



FLANDERS TODAY



Kristien Hemmerechts, p16

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Write on

Crowded boarding houses, post-war ghosts and Noah's Ark as you never imagined it

Only the best Flemish novels get translated into English. We've left no stone unturned to select our top picks from the last 100 years to help you while away a summer holiday

It's been a bad year for Flemish literature, with the great novelist Hugo Claus going to his death with the aid of euthanasia, and Louis Paul Boon's collection of neatly classified porn photos chased out of Antwerp. But there have been winners this year, too, none more surprising than the Flemish scientist Paul Verhaeghen, who won America's Independent Foreign Fiction Prize for his novel *Omega Minor*.

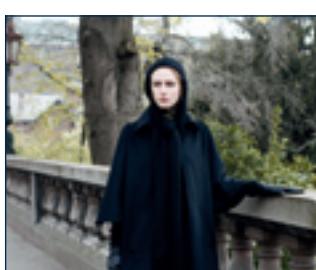
The US-based novelist then proceeded to give away the cash prize to charity to avoid boosting the tax coffers of the current US government.

So what is Flanders reading these days? Well, Peter Aspe's Bruges-based crime thrillers are always a popular choice for the Flemish beach, and a lot of people are currently making their way through Hugo Claus's *The Sorrow of Belgium*, following

the master's departure. Boon's erotic stories are also getting a bit of an unexpected sales boost thanks to the banned exhibition – but you have to be able to read Dutch to get into them.

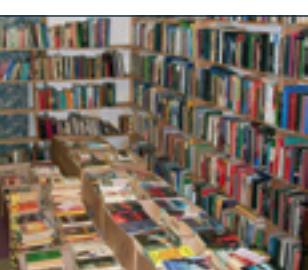
There are plenty of Flemish authors who've been translated, though, including much of Boon. Read on for the best of Flemish – in English.

Continued on page 4



Business

Véronique Branquinho has designed an autumn line for mail-order house 3 Suisses. We see what the Flemish designer has in mind for the French fashion company.



Arts

Flanders is home to more English bookshops than you may think. We'll show you piles of books in Ghent, nature supplies in Turnhout and a special place for kids in Tervuren



Living

More and more Flemish vineyards are sprouting up, especially in Limburg and Flemish Brabant. Our wine expert tells you what and where to buy.

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Poplar project gets the chop

Federal ministers put the brakes on GM trees

Alan Hope

A row has broken out between the Flemish and federal governments over the decision by two federal ministers to refuse permission for a field study on genetically-modified trees, despite the project's approval by the council set up to oversee safety in biotechnology. "This is a slap in the face for biotechnology research in Belgium," commented a spokesman for the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB).

The test-project involved the planting of poplar trees – a familiar sight on the Flemish landscape – which have been genetically modified to remove lignin, which forms the cell-walls of plants and gives wood in particular its strength. But when wood is being processed for the production of alternative fuel bio-ethanol, the process is hampered by the presence of lignin. The research team from the plant systems biology department of Ghent

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FREE WEEKLY

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Did God Speak Hebrew?

One of the world's most captivating museums stands on the Vrijdagmarkt in Antwerp. Try to visit on a Friday, and you have to squeeze past market dealers selling off worn-out chairs and defunct birdcages, much as they have been doing since the 16th century. Then you go through a large doorway and enter a bookish sanctuary that seems to have been preserved untouched since the age of Rubens.

Anyone who gets a buzz out of books needs to devote at least half a day to Plantin-Moretus. It's simply the most beautiful publishing house in the world. Founded back in 1555 by Christopher Plantin, it acquired its double-barrelled name due to his successor Balthasar Moretus.

The museum is an endless warren of rooms containing printing presses, manuscripts, plates, proofs and bound books,

but maybe the most interesting room is the one at the top of the building where they poured hot lead into moulds for casting the letters. The shelves of the attic room hold old lead types in different fonts. If you look carefully, you can find Greek, Cyrillic and Hebrew letters, along with type for musical notation.

The museum is currently hosting the exhibition *Did God Speak Hebrew?* It takes a look at the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, published by Plantin in the 16th century and the role it played in Jewish life. Plantin was one of the first to produce a Bible in Hebrew rather than Latin. He achieved this by casting Hebrew lead type in that attic, which are now the oldest surviving Hebrew lead types in the world.

Derek Blyth

online

www.plantin-moretus.be

**Correction:**

In the 21 May issue, a mistake appeared in the article "Minister describes Council of Europe findings as 'absurd'" about the Council's investigation into the non-appointment of three mayors in Flemish municipalities. We reported that the candidate mayors had contravened Belgian linguistic laws by "distributing election leaflets in French". In fact, they broke the law by distributing official voter's registration cards in French. Under Belgian legislation, ballot papers must be printed in Dutch in Flanders and in French in Wallonia. **DB**

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**FACE OF FLANDERS**

ken blyds

**Mark Tijsmans**

It wouldn't be the first time a celebrity wrote a book: Madonna did it, Princess Fergie did it, supermodel Sophie Dahl did it because her granddad did. Everyone thinks they can write a children's book because let's face it, children are a whole lot less demanding, aren't they? Hands up all those who think so. And then hands up all the parents, who know better.

Here's a good idea: let's let the children decide. The Kinder- en Jeugdjury, or Children and Youth Jury, has been around for years, and what they do is they ask children what books they liked best this year. Simple, really.

Jury members get two or three Dutch-language books to read in a month and then meet to discuss what they've read. The quality of the debate, of course, varies, but the idea is to get them involved. For anyone who thinks there's a danger kids won't read now that JK Rowling has stopped regurgitating her Harry Potter books, worry not. Kids were reading all along, and they'll keep on reading now.

The winner of the award for best book for children aged 10 to 12 was *Het geheim van te veel torens* (*The Secret of Too Many Towers*) by Mark Tijsmans, who used to be a presenter on Ketnet, long before any of his voters saw him. He's also known for his role in the long-running soap *Thuis*, as well as Ghent-based cop show *Flikken*. He also has a solid CV in other Flemish TV shows, from *FC De Kampioenen* to *W817*.

His win has less to do with his roles, though, than a story that hits almost all the hot-buttons. Here are the main elements: A pair of twins • discover they are in fact changelings • go after their true origin • and discover a riddle • which might lead to great riches.

All pretty formulaic stuff; but the children I polled who had read the book (most Flemish schools send groups along to the jury) said they found it "grappig" and "leuk" and "tof".

I have to admit, at first glance it appeared to be a bit of a laugh. My own 14-year-old daughter, short of something to read, took it off me. She hasn't yet given it back. That counts as a victory on any scale.

The other Flemish winner was Johan Vandevelde, whose book *Elfenblauw* won in the category for 12-14 year-olds. A sword-and-sorcery epic, it features an orphan, a golden amulet and an uncle-guardian who's an expert with swords.

Alan Hope

The jury is always seeking children to take part, as well as adult group leaders. Get information at your local library or check the website.

online

www.kjv.be

TALKING DUTCH**notes on language**

Shutterstock

zot

Shakespeare had no truck with it: in King Lear he describes it as: "Thou whoreson zed! thou unnecessary letter!" It has pretty well died out in the UK, though some still use "-ize" like the Americans insist on doing. The zed has a comic-book feel to it: zap! zonk! zzzz! And the few words containing the letter are not usually serious: buzz, zany, fuzz, jazz, crazy.

Which makes Dutch words all the more fun. Take the word for crazy: zot. Just say it out loud: ben je zot? – are you crazy? You may have read the recent article in Flanders Today about de zotten van Geel and the way in which people with a mental illness are taken in by families in Geel so that they can live as normal of lives as possible.

The end of the alphabet is a good place to start to get to grips with Dutch words because so many of them can be made recognisable to English speakers by replacing the zed with an ess: zo is so; zit is sit; zand is sand; zadel is saddle; zelf is self; zeven is seven; zilver is silver; zon is sun; zoon is son, and so on. Other words need more twisting. What about zicht? Replacing the zed with ess gives you the Scots word for sight. So if zoeken is to seek, what is zocht? Going through these two changes – socht – soght – gives us sought.

English pronunciation has changed over the centuries, but you can hear how some words used to be pronounced by means of their Dutch uncles: zweren has the same vocalic sound as swear, but zweten and sweat do not.

The final gee in many Dutch words evaporates in English. Take the word zaag: we change the zed into an ess, drop the final gee, twist the vowel and we have a "saw". Try the same with zeggen, but first knock off the verbal ending -en, and you should arrive at "to say". Words such as zondag and zonnig easily change into Sunday and sunny. Some letters mysteriously disappear or appear to give us English words: zwak is "weak"; zout is "salt". And what about zwaard and sword?

A few words bear no relation to anything in English: zonder is without, zuing is economical, zuivel is dairy products, zuiver is pure.

Not only has the spelling of these words changed in English, but sometimes the meaning has, too. Take the word zorg, meaning care or attention: sorrow is derived from it but has a slightly different meaning. Or the word zalig, meaning glorious, contented or sainted. Would you believe that it gives us the word "silly"?

I know what you're thinking: je ben zot!

Alistair MacLean

online

www.vandale.be

Poplar project gets the chop

Continued from page 1

University had modified the poplars to reduce the amount of lignin while maintaining strength. The result was a 60% increase in the bio-ethanol yield.

Poplar trees are second-generation sources of bio-ethanol, widely seen as a more sustainable resource than first-generation crops like maize and beets. The demand for food crops for production of bio-ethanol has been blamed for pushing up food prices on world markets, which severely affects poorer countries. Other second-generation sources include straw and grasses. But the technology for extraction of bio-ethanol from second-generation sources is more complex than for extracting it from food sources - which are essentially sugars and starches. And lignin is the main obstacle to the process becoming profitable.

Tests have already been carried out under glass, and the team under Professor Dirk Inzé wanted to proceed to field-tests in the open air. The Bio-Safety Council set up by the government gave a positive evaluation, involving strict precautions to stop the trees spreading outside of the test area in the technology park of the University of Ghent. Their advice was followed by Flemish environment minister Hilde Crevits in giving her approval. But when the request was sent to the government, it was rejected by energy and climate minister Paul Magnette and by

public health minister Laurette Onkelinx, both French-speaking Socialists.

Their objections centred on three points: negative public opinion; the lack of an environmental impact report; and the presence of a gene providing resistance to antibiotics which might spread to other plants in the surrounding area.

The VIB countered that no impact report was required by law, and that even were one considered necessary, it could have been requested earlier. As for the antibiotic gene, the VIB pointed out that it is one gene which is still permitted for large-scale projects.

The scientists, supported by former science minister Fientje Moermans, suspect that Magnette and Onkelinx disregarded the scientific evidence for political reasons. The refusal to allow the poplars project is not the first time the government has stepped in to stop field tests with GMOs. A previous plan at the University of Leuven to study GM apple-trees in the field had to be moved to the US due to government opposition.

VIB regulatory manager René Custers said in a statement: "The rejection of the trial is a severe blow for biotechnological research in Belgium. I just cannot believe that the government has refused permission for a sound scientific trial that would have supported research into the sustainable production of biofuels."

