists.

Fonds voor de Letteren (Foundation for Dutch Literature), Huddestraat 7, 1018 HB Amsterdam, tel: 020-6235708, e-mail: info@fondsvoordeletteren.nl, www.fondsvoordeletteren.nl. The Foundation provides working scholarships and other grants to writers and translators. It also has developed a policy on intercultural literature, which is aimed at supporting non-western authors.

Hogeschool voor de Kunsten Utrecht (HKU), main subject Theatre Writing (Drama schrijven) and Training Literary Teachers (Docentschap Literaire vorming), Janskerkhof 4a, 3512 BM Utrecht, tel. 030-2300493. The HKU has four-year high vocational training courses. "Dramaschrijven" aims at delivering independent writers of theatre texts and "Literaire vorming" produces qualified teachers of literary writing.

Rasa Wereldculturencentrum, Pauwstraat 13A, 3512 TG Utrecht, tel. 030-2316040, rasa@rasa.nl, www.rasa.nl. Rasa organises theatre and symposia that are aimed especially at Arab and Egyptian artists.

Stichting Aves, Kerkstraat 322a, 1017 HC Amsterdam, tel. 020-4214049, w.westermann@wxs.nl. Aves organises, among other things, the course "Grenzeloos Schrijven" (Writing Without Borders).

Stichting Poetry International, William Boothlaan 4, 3012 VJ Rotterdam, tel. 010-2822777, fax 010-2822775, e-mail: poetry@luna.nl, www.poetry.nl. These are the organisers of the annual Poetry International poetry festival, where poets from all over the world perform. It is held every year in June.

Stichting Schrijven (Writing Foundation), Herengracht 495, 1017 BT Amsterdam, tel. 020-6254141, fax 020-6383153, e-mail: helpdesk@schrijven.nl, www.schrijven.org. Stichting Schrijven . Stichting Schrijven publishes a magazine of the same name and the "Handboek voor Schrijvers" (The Writer's Handbook). The foundation also has a free help-desk for writers, organises writing days ("Schrijfdagen") and other cultural festivals.

Stichting Zami, Nieuwe Herengracht 95 -IV, 1011 RX Amsterdam, tel. 020-6393138, www.zami.nl. Zami is an autonomous organisation for black, migrant and refugee women. Zami organises festivals and literary prizes.

Vereniging voor Letterkundigen (Dutch Literary Association), Wibautstraat 3, Amsterdam, tel. 020-5963411.. Wat doen ze?VvL is a union for literary writers and translators. It advocates their interests.

Dutch Books

Linus Hesselink (red.)
'Rechtwijzer voor auteurs, Contract, fiscus en beleid rond schrijven en vertalen'
Sdu, Den Haag 1994

Kees Holierhoek
'Belastinggids voor schrijvers en vertalers'
Vereniging voor letterkundigen Amsterdam

Sander van Vlerken en Louis Stiller
'Handboek voor Schrijvers'
Stichting Schrijven, Amsterdam 2001

Dutch Magazines

'Boekblad', Frederiksplein 1, 1017 XK
Amsterdam, tel. 020-6253131, e-mail:
redactie@boekblad.kvb.nl

'Letteren, Literaire Maandagenda',
Groenstraat 75, 4841 BC Prinsenbeek,
tel. 076-5412772, e-mail: letteren@iae.nl,
www.letteren.org

'Schrijven', Herengracht 495, 1017 BT
Amsterdam, tel. 020-6254141, e-mail:
redactie@schrijven.org, www.schrijven.org

Websites

<http://meander.italics.net/>

<http://www.boeken.net>

<http://www.fondsvoordeletteren.nl>

<http://www.kunsteducatie.nl/instellingenoverzichtsindex.htm>

<http://www.letteren.nl/schrijv>

<http://www.nblc.nl/blblioweb>

<http://www.nlpvf.nl>

<http://www.nulnul.nl>

<http://www.schrijven.org>

<http://www.schrijversnet.nl>

<http://www.speurwerk.nl/>

<http://www.vertellen.nl>

<http://www.webschrijven.net>



Colofon

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