Flemish prime minister Kris Peeters has promised to try to get the federal rejection overturned, after a majority of members of



the Flemish parliament expressed outrage at what innovation minister Patricia Ceysens described as "a boycott of Flemish environment and innovation policy". Flemish socialist Christine Van Broeckhoven, a biotechnologist by training, criticised her political colleagues: "The arguments the ministers give for their decision are nonsense," she said. "If ministers are going to ignore the advice of experts, they shouldn't bother asking for it."

Online

www.vib.be

NEWS FLASH



Oud-Rekem in Limburg is the winner of **Mooiste Dorp van Vlaanderen**, the competition to find the region's prettiest village. The town received almost one-third of the total of 91,000 votes cast by SMS by members of the public. In the final voting round, Oud-Rekem defeated De Haan, Kasterlee, Deurle and OLV Lombeek.

Smokers have no right to reimbursement for the medical costs related to their habit, according to three out of ten doctors polled by the Flemish GPs' magazine *Artsenkrant*. One in ten feels the same about motorcyclists who ride without a helmet, and alcoholics with liver complaints. However only 8% thought obese patients should be refused repayment.

Studio 100 spreads its wings

Flemish media giant Studio 100 has paid €41 million for EM Entertainment, the German company which holds the rights to TV classics like *Pippi Longstocking*, *Black Beauty* and *Lassie*. The company plans to "refresh" some of the more dated aspects, such as music, as well as remastering faded film on digital support. As well as the original productions, Studio 100 is likely to exploit the merchandising potential of its new stable of characters – something they have done successfully with home-grown properties like *Samson*, *Kabouter Plop* and *K3*.

"As the takeover was proceeding, we took another look at a lot of these evergreens," commented Gert Verhulst, the face of Studio 100. "It was wonderful. It brought back warm memories of my childhood".

Studio 100 now owns media interests in Australia, the US, Spain and Germany. The EM package also includes a children's pay-channel which broadcasts in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.



The federal government last week launched its **new-look website**, redesigned with a view to making it more user-friendly. "It may not look very sexy," joked Vincent Van Quickenborne, minister for simplifying government affairs, "But that's the style of the new government." The new site presents the various government minister and federal institutions under a series of simple headings, and is available in four languages, including English.

Online
www.belgium.be

Interior minister Patrick Dewael is to take over the organisation of **trips to concentration camps** like *Buchenwald* and *Dora* by school students. The trips were cancelled in February by defence minister Pieter De Crem for cost reasons. His decision caused some controversy, when he pointed out that the government was competing unfairly with commercial bus companies by organising free buses for schools. Dewael promises to find the funding needed.

At least **six griffin vultures** have been confirmed in the area of the slagheaps in Zwartberg near Genk in Limburg, bird-watchers said. The birds were first reported to be in the country two weeks ago, but sightings were unconfirmed. The birds come from Spain and southern France, where their feeding grounds are under threat. Around 90 of them made the trip to Belgium last year.

FEATURE



Activist, former Green party candidate and writer: Anne Provoost

Flemish novels

Continued from page 1

In the Shadow of the Ark

by Anne Provoost

Anne Provoost could be described as the thinking adolescent's Doris Lessing. Her books tackle such issues as religion, sexuality, xenophobia and social justice head-on. The breakout novel, *Falling* (1994) examined the seductive power of right-wing rhetoric; those that have followed – most of which are translated into English – have secured her reputation for asking uncomfortable questions with courage and clarity.

In the Shadow of the Ark (2006) is a literary reframing of the Flood applying a critical and imaginative eye to an event that has often been airbrushed to serve commercial tastes. She asked herself the question: what happened to those who weren't among God's chosen? Dissatisfied with the answer that they were necessary collateral damage, the Antwerp-based writer created a world in which their voices could be heard, dismissing the concept of a "chosen people" in order to linger over the stories of those who did not escape the rising waters.

Like an unexploded bomb, the young stowaway Re Jana is the

invisible ninth person on board the Ark. Rescued by Noah's son, Ham, she is a conscience for Noah's crew and a fascinating study in faith. Provoost knows that people often look for the same things in literature as they do in religion. *In the Shadow of the Ark* suggests that as we continue to jostle for survival space in a rapidly shrinking world, the solution may not be to save a select few, but to build a bigger ship.

Although widely recognized as a writer for young people, Provoost easily straddles the divide between adolescent and adult. Her annual letters to Hans Christian Andersen, as well as her essays – she recently released a tract on atheism – are more likely to appeal to older readers.

Trilby Kent

The Deadbeats

by Ward Ruyslinck

The Irish critic Vivien Mercier famously described the plot of Samuel Beckett's 1953 play *Waiting for Godot*: "Nothing happens, twice". That notion must have made a profound impact on Flemish writer Ward Ruyslinck, whose 1957 novella *The Deadbeats* tells of a world where nothing happens, over and over.

Ward Ruyslinck, real name Raymond Charles Marie de Belser, was born in 1929 in Berchem. Like other authors before him, he took a job as a librarian – at the Plantin-Moretus Museum in Antwerp. His first collection of poems in 1956 was followed one year later by the novella known in English as *The Deadbeats* and in Dutch as *De ontaarde slapers*. His most popular book, *Wierook en tranen* (*Incense and Tears*) came in 1958 but has never been translated into English. Ruyslinck later became an outspoken polemicist, joining the Belgian Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1975 and becoming its president a decade later. The author now lives in Meise and published his last work in 1999.

The Deadbeats has at its centre the emblematic downtrodden little guy. Silvester is unemployed, apparently unemployable, a drifter through life. If he has an ambition, it would be to smoke more. But tobacco is too expensive.

He lives in a shack with a broken window and a stinking rubbish pile stacked up against the back wall, with his wife Margriet. She is obsessed with the idea that the war will break out again. For her it's as if it never ended, and, at the close, it turns out she was right.

Silvester has no strong feelings about anything. Not Margriet, who he regards with half-hearted contempt; not death, to which he is indifferent; not pretty women, who leave him cold. The author sums him up: "He did not believe in human love and goodness, in beauty and virtue, in a god who would maintain and guide these things towards their ultimate, true destiny – he did not even believe in himself".

His one pleasure in life is lying. His father was a great liar, we hear – audacious, inventive and gratuitous – and it appears Silvester remembers him for this trait alone. Walking in the wake of a funeral cortège to stay out of the rain, he invents an elaborate past shared with the deceased. He lies to the Dean in order to obtain a pocket-calendar. Lying is Silvester's only means of shaping his environment. The truth is unrelentingly dismal, the landscape flat and greyish, the weather forecast dull and overcast.

Silvester has nothing to look forward to. He has nothing in his future but decay and decrepitude: you get the feeling a war might actually be an improvement in his fortunes.

Alan Hope

Chapel Road

by Louis Paul Boon

Louis Paul Boon was a social rebel, and *Chapel Road* still remains an irreverent masterpiece. In an interview, Boon once stated:

"I don't believe in Jesus, I don't believe in socialism, I believe in the dog's bullocks. Maybe I make an exception once in awhile for a good human."

Sometimes described as "artist, anarchist and dirty 'tist (man)", Louis Paul Boon still incites the occasional media twirl, 30 years after his death. Recently his *Fenomenale Feminateek*, a collection of porn photos accompanied by his personal comments, was halted at the door of the Antwerp photo museum by the province, which promptly made the headlines. The ensuing debate centred on the chapter "Lolita Girl", in which Boon concludes that young girls can be regarded as sexual objects due to their shameless posturing and seductive mouths. Well, who could help but shake their head.

Truth be told, it wasn't until Boon was shortlisted for a Nobel Prize for Literature in the 1970s, that his novels moved from the sock drawer to the living room bookshelf. *Chapel Road* (1953) is an intricately woven story that follows the life of a common man between 1850 and 1945. The style, ahead of its time, includes a running thread of a satirical reinterpretation of the medieval tale of Reynard the Fox (another rebel trying to outwit the establishment).

The novel's main character is a

sculpture called Oscar, who lives and works with his wife in Aalst, a most classic factory town, ruled by the industrial revolution and the catholic upper class. You'll find a similar atmosphere in Pieter Daens, another book by Boon, made famous by the award-winning 1993 film *Daens* by Stijn Coninx. (And soon to be a musical!)

Though Daens isn't available in English, several of Boon's other books are. Right up there with Hugo Claus, Boon is one of Flanders' most famous novelists, and *Chapel Road* is an excellent place to start.

Monique Philips

The Sorrow of Belgium

by Hugo Claus

Canonised as the best Flemish novel ever, you'll find this book in almost every Flemish household – and, indeed, in many across the globe. The popularity of the 1983 book surged in 1995 with the production of a television mini-series and again two months ago when the beloved author died in Antwerp at the age of 78.

With *The Sorrow of Belgium*, Hugo Claus shocked Flanders to its core. Beside holding up a mirror to its war-time past, the writer tells his own barely disguised coming-of-age story in a small Catholic town, Kortrijk. "It's about the



A portrait of LP Boon painted by his friend Maurice Roggeman, on display at the Stedelijk Museum Aalst

classical development from self-love to the love for one's own sex and, with difficulty, on to the love for the other sex," he said in an interview. Claus knew how to push buttons.

Eleven-year-old Louis entered a Catholic boarding school at the age of 18 months, allegedly to give his mother some rest after she had fallen down the stairs. In reality, she was pregnant. It's these lies – needless and painful holding on to secrets, whether within a family or within a country – that Claus captures so well.

Louis spends his holidays outside of the city, where he chases girls down country lanes. But things never become idyllic. Eventually, while making love to his aunt, he imagines Guido Gezelle, a homegrown icon, listening in. Living in a world of fantasy and half-truths, Louis becomes a writer.

Claus goes on to tackle the reality of widespread collaboration and repression. The author himself was drawn in for a time by the common awe for Nazi Germany, debating whether he would use some make-up to look older and join the Flemish fighting at the Eastern Front.

As an English title, "misery" might have been more appropriate. That's what Louis is called by his disappointed grandmother after he had stolen some money: "The misery of Belgium, that's what you are." **MP**

Marcel

by Erwin Mortier

The writer in me seems to be something like a permanent houseguest whom I hardly know," Erwin Mortier once told me. This statement also perfectly describes the situation in Mortier's 1999 novel *Marcel*, a brilliant, atmospheric meditation on the influence of the past – and the desperate need to overcome it.

The short book's title character is one such ghost, infiltrating the lives of a provincial Flemish family in the 1960s. They and their village are still almost completely defined by the Second World War, something that happened before our pre-pubescent protagonist was born. But he cannot escape its memories, as the person he refers to as "the grandmother" fills him with the stories of all the lost lives whose photos she meticulously dusts in the curio.

Each photo's proximity to the central statue of the virgin Mary indicates their rank of importance in the mind of the pious grandmother. One photo never gets pushed to the back: the grandmother's brother Marcel – the only one without a grave to visit. The unnamed boy of the

story, often compared to his great-uncle, learns the truth through fallen snippets of conversation – and the occasional purposeful action.

Mortier is a poet, who has penned several short novels, and it shows in each simple, lyrical sentence: "The walls had absorbed the smell of generations of cooked dinners, as in the kitchen, where grease clung to the rafters. The cellar stored, the attic forgot." Despite how heavy it all sounds, the story is full of wry humour, not least of all provoked by our young hero's unyielding obsession with his full-bodied schoolteacher.

Marcel is an examination of post-war Flanders, of extended family, of desperately wanting to belong while simultaneously fighting to let go. It's traumatic, droll and melancholy by turn: a perfect example of contemporary Flemish fiction by one of the region's most talented writers.

Lisa Bradshaw



Author Erwin Mortier conjures the dead

Villa des Roses

by Willem Elsschot

A 1913 novel about a French boarding house might not sound like a gripping summer read, but you haven't read Willem Elsschot's *Villa des Roses*. This slim novella by an Antwerp-born writer manages to capture the quiet despair of a run-down boarding house in an unimposing Parisian street.

The idea of cramming a hotel full of divergent people was later taken up by Joseph Roth in *Hotel Savoy*, but Elsschot had already developed the idea 10 years earlier. Everything about the place is hopeless, right from the sign on the door that promises "English

spoken" because "one of the paying guests was a gentleman who had lived in England and liked to show off his English."

The boarding house is almost a character in its own right: a modest two-floor building in a street of "buildings with five or six floors". And the name, with its promise of flowering gardens, was equally a let-down; the garden was overshadowed by towering apartment buildings on either side, so that "all roses and other flowers were things of the past."

Elsschot builds up the story by filling the villa with an odd assortment of Europeans. There is Mr Aasgaard from Norway, a Dutchman from Java, "three young ladies from Budapest, with unpronounceable names" and a young German called Grunewald who falls in love with the chambermaid.

The author is at his best in describing Madame Brulot's desperate attempts to give her boarding house a genteel air. Despite advertising "modern conveniences," the hotel did not have electric lighting or a bathroom because Madame "had decided to forego both newfangled inventions because of the attendant dangers." The logic is perfect.

Derek Blyth

Villa des Roses is translated by Paul Vincent, who will speak in Amsterdam on 11 June about his love of the literature of the Low Countries. For more information, visit www.uva.nl.

Back to the Congo

by Lieve Joris

Back to the Congo relates journalist Lieve Joris' first journey to Belgian's former colony. She follows into her uncle's missionary footsteps and, thus, sets off, like so many Flemish colonists before, by boat. Where once crowds of onlookers waved off the big ships filled with Belgium's hope, she travels alone on a freighter.

The novel reads easily as Joris explores Congo's current state of affairs. Congolese people are great survivors, day by day, which, she finds, is their fortune and misfortune. She meets people of all strata of society and ventures deep up the Congo River.

Reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, she travels further and further away from Kinshasa and civilization, and with more and more difficulty. The river is clogged by non-native plants, "escaped" from an abandoned Mobutu villa's fish pond. Later, in *The Dance of the Leopard*, Joris relates the rise and downfall of president Mobutu.

Joris' style is personal – a little



Prolific Flemish author Ward Ruyslinck at the piano in 1966, two years before the English translation of *The Deadbeats*

journalist and a little literary – and is often compared to VS Naipaul. Her multitude of readers appreciate how she captures a particular mixture of feelings in Congo. Once you've been there, it captures your heart forever. **MP**

The Amsterdam-based Foundation for the Production and Translation of Dutch Literature maintains a website with the handy ability to search for English translations of Dutch books. Visit it at www.nlpvf.nl.



The utterly satirical Willem Elsschot

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GOSSELIN MOVING

BELGIUM - MEMBER GOSSELIN GROUP

InBev shopping around for a takeover, say reports

American brewery giant Anheuser-Busch has retained investment banks Goldman Sachs and Citi to defend against a possible bid from Leuven-based InBev, brewers of Stella Artois and Becks', according to reports in British Sunday newspapers.

The week before, the Financial Times leaked plans for the bid, which would merge two of the world's largest brewing groups, giving InBev an important place in the US market. The bid is reckoned to be worth about €30 billion, or \$46 billion. InBev was reported to have arranged the financing with a group of banks including JP Morgan, BNP Paribas and Santander, with Lazard as advisers.

InBev is the world's second-largest brewer, and the leader in more than 20 markets, with production of 274 million hectolitres in 2007, and net profits 55% up to €2.2 billion. Anheuser-Busch, brewer of Budweiser, is number four in the world, with profits last year of €1.3 billion.

Meanwhile InBev also appears to have a Plan B up its sleeve, should Anheuser prove resistant, in the form of a bid for South Africa's SABMiller. They're the world's biggest brewing group by volume, with the Miller and Grolsch brands, and announced sales up 15% last year to €13.9 billion, and profits of €1.45 billion. SABMiller was reported to be willing to look at any bid offer from InBev, which would be worth around €28.4 billion – well within the credit-line InBev has arranged with the banks.

InBev declined to comment on any of the rumours.



Antwerp scientists develop super-PC

Researchers at the University of Antwerp have developed a desktop super-PC capable of making advanced calculations 100 times faster than a normal PC. The team is associated with the Institute for Broadband Technology (IBBT), concerned with tomography – the technique of building up three-dimensional images from many scanned images. Such complex images can take a week to come together under the power of a normal PC. Using many PCs in parallel speeds the process up, but at great cost.

But the Antwerp group, led by Professor Jan Sijbers and Dr. Joost Batenburg, have worked out a way to reprogramme the sort of 3D graphics cards used by gamers so that they can work in series to perform the required calculations up to 100 times faster, but in the form of a desktop computer. Eight graphics processors can in this way provide calculation power equivalent to 350 PCs, and all for a cost of less than €4,000.



Zebra mother Lindy last week gave birth to Jorilani, a baby male zebra whose name comes from a tribe in Lesotho in Southern Africa. Jorilani is the first zebra birth in Antwerp Zoo for two years.

ENI to take over Distrigas

As expected, the Italian electricity utility is to be the new owner of Distrigas, under the terms of an agreement reached last week. Distrigas is being hived off by owner Suez as part of the deal reached with EU competition authorities when Suez merged with Gaz de France two years ago.

ENI won by bidding higher than closest rival Electricité de France and Germany's E.ON. Those were the final favourites of a field that initially numbered 18 bidders. The bid -- €6,810 per share exclusive of dividend, or €7,061 including coupon – values Distrigas at €4.8 billion, and represents a premium of more than 12% on the last quoted share price.

Suez will use some of the proceeds of the sale to buy shares in ENI, thereby giving it a presence on the Italian market. The final details are expected to be completed by mid-July.

Online

www.eni.it



Brussels Starbucks to open in 2009

Coffee-shop chain Starbucks is to open its first Belgian store in the Brussels area in 2009, according to press reports this week. The rumour of a Belgian Starbucks has been circulating since a visit by Prince Philip to the company's home town Seattle as part of a trade mission earlier this year. Starbucks has more than 15,000 stores in 44 countries, the latest being Argentina, which opened its first last week.

The news of the Brussels arrival of Starbucks will come as good news to the more than 6,000 members of a Facebook group set up to lobby for an end to the Belgian shut-out, which was allegedly a result of the Belgian cultural habit of eating breakfast at home instead of on the way to the office.

NEWS FLASH



Researchers from the Free University VUB and the University Hospital have developed a procedure to prevent boys being treated for cancer from becoming infertile later in life. At present, radiotherapy can damage reproductive organs by killing off the production of sperm cells, with lasting effect. The Brussels team has developed a technique for "planting" frozen testicular tissue containing stem-cells in the scrotum, where the stem-cells begin reconstructing sperm-production tissue. The procedure can be carried out under local anaesthetic.

Dexia Bank is to place 40 cash machines in Brussels metro stations. The decision follows a pilot project in Merode and Noordstation, which showed monthly withdrawals of €12,000 and €19,000 respectively. Four machines will be placed in Centraal Station, three in Zuid Station and two each in Rogier and De Brouckere. The installation should be complete by October.

The VRT is to restore and digitise its entire library of over 66,000 rolls of film, the first part of a complete library of 172,000 hours of images and 92,000 hours of audio to be treated. The budget for the first part of the work is €2 million. The film archive has been selected because of the dangers of acidic chemical deposits on the film itself which destroy it. Much of the initial 35,000 hours is news footage, most of it the only audio-visual record of events in existence.

A team of deep-sea divers left last weekend for the Red Sea where they will attempt to explore the wreck of the British cargo ship SS Maidan, which sank in 1923. The ship lies at 120m, and has never been properly investigated, according to team leader Johan Devolder. On a three-hour dive to that depth, he explained, only ten minutes would be available for circling the wreck: the rest of the time is needed to descend and ascend slowly, so as to avoid the bends. They will also be filming their work with a camera weighing 30kg, built to withstand enormous undersea pressures.

Inflation in Belgium topped 5% for the first time in 23 years last month, outstripping at the same time the forecasts of the government's planning bureau. The news took economists by surprise, following a drop in the rate in April to 4.15% from 4.39% in March. The forecast now is that inflation could stay around 5% for some months. The news will put additional pressure on wages, as workers coping with reduced purchasing power see the value of their money diminish – leading to more pressure on inflation as a result.

3 Suisses goes Flemish

Véronique Branquinho designs mail order-collection



Flemish designer Véronique Branquinho's new collection for 3 Suisses debuts this autumn

Stéphanie Duval

It's been a busy year for Véronique Branquinho, who celebrates her label's 10th birthday with an exhibition in the Antwerp Fashion Museum and an edition of *A Magazine* curated by the designer herself. Yet Branquinho still found

time to work on a special collection for 3 Suisses, the French fashion mail-order company. Branquinho is not the first Belgian designer to collaborate with 3 Suisses; last year's summer catalogue included a capsule collection by Véronique Leroy.

"When 3 Suisses offered me

the opportunity to work with them, I took up the offer without a moment's hesitation," says Branquinho. "I loved what they had done with Véronique Leroy. And it wasn't as if I had to design a collection for someone else because they really wanted me to do it my way. It's vital to maintain a certain independence."

The Antwerp designer knew something of the company already, having worked at the 3 Suisses call centre when she was still a student. "I think it's important to be on the same page when you collaborate like this. With 3 Suisses, I definitely felt that was the case." Branquinho was also drawn to the democratic aspect of the project. "I like the fact that I can reach women through 3 Suisses who would otherwise not be able to buy my designs. In that respect, it feels as if I am giving them a gift."

She worked together with the French company to ensure the highest possible level of quality. "They really did their best to use quality materials and fabrics, which is something I find very important in my own collection, as well. We searched for the perfect compromise between quality and price. I was also given time to keep refitting until I was satisfied with the way everything looked."

The mail-order company offered Branquinho a blank page to create whatever she liked. "We make sure our guest designers have enough space to unleash their creativity," says Fred Jacob, Director of Communications at 3 Suisses. "So

when Véronique said she wanted to design an umbrella, we immediately gave her the go-ahead." As a result, the final collection includes several original accessories, such as a scarf that doubles as a hood and elbow-length gloves.

Jacob is exceptionally pleased with the results. "I've always admired Branquinho. She matches the vibe 3 Suisses strives to send out as a forward-looking and innovative fashion company," he says. "I also think her work deserves to get more recognition in France, where she is less known."

Branquinho's designs for 3 Suisses will be launched in the autumn-winter 2008 catalogue. Among the collections are pieces that are very typical of the Flemish designer's signature style. "I ended up bringing together a few of the classic designs that have become my trademark, like the feminine tuxedo with puff sleeves and coloured details. I also wanted to do a cape, because I love those, and a pair of trousers that elongates the legs."

Other items include a silk shirt and dress and several voluminous sweaters in angora and wool. One of the handbags is in tweed, which is one of the designer's favourite materials. The colour palette is also recognisably Branquinho, with rich jewel tones and warm hues.

Online

www.3suisses.fr

BUSINESS BRIEFS

Gazprom

Russian company Gazprom, the world's largest gas producer, has won a licence to supply gas to the Belgian market.

Galapagos

Galapagos, the Mechelen-based biotechnology company, has signed a research contract with the University College of London to participate in the development of septicaemia-treating medicines.

Armonea

Restel and the Van den Brande group, two of the country's leading operators of rest homes for the elderly, are to merge to create Belgium's market leader with some 4,000 beds under the new Armonea brand name.

Janssen Pharma

Janssen Pharma, the Geel-based affiliate of US pharmaceuticals group Johnson & Johnson, is to invest €130 million in a medicine development and testing centre expected to open by 2011. The new facility represents the firm's highest investment ever in Flanders.

Aviapartner

Aviapartner, the handling and airport services company, has won the contract to handle the cargo operations for US Airways in 13 European airports.

Bekaert

Bekaert, the Zwevegem-based steel wire producer, has signed a partnership agreement with the Chinese Ansteel to develop jointly their China-based activities in steel wire and related products.

Starwood

Starwood, the US-based hotel group, is to open an "Aloft" residential apartment in the European quarter in Brussels later this year. The group already operates the Sheraton hotel in the city's downtown area, the Airport Sheraton and a third in Eijsene.

InBev

InBev, the Leuven-based beer group, is believed to be on the prowl. Rumours of a possible major acquisition have made the headlines in the *Financial Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. But industry analysts are divided on whether it involves US brewer Anheuser-Busch, the world leader, or South Africa's SABMiller.

Degroof

Degroof, the Brussels-based bank specialised in mergers and acquisitions and wealth management, has acquired the French Aforge Finance company. Degroof already owned the Paris-based Philippe Patrimoine company, and the new acquisition will significantly strengthen the bank's corporate finance presence in France.

Ackermans & Van Haaren

Ackermans & Van Haaren, the diversified Antwerp-based holding company, has acquired a 14.3% stake in the Indian building material company Sagar Cement.

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Apple confirms iPhone deal



Flanders gets a new gizmo

Alan Hope

The news was what every trend-setter, early-adopter and fashion victim had been waiting for: Apple had reached an agreement to have its iPhone distributed in Belgium. Apple signed its deal with Orange, which is a subsidiary of France Telecom. Orange in Belgium is represented by Mobistar, the second biggest mobile phone operators after Belgacom's Proximus, which has 43.8% of the Belgian mobile phone market to Mobistar's 33%.

The announcement, which seemed to take Mobistar as much by surprise as anyone, means the iPhone will soon be legally available here. Of course, all those trend-setters will be running to catch up with those who already have their iPhones, often bought at extortionate prices, and who are now using it after having it doctored to work with an existing phone service, perhaps even Mobistar. Computer experts refer to that as "cracking", while opponents of Apple's restrictive policy of allowing only one operator in any territory to service its phone call the practice "jailbreaking".

Jailbreaking an iPhone is not all that difficult. There are hundreds of websites giving instructions,

including videos on YouTube. There are also many services that promise to jailbreak your iPhone for a fee. They're easy enough to find, and there's plenty of choice. An estimated 10,000 Belgians are already owners. Presumably they paid for their expensive phones with a view to using them, like Telecommunications minister Vincent Van Quickenborne, who was photographed unashamedly waving one about in Parliament.

Details of the deal are still hush-hush, but Apple could face problems if it attempts to repeat here the terms it has imposed elsewhere on customers namely the requirement to use one designated operator and that operator only.

European law on the whole forbids territorial exclusivity: in other words, a manufacturer may not award any territory exclusively to any dealer. The case law was ironed out in the days when British car-buyers were trying to buy right-hand drive cars here where they were cheaper, and attempts were made by Volkswagen, among others, to put a stop to such parallel imports. Apple can require dealers to show the requisite degree of serious intent before supplying them but cannot cut them off simply because it prefers another company. If one of the big chains

wanted to sell iPhones, there's nothing in theory stopping them.

The other problem concerns bundling – the sale of services along with goods or indeed any enforced package – the most famous case being Microsoft's bundling of Internet Explorer with Windows. European law (under which Microsoft was fined) has rules against enforced bundling but Belgian law is stricter and more speedy to react. So it's hard to see how Apple can sell the iPhone here with any obligation to use Mobistar. It looks extremely likely that jailbreaking will not be required in the first place, if the phones are sold unlocked.

One option being discussed is to raise the price to compensate for the lack of a Mobistar contract – to somewhere in the region of €600. That will surely only push more customers to buy elsewhere: current price in the US for an 8Gb unlocked is \$599, or €380.

Mobistar will doubtless come up with a variety of special deals and treats to attract iPhone customers to their service, but they may have to pay Apple a percentage of the income for the privilege. Unlike operators in other countries who have been smiled on by Steve Jobs, they've been handed a silver platter with essentially nothing on it.

The hard sell

The iPhone has, apart from the must-have character shared by most new Apple gizmos, a good few positive advantages. The touch-screen gets around the problem of small keys and leaves most of the surface area free for screen, which provides excellent visibility and almost limitless zooming (a simple pinching motion with two fingers).

But not all reports have been glowing. The sound quality has been criticised. Other smartphones sold in Flanders are already equipped with 3G technology, which the iPhone lags behind for the time being, though an announcement is expected imminently. There is no broadband internet, and many websites will be inaccessible

because of the phone's inability to read Flash, Javascript, PDFs and streaming media. And the touch-screen is reported to be hopeless for texting, making all those hard-earned skills obsolete. "It is useless for calling or SMS. The touchscreen and interface get in the way of my input. I can SMS at a great speed on my Nokia, but I make tons of mistakes on

the iPhone. The touch screen keyboard just doesn't work," said Alexander Van Elsas, a leading technology blogger.

Another complaint surrounds Apple's approach: the iPhone takes as its basis the iPod, so it's essentially a music player with a telephone bolted on. Compare that with the Blackberry, which started from the point of view of

a phone, and die-hards see the iPhone as a retrograde step.

"The iPhone, in my opinion, isn't a phone. It's a handheld computer that allows you not only to browse the Internet in an intuitive way, but as an extra feature, it also lets you make phone calls, said Van Elsas.

ENI to take over Distrigas

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Suez will use some of the proceeds of the sale to buy shares in ENI, thereby giving it a presence on the Italian market. The final details are expected to be completed by mid-July.

Inland waterways took two million trucks off the road last year

Shipping on inland waterways last year carried the equivalent of two million lorries. Sloads of freight, according to a parliamentary answer given by public works minister Hilde Crevits. Last week the minister opened a new headquarters for inland shipping in Hasselt. Inland shipping on rivers and canals is being promoted as a green alternative to road freight.

Although still small in comparison, with a share of only 12% to the 78% which goes by road, inland shipping is growing steadily, up to 4.6 billion tonne-kilometres in 2007 compared to 3.1 billion 10 years earlier. The forecast of the government's long-term planning bureau has that share growing by 2% by 2030. Most of the country's inland shipping – 42% – starts in the port Antwerp, compared to 2% from Zeebrugge and only 1% from Ostend.

Speaking volumes

Rare manuscripts may say more about the collectors than the books

Ian Mundell

Admit it, you check out the bookcases when you visit people's houses. I do. Partly it's raw curiosity, but I'm also looking for clues about the book owner. Compare the creasing on the spines of their copies of *Harry Potter* and Proust, and draw your own conclusions. Are there fingerprints all the way through their *A Brief History of Time* or just *The Da Vinci Code*? Do they read Hugo Claus in the original or *Suske en Wiske*?

An exhibition running at the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in Brussels invites us to play a fiercely high-brow version of the same game. It has assembled volumes from the libraries of 20 great Belgian book collectors from the 19th century. Most were independently wealthy and academically minded, their hunger for rare volumes partly satisfied by the books released when the convents and abbeys of the Low Countries were dissolved in the early 1800s. When the Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België (Royal Library of Belgium) was set up in 1837, its collections were built up with books from these private hoards, usually over the collector's dead body.

In the exhibition *In de ban van boeken* (*Under the Spell of Books*) there is no opportunity to leaf

through to see where corners have been turned down or candle wax dripped. In each case you have to work with the page the library has decided to show you.

Sometimes this turns out well. There's a copy of Andreas Schott's 1577 edition of *De viris illustribus urbis Romanae liber* (Roman, first century AD), whose title page carries traces of a well-travelled life. Before the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, it belonged to Franz Vergauwen, a senator from Ghent. But it also contains the bookplate of rival collector Pierre Philippe Lamens and notes saying that it once belonged to the Jesuit professed house in Antwerp.

But how much does one page tell us? Just because we are offered the glittering illustration from a 16th-century *Book of Hours*, does that mean that collector Charles Van Hulthem was only interested in the pictures, or did he study the prayers and psalms as well? Similarly, is the tiny 14th-century Dutch bible in the collection of Jean-Baptiste Théodore de Jonghe for devotional use, or is it just a curiosity – its type too small to read, its spine too stiff to open? Are these people readers or hoarders?

In the end, you need help to unlock the lives behind the books and, like the collectors of the 19th century, you need to be

independently wealthy: the full story is only in the catalogue, a hefty €40. But there are sufficient scraps in the guidebook to give pause for thought.

Consider Frédéric-Jules Faber, for example, a Brussels resident who worked in the Ministry of Mines by day, but at night lived for the theatre. At his death, he left a collection of 3,900 plays. One of the volumes here – *Tryntje Cornelis* by Constantijn Huygens – is open at an intriguing glossary translating Brabant dialect into more recognisable Dutch.

Or there's Jules Capron, who sold his collection of ancient Dutch manuscripts to better concentrate on his other passion – books about and from Ieper. This is a striking contrast to the other collectors whose interests connect them to the international search for scientific knowledge.

Perhaps the most engaging selection is from the collection of Léopold van Alstein, a self-taught linguist from Ghent whose books include an evocative 17th-century volume interpreting Arabic sayings into Latin, with occasional commentaries in Greek and French. He also had a volume trying to decode Egyptian hieroglyphs, published nearly 200 years before the discovery of the Rosetta stone finally provided the key.



The 17th-century Lier lawyer and politician Cornelis de Bie found time to write a few books, the most important of which sports the above illustration: *Het Gulden Cabinet oft schat kamer vande Edele vry Schilder Konst* (The Golden Cabinet of the Honourable Free Art of Painting)

Seeing these different languages and forms of writing intermingling on the page gives a strong sense of what rare volumes such as these offered the inquiring mind in an era before public libraries, let alone the internet.

Until 23 August, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België, Kunstberg (at Keizerslaan), Brussels

Online
www.kbr.be

FLANDERS EYE



Belgian photographer Harry Gruyaert's book *Rivages (Shorelines)* was released in limited edition in 2003 and is no longer available, so this exhibition of the original photos is a gift to those who wish they owned it. Now based in Paris, the Magnum photographer has travelled extensively, and it occurred to him that he had photographed beaches and shores from many vantage points. This exhibition in Brussels' Box Galerie illustrates this preoccupation with where two worlds meet across Europe and in Egypt, Israel and India. Gruyaert studied film in Brussels back in the 1960s, and his meticulous use of natural light and shadow lends a sense of reality and presence to framing that itself recalls the Belgian surrealists. There are three shots of 1988 Ostend in the show, which, including the one to the left, are unmistakable.

Lisa Bradshaw

Online
www.boxgalerie.be

Buy the book

Flanders is home to some surprisingly unique English-language bookshops

The English Bookshop is a dingy affair – dusty and stuffy – but the wall-to-wall books of every genre, size and weight imaginable, easily make you forget that. As you might have guessed, it only sells English-language books, and it has a gentle tranquility that quietly draws you in. Once there, you find a veritable book lover's treasure trove, a reader's cave made up of the spines of countless second-hand books. Browse to your heart's content.

Located on the beautiful Ajuinlei right next to the canal in Ghent's city centre, The English Bookshop is run by British expat Godfrey Mason. His clientele consists mostly of Flemish locals, but – not surprisingly, given the location – a lot of tourists too. Add to that international students who want to read up on the classics. Mason is happy to advise them.

The owner himself is interested in history, and it shows on the shelves (and floors and stairs) of his small shop. But he occasionally allows himself to be seduced by other subjects. Sometimes books come in that are so intriguing, he has no option but to read them – even if they are about unlikely subjects like mountaineering, and even if he's unlikely (and unwilling) to ever climb a mountain.

To Mason, that's the typical charm of a second hand bookshop. "You might go in looking for a specific book in mind, but you'll probably come out with something you never thought you'd buy."

Another plus: you can go there literally every day of the week. Mason is nothing if not devoted to his trade. On the day of our visit, it happened to be his birthday. Why is he in the shop on his special day? "If you're not open, what else is there to do?" he replied.

An Gydé

One of the difficulties in following a specific hobby is finding the necessary books. A general bookshop is no use; you need the help of a specialist. If your interest happens to be in nature and the environment, then your expert is the Natuurpunt bookshop in Turnhout.

For example, are you going on holiday this summer and want to identify the local wildlife? How about *A Birdwatching Guide to Menorca, Ibiza & Formentera*? Going further afield? Then maybe you need *A Birdwatchers' Guide to Trinidad & Tobago* or *Know Your New Zealand Birds*. If birds are not really your thing, you might be interested in a copy of *Moths of*

the British Isles, *The Collins Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Europe* or even *Boas and Pythons of the World*.

Or do you want to identify what you are likely to hear? If so, the 3-CD set *Bird Song of the Gambia and Senegal* might help, or *the Collins Guide to Wildlife Sounds*.

If you are staying in Belgium this summer, a copy of *Orchids of Europe* will definitely help you find these fascinating plants, while *The Pocket Guide to Trees* will prove invaluable in your local park or forest. Even closer to home, *Attracting Wildlife to your Garden* will give you many hours of delight watching the butterflies on the buddleia, or building a hedgehog house under the shed.

Perhaps you want to curl up on the sofa with a good book. Then you might be tempted by *Biological Globalisation, Europe's Living Landscapes* or David Attenborough's *Amazing Rare Things*. What's more, the bookshop is much more than just a place to find books. You can also buy all the equipment you need for your hobby, from binoculars to bird tables, butterfly nets to bat detectors.

Denzil Walton

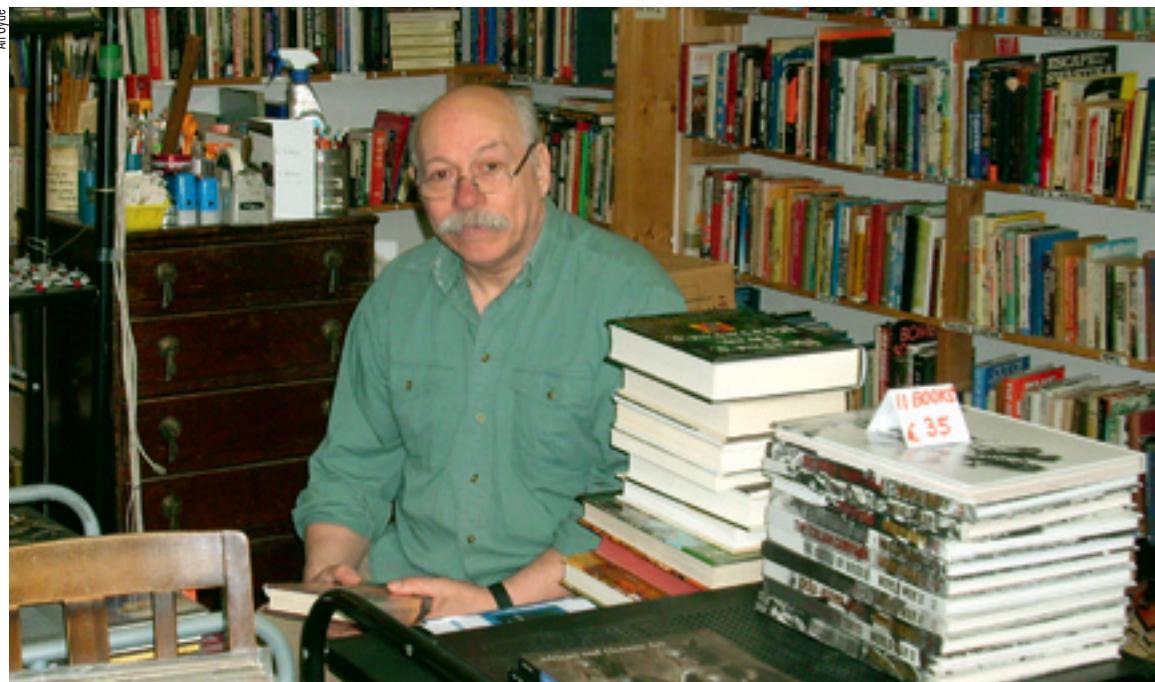
Online

<http://winkel.natuurpunt.be>

It was seeing how her own three children were treated in bookshops that spurred Christine Moore to start Treasure Trove in Tervuren in 1980. "They were not welcome," she recalls. "They were perfectly well behaved and just wanted to flick through a few books before deciding on a purchase – just as an adult does. Yet they were frequently frowned upon for even touching the books."

But, as Moore says, children are the readers of the future – and important customers, too. So she took it upon herself to open her own child-friendly bookshop, initially on the veranda of her home. Although she had never been in the trade, she found it fairly easy to learn. Over nearly three decades, the business has expanded: from the veranda to the cellar and then, four years ago, to a modern shop complete with parking space.

The range of books has expanded, too, with adult fiction proving the most successful in recent years, particularly as Treasure Trove supplies over a dozen reading groups. In addition, the Harry Potter phenomenon has been a major boon, as it made reading fashionable amongst children.



At your service: Godfrey Mason of The English Bookshop (top), Natuurpunt in Turnhout (middle) and Christine Moore of Treasure Trove

Moore has seen the business change considerably over the years. "When I started, sales representatives would visit me twice a year with their new catalogues," she recalls. "Now they are only interested in the big chains; visiting small, independent bookshops is not cost-effective for them." Consequently, she orders most of her books direct from wholesalers.

The rise of Amazon and other online booksellers has also had an influence, though not as great as might be expected. This is because a bookshop – especially one run by a book lover – can offer the kind of help that a customer can't get online. "Over half of my customers don't have English as their first language. So when they want an English book for themselves or their children, they want expert advice as to which book might be best. You can't get that on the internet." In addition, of course, nothing beats a quiet half hour browsing through the shelves.

Moore is planning to retire at the end of the year and is looking for someone to take over running the store. "For somebody who loves books, it's a wonderful job," she enthuses. "It's satisfying to point people in the direction of a good book. I especially like helping children. Give them the right book, and you have given them a treasure." DW

Online

www.treasuretrove.be

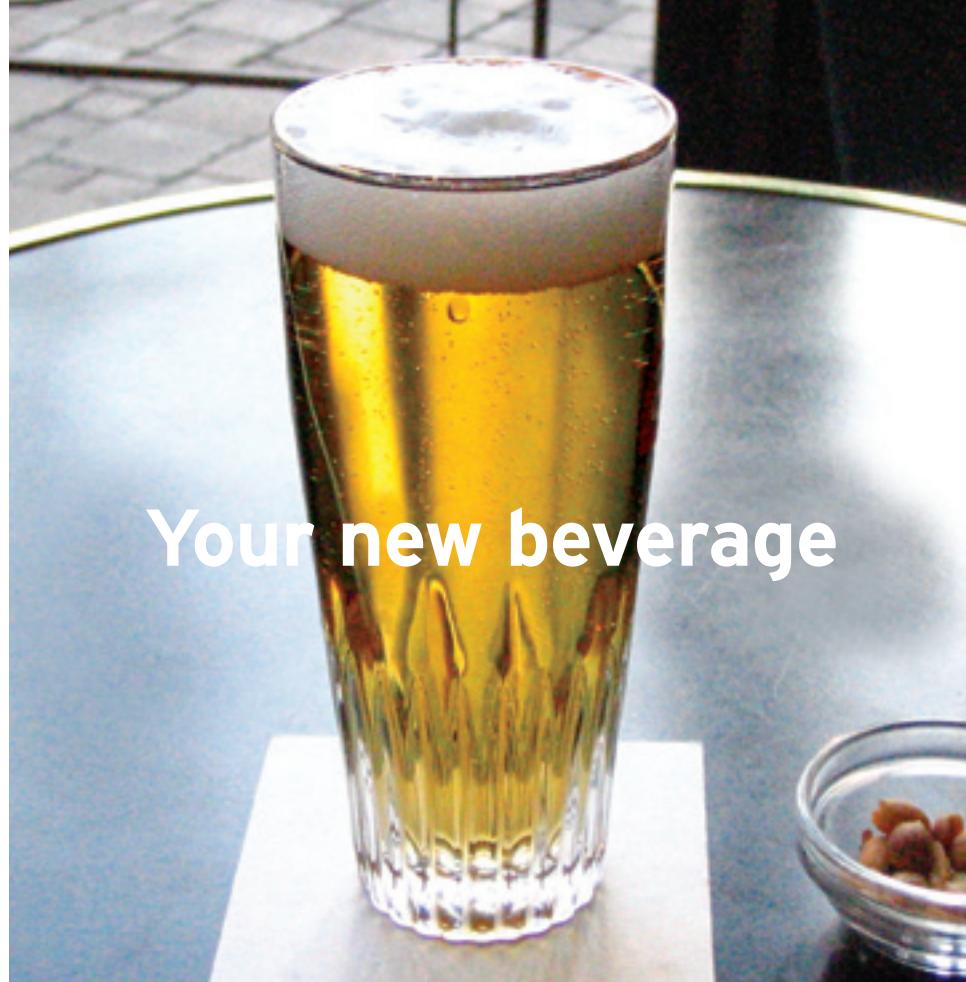




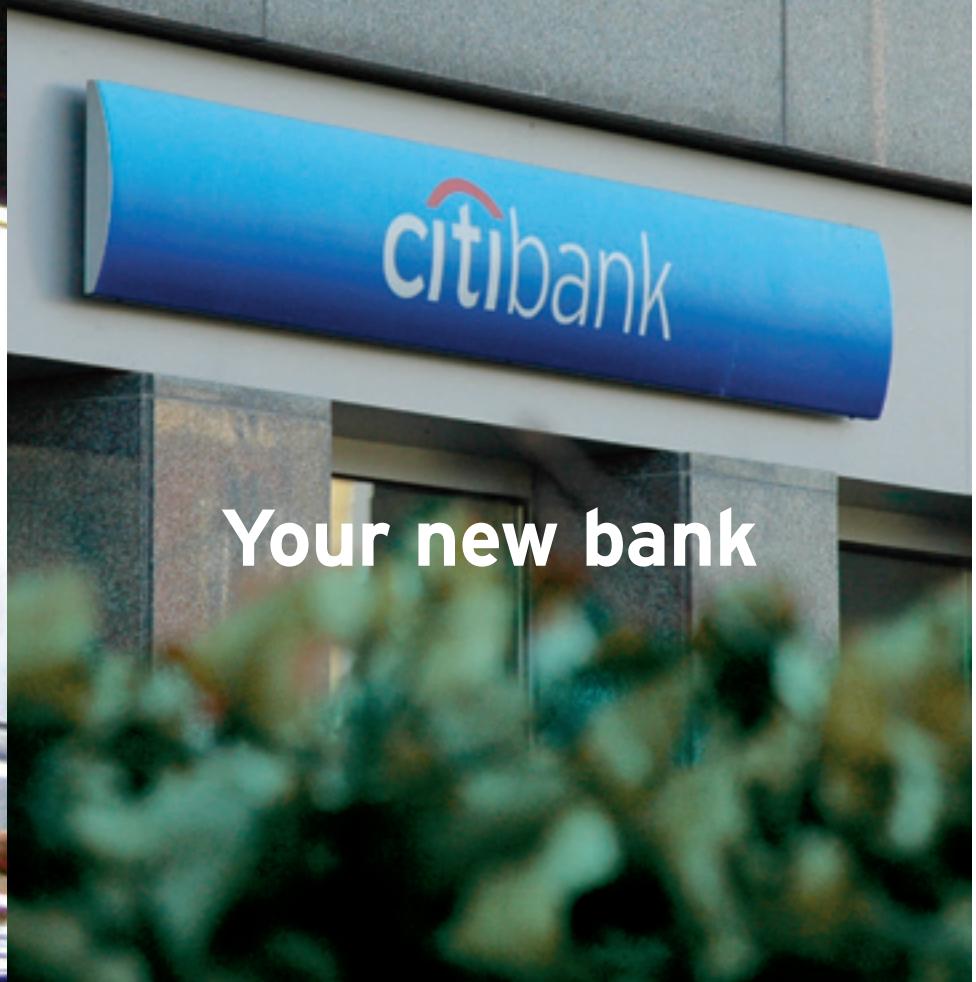
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Uncorking Flemish wines

Flanders' vineyards are coming of age, and the world is taking notice

Fiona Morrison, MW

A few years ago, I received a call from a wine writer colleague. He was putting together an annual guide of wine throughout the world and had heard that Belgian was now producing a quantity interesting enough to merit a chapter. Intrigued, I signed on to write it. This was the beginning of a learning curve of Belgian viticulture which would have me marvelling at the dedication and resilience of winegrowers in this northern climate.

Today there are 15 officially declared producers in Flanders – nine in the Flemish Brabant appellation of Hageland, with 30 hectares of vines, and six in the appellation of Haspengouw, with 25 hectares. There are many more producers in Wallonia, meanwhile, 56 of whom are officially registered in the new appellation, “Les Côtes de Sambre et Meuse”.

Belgian wine production still remains a tiny 1,000 hectolitres per year – compare that with the region of Bordeaux, which alone produced almost six million hectolitres of wine in 2004 – and for many wine growers, viticulture remains a hobby, just as you and I would tend our vegetable patch. There are, however, a few producers who have managed to build up a serious business, often mixing wine with tourism – the best example being the famous Wijnkasteel Genoels-Elderen in Limburg, which is well worth a summer's day out for wine lovers.

Most Belgian winemakers learned their craft with a manual in one hand and a hose in the other. Sometimes there were problems of spoilage and bacteria in the cellars due to poor methods or lack of hygiene. But now there is more ambition and a desire to improve. Enthusiastic amateurs have been visiting producers in France and following winemaking courses,



The Colemont Family of Clos d'Opleeuw knows how to feest- and make Chardonnay

and the results are clear. Most of the wines are much more clean and forthright than in the past.

Flemish winemaking has a surprisingly rich history. In the middle ages, when the country was part of the Dukedom of Burgundy, there were several vineyards around Leuven, Diest and Aarschot. But the great frosts of the 17th century forced many farmers to switch from grapes to potatoes, which were much more resistant and profitable. The final blow to Flemish vineyards was dealt by Napoleon, who ordered Belgian vines to be torn out. However difficult it is to imagine, the great French Emperor was jealous of this country's wines.

Modern winegrowing started timidly during the 1970s, and it was only two decades later that the first Flemish appellations were created: Hageland in 1997 around Leuven, and Haspengouw

in 2000 near the Dutch border. These appellations are run along the same lines as other European zones and overseen by the Belgian Federation of Wines & Spirits.

Most of the wines, as you would suspect, are Germanic in style, and the best have pure fruit, good acidity and fresh, lively structures. But, apart from a handful of estates, most of the vineyard holdings are tiny – several producers only have less than half a square kilometre, and winemaking is a hobby pursued in the evenings or weekends.

So, though Belgian wine has a long way to go before it achieves the status of Belgian beer, the same boutique image applies. The best producers to look out for are Kluisberg, Boschberg (especially the Kerner 2003, one of my top Belgian picks in a recent blind tasting) and Elzenbosch, whose wines featured in all the Carrefour restaurants earlier this spring.

The best way to get to know local wines is indeed via wine bars and restaurants, which are becoming more proud of their home products. The best experience I've had was when William Wouters, owner of Pazzo in Antwerp, served me Clos de l'Opleeuw's Chardonnay blind. With its rich colour, nose of hazelnuts, pears and peaches and its round silky texture, I thought this Haspengouw wine certainly came from Burgundy. It's more expensive than most home-grown wines at around €20 a bottle, but

well worth it. In terms of cost, most Belgian wines are around €5 to €10 a bottle, which makes them reasonably priced in comparison with French and German competitors.

One of the pioneers of Flemish viticulture is the Van Rennes, a wealthy Dutch family who own the aforementioned Kasteel Genoels-Elderen. During the castle's extensive renovations, the family found archives showing vineyards planted at the domain. They decided to renew this heritage, and today the estate is the largest in the country, with 16 hectares of vines planted with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. The wines are made by Joyce Kekko-Van Rennes, who studied in Burgundy, and these are the only Belgian wines that can be found on the international market.

Flanders can also boast of its own sparkling wine, produced by Paul & An Vleminckx at Meerdæl near Leuven. Their eight hectares of vines are planted with Chardonnay, one of the traditional Champagne grape varieties. Opening this summer is an ambitious new cellar, proof of their commercial success. The Chardonnay Meerdæl, which sells for around €12, can give many Champagnes a run for their money.

So be adventurous and try a Flemish wine now that summer is here, and you thirst for fresh and fragrant lighter wines. Look out for these local wines at well-

stocked shops such as Mig's World Wines in Brussels, Vintage in Ghent or Deldycke in Bruges. Or call the producers to find a location close to you. Better still, get in the car and make a visit to a local winery: Meerdæl, Genoels-Elderen and Boschberg all welcome visitors – or see if you can get an appointment with Clos de l'Opleeuw's Peter Colemont, Belgian's top winemaker, who also teaches wine courses.

online
www.fbvs.be

Top picks

Kluisberg: Kerner
Assent-Bekkevoort, Hageland region, Flemish Brabant
available from Delhaize
www.kluisberg.be

Elzenbosch: Müller-Thurgau
Assent, Hageland region, Flemish Brabant
available only from the winery
013.44.20.06

Clos d'Opleeuw: Chardonnay
Gors-Opleeuw, Haspengouw region, Limburg
available in East Flanders from De Wase Wingerd in De Klingen and Het Waarschoots Wijnhuis in Waarschoot
www.clos-d-opleeuw.be



Flanders' own bubbly: Meerdæl in Oud-Heverlee.

Classical & new music**Brussels**

Bozar (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be

JUNE 5 20.00 Queen Elisabeth Singing Competition 2008 closing concert: Royal Wallonia Opera Orchestra conducted by Günter Neuhold
JUNE 8 11.00 Gudrun Jóhanna Ólafsdóttir, mezzo, Vikingur Heidar Ólafsson, piano: Beethoven, Axelsson, Einarsson, Kaldalóns, de Falla, Giménez

De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
Queen Elisabeth Singing Competition 2008
JUNE 5 12.30 Tatiana Trenogina, soprano
JUNE 6 12.30 Lim Changhan, baritone

Flagey
Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be
JUNE 5 20.15 Ictus - Trio Basso: Haydn, Scelsi, Hidalgo
JUNE 6 12.30 Trio Salvador Dali: Rameau, Bartók, Paganini, Schubert, Debussy, Massenet

Kapel van de Miniemens
Miniemensstraat 62; 02.507.82.00, www.minimes.net
JUNE 5 18.00 Lëtzebuerger Männerkouer 1989, conducted by Edith Wolter, with Claude Heuschling, piano: Beethoven, Mozart, Grieg, Haydn and music by Luxembourg composers

Les Brigittines
Korte Brigittinenstraat; 02.506.43.00

Get your tickets now for...**Nederlands Dans Theater**

19-21 June, Théâtre National, 111-115 Emile Jacqmainlaan, Brussels. Tickets from 02.203.41.55 or www.theatrenational.be

A stunning triple bill by this acclaimed contemporary dance troupe from The Hague, which set up shop in the late 1950s in reaction against the cold and academic style of classical ballet. Two of the shows are by Jirí Kilián, its Czech artistic director of 24 years who passed over the torch a few years ago but whose influence is still strongly felt: the classic *Wings of Wax* is a beautiful exploration of flowing movement with a giant, inverted tree as a set; *Tar and Feathers* is more freakish, involving a grand piano with long spindly legs and surreal barking noises (photo); and *Signing Off* is a poignant new piece by choreographers in residence Paul Lighfoot and Sol León, in which music, movement, light and sets come into perfect balance.

JUNE 6 20.30 Attention Musiques Fraîches! works for voice and orchestra by young composers, performed by Ensemble Musiques Nouvelles

Protestantse Kapel
Museumplein; 02.332.06.66
JUNE 6 19.00 Jyväskylän Studio Choir: Finnish music

Protestantse Kerk Brussel
Nieuwe Graanmarkt 8; 02.512.03.67, www.protestantsekerkbrussel.com
JUNE 8 16.00 Many Voices One Sound: Interfaith concert with Hindu, Muslim and Christian musicians

Royal Music Conservatory
Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37
JUNE 4 20.00 Prazak Quartet: Haydn, Dusapin, Dvorak

Saint Michael and St Gudula Cathedral
Sinter-Goedeleplein; 02.217.83.45
JUNE 11 20.00 Jan Willem Jansen, organ: JS Bach, CPE Bach, Franck, Frescobaldi, Alain

Opera**Brussels**

De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
JUNE 5-29 19.00 La Forza del Destino by Verdi, conducted by Kazushi Ono and Andriy Yurkevych

Antwerp

Vlaamse Opera
Frankrijklei 3; 070.22.02.02
JUNE 5-20 Götterdämmerung, the final opera of Wagner's Ring cycle, conducted by Ivan Törzs, staged by Ivo van Hove

Jazz & blues**Brussels**

Café Dada
Violettestraat 34; 0484.50.83.80
JUNE 7 20.00 Olivier Desailly.

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193; 02.733.13.78
JUNE 5 20.30 Jazz Station Big Band
JUNE 7 18.00 Charles Loos & Stéphane Mercier Quartet
JUNE 12 20.30 Slang

L'Os à Moelle

Emile Maxlaan 153; 02.267.10.90
JUNE 10 21.00 Antoine Gueuning Trio

Le Caveau du Max

Emile Maxlaan 87; 02.733.17.88
JUNE 6 20.30 Le Sans Set Quarter

Piola Libri

Franklinstraat 66-68; 02.736.93.91, www.piolalibri.be
JUNE 6 19.00 Apéro concert: Lariccia Duo
JUNE 10 19.00 Apéro concert: Jennifer Scavuzzo.

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpstraat 28; 02.512.92.50, www.soundsjazzclub.be
Concerts at 22.00:

JUNE 5 Antonio Segura Group **JUNE 6** Chris Joris - Bob Stewart **JUNE 7** Frankie Rose Trio **JUNE 9** Master Session

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
JUNE 7 20.30 The Cotton City Jazz Band
JUNE 9-10 18.00 Jazz exams: session 3
JUNE 11 20.30 Ypsilon Quartet

Antwerp

Cafe Mambo
Vlasmarkt 3
Wednesdays until AUG 27 Marcelo Moncada Quartet

Kelly's Irish Pub

JUNE 6 20.30 Attention Musiques Fraîches! works for voice and orchestra by young composers, performed by Ensemble Musiques Nouvelles

Borgerhout

De Roma
Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.235.04.90
JUNE 5 20.30 Wolfert Brederode Quartet + Jef Neve Trio
JUNE 8 21.00 Roland Van Campenhout

Ghent

Lazy River Jazz Club
Stadhuissteeg 5; 09.230.41.39, www.lazyriverjazzclubgent.be
JUNE 6 20.30 The Big Easy Cats

Opatuur

Citadellaan 17; 09.221.11.36, www.opatuur.be
JUNE 8 20.00 Fabrice Alleman Trio

Pop, rock, hip-hop, soul**Brussels**

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
JUNE 4 19.10 Boozed + Knucklebone Oscar + Dead Elvis & his One Man Grave + Peacocks + Peter Pan Speedrock **JUNE 7** 20.00 Pete Greenwood + Isobel Campbell & Mark Lanegan **JUNE 9** 20.00 Paramore **JUNE 10** 19.00 Queensryche **JUNE 11** 16.30 Now_Series: General Mindy + Stephen Malkmus & The Jicks

Borgerhout

Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50, www.beursschouwburg.be
JUNE 7 21.45 Taxi Val Mentek, electro vaudeville/video art

Bozar

Koningsstraat 10; 070.22.52.29
JUNE 7 21.00 Darko presents Statik Dancin@bozar: Donnacha Costello + Maxime Dangles + Klimek + DJ Darko

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
Concerts at 20.00:
JUNE 4 Born Ruffians **JUNE 5** Tokyo Police Club **JUNE 6** White Williams **JUNE 9** Guillelmos **JUNE 11** Midnight Juggernauts **JUNE 12** Victoria Tibblin

Phoolan Bar

Luxemburgstraat 43; www.phoolan.be
JUNE 12 18.00 Petra Jordan

Recyclart

Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34
JUNE 4 21.30 Tapes & Tapes **JUNE 5** 20.00 The Black Light Connection Mini Festival **JUNE 11** 20.00 Kris Dane

Stekerlapatte

Priestersstraat 4; 02.512.86.81, www.stekerlapatte.be
JUNE 5 21.30 Chloé Lacan solo, voice, accordion, piano **JUNE 7** 21.30 Tasquin **JUNE 12** 21.30 XX

VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07
JUNE 10 21.30 Rival Schools. Circus of Mayhem

Antwerp

Arenberg Theatre
Arenbergstraat 28; 070.22.21.92
JUNE 4 20.00 Tribute to Bob Marley

Petrol

Herbouvillekaai 21; 03.226.49.63, www.petrolclub.be
JUNE 7 21.00 The Chap + Hong Kong Dong

Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 077.37.38.39
JUNE 4 20.00 Tribute to Bob Marley

Borgerhout

De Roma
Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.235.04.90
JUNE 7 20.30 Volksbal II with

Orquestra Patagon and Jan Desmet + DJ Boogiefarm afterparty

World, folk**Brussels**

Espace Senghor
Waversesteenweg 366; 02.230.31.40, www.senghor.be
Concerts at 20.30:
JUNE 5-7 Hungarian Roma music 'Roads of Europe': **JUNE 5** Iza Group, traditional Maramures music **JUNE 6** Csik Band, traditional folk music **JUNE 7** Nomad/World music concert

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be
JUNE 11 20.15 Silvério Pessoa: electro and acoustic music (Brazil)

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpstraat 28; 02.512.92.50, www.soundsjazzclub.be
Until **JUNE 18** 22.00 Chamaquindo, salsa
Until **JUNE 25** 22.00 Caribe Con K

Dance**Brussels**

Kaaitheteater
Sainctelettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59
JUNE 6 20.30 Poni in PNLT + EAY = Penalty
JUNE 7 20.30 P.A.R.T.S in Rain, choreographed by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker + 12/8, choreographed by Thomas Hauert

Kaaitheteaterstudio's

Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81; 02.201.59.59
Until **JUNE 6** 20.30 P.A.R.T.S dance school, works by graduating dancers and choreographers

Théâtre de la Balsamine

Félix Marchallan 1; 02.735.64.68, www.balsamine.be
JUNE 6-7 19.30 Pouliches, choreographic portraits by Manon Oigny. 21.30 Qoeur (Quore), choreographed by Raffaella Giordano

Théâtre les Tanneurs

Huidevettersstraat 75; 02.512.17.84
JUNE 5-6 20.30 Holeulone, choreographed by Karine Ponties **JUNE 9-10** 20.30 Whoosh'ing Mach'ine in Siegfried Forever, choreographed and staged by Mauro Paccagnella

Théâtre Marni

Vergniestraat 25; 02.354.43.68
Until **JUNE 6** 20.30 Mare, choreographed by Shaula Cambazzo **JUNE 11-13** 20.30 L'Amitié, choreographed by Ebalé Zam

Woluwe-Saint-Pierre Cultural Centre

Charles Thielemanslaan 93; 02.773.05.80, www.art-culture.be
JUNE 9 20.00 Bayanihan Philippine National Dance Company in a gala performance celebrating the company's 50th anniversary since its first international appearance at Brussels' Expo 58 and commemorating the Philippine National Day

Antwerp

Het Toneelhuis/Bourla
Komedieplaats 18; 032.224.88.44
JUNE 6-14 20.00 Origine, choreographed by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui

Leuven

Pieter De Somer Aula
Deberiotstraat 24
JUNE 7 19.00 Uma Sharma, Indian Kathak dance

Theatre**Brussels**

De Loge Architecturmuseum

Klusstraat 86; 02.649.86.65
Until SEP 28 Belgie/Belgique 58, architectural and decorative forms at the time of Belgium's 1958 World's Fair, with drawings, photographs, models, posters and furniture

Erasmus House

Kapittelstraat 31; 02.521.13.83

Until JUNE 15 Anatomie van de Ijdelen (Anatomy of Vanity), the museum's 75th anniversary show, with work by Hieronymus Bosch, Jan Fabre, Hans Holbein, Marie-Jo Lafontaine, Aida Kazarian and Quinten Metsys

Espace Photographique Contretype

Verbindingslaan 1; 02.538.42.20
Until JUNE 15 Un monde inquiétant (A Worrying World), photographs by Julien Coulommier

ISELP

Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70
Until JUNE 21 De Narcisse à Alice: Miroirs et reflets en question (Questioning Mirrors and Reflections), group show

JUNE 5-AUG 16 N'oublie pas (Do Not Forget), drawings by Virginie de Limbourg

JUNE 5-AUG 16 Ceramics by Pilar Zurimendi

Fondation pour l'Architecture

Klusstraat 55; 02.642.24.80, www.fondationpourlarchitecture.be

Until AUG 17 Gevers Design: Inventaris van een uitvinder (Inventory of an inventor), retrospective of work by Belgian designer Christophe Gevers (1928-2007)

Jacques Franck Cultural Centre

Waterloosesteenweg 94; 02.538.90.20
Until JUNE 22 Light my Fire, installations by Djos Janssens

Jewish Museum of Belgium

Minimstraat 21; 02.512.19.63, www.mjb-jmb.org

Until JUNE 22 Dicht op de huid (Close to the Skin), paintings by Brussels-based artist Maurice Frydman

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
Until JUNE 29 Vodoun/Vodoun: Portraits of Initiates, photographs of voodoo priests by Jean-Dominique Burton

Until JUNE 29 Jérôme Considerant, installations

Museum van Elsene

Jean Van Volsemstraat 71; 02.515.64.22
Until AUG 31 The Belle Epoque, sculpture by Alexandre Charpentier

and the museum's collection of posters by Toulouse-Lautrec, among other fin-de-siècle works

René Magritte Museum

Essegemstraat 135; 02.428.26.26
Until JUNE 30 Dreaming of a Future World, paintings and drawings by the Flemish artist Edmond van Dooren

Royal Army Museum

Jubelpark 3; 02.737.78.33
Until JUNE 29 (H)erkenning! 175 jaar Leopoldsorde en Nationale Orden, exhibition on the oldest Belgian military order

Until NOV 30 A Paintbrush in the Barrel, World War One paintings, drawings and etchings by soldiers

Royal Library

Kunstberg; 02.519.58.73
Until AUG 23 Eugène Ysaÿe, exhibition on the Belgian violinist and composer, with photographs, letters and instruments

Until AUG 24 In de ban van boeken, Belgian book collectors, 1750 to 1850

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11, www.fine-arts-museum.be

Until JULY 6 Paintings and sculpture by contemporary South Korean artist Lee Ufan

Until SEP 21 The British Royal Collection: From Bruegel to Rubens,

more than 50 paintings from the Queen Elizabeth II's collection, with major works by Hans Memling, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Peter Paul Rubens and others, shown alongside masterpieces from the museum's collection

Until SEP 21 Expo '58: Contemporary Art at the World Fair, revisiting the 1958 exhibition 50 Years of Modern Art

Until AUG 31 Plecnik Project, life and professional achievements of Slovene architect Joze Plecnik (1872-1957)

Royal Museum for Central Africa

Leuvensesteenweg 13; 02.769.52.11

Until AUG 31 Knock on Wood!

Forest and Wood in Africa, thematic exhibition on African trees and forests and their need for sustainable management

Until OCT 19 Expo 58, films and photographs, ethnographic objects, plants, artwork and animals that were displayed in the seven pavilions dedicated to the Belgian Congo at Brussels' World's Fair in 1958

WIELS

Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.347.30.33

Until JULY 27 Mike Kelley Educational Complex Onwards: 1995-2008, retrospective with large-scale installations, sculptures, paintings and photographs by the American artist

Antwerp

Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)

Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60

JUNE 6-AUG 31 Visual art and sound installations by British artist and composer Cornelius Cardew

Until SEP 9 Fantasy, intervention by Koen van den Broek

Until AUG 17 Die Lucky Bush, contemporary art show curated by Imogen Stidworthy, questioning the physical and social impact of language, with works by John Cage, Jimmie Durham, Gary Hill, Aglaia Konrad and Michelangelo Pistoletto, among others

Diamond Museum

Koningin Astridplein 13-23; 03.202.48.90

Until JUNE 8 Diamond Divas, prestigious collection of diamond jewellery worn by the rich and famous

Extra City

Tulpstraat 79; 0484.42.10.70

Until JULY 27 Blow Job, site-specific installation by Berlin-based Peter Friedl

Fotomuseum

Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00

Until JUNE 8 Patrick De Spiegelaere, retrospective of the late Flemish photographer (1961-2007)

Until JUNE 8 Face On, portrait photography

Until JUNE 8 Provisoria, multi-media work by Ria Verhaeghe

Until JUNE 22 West, so far, photographs by Phil van Duynen

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (Royal Museum of Fine Arts)

Leopold De Waelplaats; 03.238.78.09

Until JUNE 15 Jan Cox: Living One's Art, paintings by the 20th-century Flemish artist

Until JUNE 29 Willem Elsschots' Kaas: een beeldroman, graphic novel adaptation by Dick Matena

Middelheim Museum

Middelheimlaan 6; 03.827.15.34

Until AUG 17 Open air installations by Leo Copers

MoMu

Nationalestraat 28; 03.470.27.70

Until AUG 17 Moi, Véronique. Branquinho TOuTeNUe, retrospective of the Belgian designer marking the 10th anniversary of her fashion label

Bruges

Arentshuis

Dijver 16

Until AUG 3 Three Bruges Artists: Legillon, Verbrugge and Ledoux, 18th

and 19th-century drawings

Groeningemuseum

Dijver 12; 050.44.87.43

Until DEC 31 Leuven loans, 15th- and 16th-century paintings and woodcarvings from Leuven's Van der Kelen-Mertens museum

Ghent

Dr Guislain Museum

Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95, www.museumdrguislain.be

Until SEP 7 Circus or Science: The Roca Collection, anatomical collection from the late 19th and early 20th centuries

Until SEP 7 Jean Rustin, retrospective of work by the French painter

Until SEP 7 I live in the painting, work by Marc Maet

Design Museum

Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99

Until JUNE 22 Voices: Contemporary Ceramics Art from Sweden

Until JUNE 22 Conversation-conservation, works by French designer Matali Crasset and Belgian ceramists Frank Van Houtte

Until JUNE 22 Glass from the Dirk Schrijvers collection

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03, www.smak.be

Until JUNE 29 Kunst Nu: Wilfredo Prieto, installation by the Cuban artist

Until JULY 6 Guillaume Bijl, retrospective of the Flemish artist

Until JULY 27 Hors de soi (Outside oneself), installations by Benoît Félix

Hasselt

Modemuseum

Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21

Until AUG 31 Looks: Mode 1750-1958, Two-hundred years of fashion history

National Jenever Museum

Witte Nonnenstraat 19; 011.23.98.60

Until AUG 31 The Orange Bulb Alambiflurics, olfactory installation by Peter De Cupere

Z33

Zuivelmarkt (Begijnhof) 33; 011.29.59.60

Until AUG 17 Bridge, installation by Michael Cross

Machelen-Zulte

Het Roger Raveel Museum

Gildestraat 2-8; 09.381.60.00

Until JUNE 15 Witte schaduw (White Shadow), drawings by Roger Raveel

Ostend

Modern Art Museum

Romestraat 11; 059.50.81.18

Until AUG 31 Georges Vantongerloo: Pionier van de moderne beeldhouwkunst (Pioneer of Modern Sculpture), retrospective of work by the Flemish artist (1886-1965)

Poperinge

Hopmuseum

Gasthuisstraat 71; 057.33.79.22, www.hopmuseum.be

Until SEP 30 Photo search activities for children

Waregem

BE-PART

Westerlaan 17; 056.62.94.10

Until JUNE 29 Contemporary works by Willy De Sauter and Virginie Baily

Ypres

In Flanders Fields Museum

Grote Markt 34; 057.23.92.75

Until SEP 7 Man, Culture, War: Multicultural Aspects of the First World War, a panorama of the diverse origins of those who fought in Belgium during WWI

Don't miss this week



La Forza del destino

5-29 June, De Munt, Muntplein, Brussels. Tickets from 070.23.39.39 or www.demunt.be

A plodding and dreary saga featuring eloping lovers, an unwitting parricide and a bloody dénouement in an isolated convent: Verdi's Force of Destiny would be pretty much unwatchable today if it wasn't rescued by its glorious and haunting music. Brussels' De Munt hasn't shown it for more than 30 years, so make sure you don't miss

INTERVIEW

Kristien Hemmerechts

Flemish novelist, essayist and reviewer Kristien Hemmerechts has a style that is realistic, concrete and direct. Too direct for many critics. This week sees the publication of Mark Cloostermans' *Bloot en Beginnen*, a study of her work that should serve as a counterweight. Hemmerechts, a professor of English literature at KU Brussels, has recently published *Ann*, the memoir of a survivor of incest and anorexia, and *The Man, His Penis and the Knife*, a pamphlet on sexual violence.

I'd like to talk about Anglo-Saxon literature, your work and your courage to speak.

Good! I'm happy that you formulate the latter positively. Often what I do is pegged as provocative or worse.

You started writing "in a little diary, in a little room, in a little house." How did that come about?

During my studies in the 1970s I had to read mostly male writers. So for my dissertation I decided as a matter of principle to read only female writers. I think a connection was made somehow because it's during that period that I started writing myself. Maybe you need a sort of permission, a voice, to become a writer. A psychiatrist would have to analyse this for me [smiles]. But literature seemed to me to be the domain of men.

Did you feel like a female writer?

Not personally. But in those days, similar questions always emerged in interviews: "What's it like to write as a woman?" as if they were afraid I would forget I was a woman. What is it like to drink tea as a woman, they might just as well have asked. They'd never ask a male writer such questions.

Your debut short stories were written and published in English while you were living in London. What's it like to write in another

language?

It's liberating. Even when I speak English I feel more bold and direct. I imagine your personality slightly changes within the different languages that you speak.

Which Flemish writers would you recommend?

Of course there's *The Sorrow of Belgium* by Hugo Claus, which to my disgrace perhaps, I haven't read myself [laughs]. But I'm an English professor and have to keep up with English literature. You have to read so much: work from Scotland, India, South-Africa. You're never finished. I've just discovered Edwidge Danticat from Haiti. She's brilliant and I'll interview her soon. When I started writing, it felt like the current Flemish literature didn't amount to much. It was the silent generation. Then Tom Lanoye and Herman Brusselmans came on the scene with a loud bang. Then I made a bit of noise too. And now there are Christophe Vekeman, Dimitri Verhulst, Erwin Mortier, Saskia de Coster and David van Reybrouck who produce quality columns, novels, poems, plays.

Your work in Dutch has been translated into other European languages, but not into English. Why not?

Not many writers are translated into English. Anglo-Saxon writers produce so much themselves. On the other hand, too many bad writers get translated into Dutch, and often badly too. During the Second World War they used to call American GIs "overpaid, oversexed and over here." And that kind of cultural imperialism goes on with books, like with films. Of course, some Anglo-Saxon writers are unavoidable, but you wouldn't believe the money that gets paid for yet another overhyped new American author. Estonia, for instance, might have great writers, but we don't get to know them. Less and less writers get promoted, while more and more books get published, which is strange.

You have published about 5,000 pages yourself. Finally someone has written a book on your literary work and the open hostility you've had to deal with. How do you feel about that?

Apart from feeling as if I'm attending my own funeral? Of course it's a great honour for my work, and Mark has been thorough and intelligent. I appreciate the recognition. The strange thing about my job is that everyone feels free to evaluate you all the time. And sometimes they criticize you quite harshly. So it's nice to get compliments for a change. But the contact with the reader is always nice, too. Sometimes I compare books to the proverbial message in a bottle. You hope it will be read by an attentive audience. A book exists by the grace of its reader. It's like a dance. With some dance partners, it just clicks and you twirl and float through the dance hall. And with others, it doesn't spark at all. You need to find that perfect partner who appreciates your invitation to dance.

The title *Bloot en beginnen* reflects your characters' attitudes. As they look for authenticity, they strip themselves of as many social roles as possible. But does this being naked and beginning also reflect your own attitude when you start writing?

As a principle, I never explain my characters' personalities or stick a label on them. They exist through me, like parasites. I'm like the tree on whose juices they feed [laughs]. So, yes, I clear myself of prejudice, before I begin. Writers are constantly trying to open labels up and show the complexity beneath. And then the press comes along and closes everything up again. You can't win. My latest book, for example, has been labeled as "a fight against macho literature", which is beside the point.

De man, zijn penis en het



mes (*The man, his Penis and the Knife*) is a pamphlet against sexual violence and an appeal to men to educate each other. I understand that the title came to you when a male friend described an erection as "having a knife in your pocket". Society often has a blind spot for sexual violence, even when it's so blatantly present?

Of course, we all have our blind spots and look through our own personal glasses. But you need to at least realize that there are many glasses about. I remember I had to put on some particularly large glasses to make me see the gay and lesbian code in some books. And then I felt shocked and ashamed

for never having noticed these things before.

So, your pamphlet tries to hand us a pair of glasses?

We pick up on incest and sexual violence, but we let negativity and violence on female bodies pass more easily. Mind you, I don't want to censor. My point is "read what it says". Literature isn't produced in a vacuum. It reflects the writer and the society he lives in. I think that deep in their hearts many men honestly feel they have more sexual rights than women. And women incorporate this idea. Like many whites feel better than blacks, truth be told. My trick is to turn the table, and then the absurdity becomes clear. Maybe it would be nice if this book got translated into English, after all.

Interview by Monique Philips

THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

"It has never occurred to me to do the ironing for a man, but I've noticed that nearly all women do it. Why, actually? Is it perhaps genetically determined that a woman can iron better than a man?"

Human rights professor Eva Brems of Ghent University in an interview in *Knack* magazine

"I couldn't care less about football any more."

Carmen Pfaff, wife of former Red Devil Jean-Marie, who now has his own eponymous magazine

"Among the European royal houses, the ladies don't change their hairstyles on a whim."

Willy Maeser, hairdresser to Queen Fabiola, whose barnet remains unchanged these 40 years

Wiels Suzan Daniel Fonds Oud-Rekem Chiro
Garbage Sex And The City in Antwerp Saradag

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