

A masterful symbolic novella

The Dying Peasant

KAREL VAN DE WOESTIJNE

In 'The Dying Peasant', Van de Woestijne describes the last, lonely hours of an old dying peasant from his own perspective. Evening falls, it grows dark, the peasant Nand is lying alone in bed and is cold. Scraps of his life flash by his mind's eye. He resentfully ponders the deficiency of his life, but he also eagerly re-lives the varied alternation of work and pleasure. The delirious peasant sees five women appear at his bed, each one a symbol of a sense that has coloured his past and that he now has to say goodbye to. Together, they give a penetrating impression of human existence. While looking death in the eye, Nand tries to rise above his loneliness.

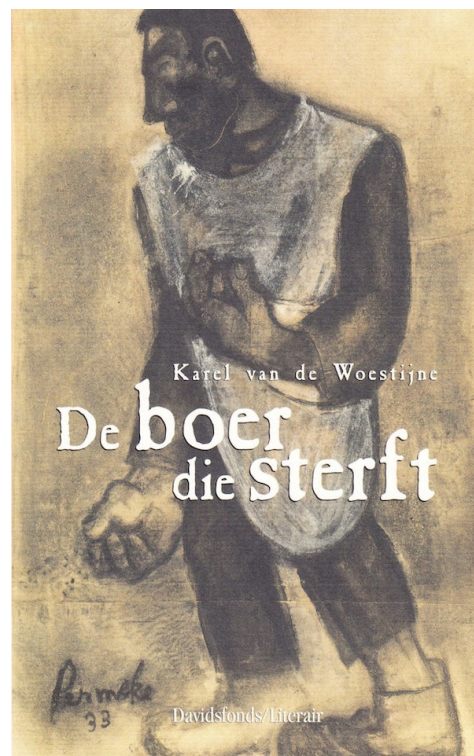
This tale speaks to the common humanity of gratitude, humility. Even the simplest life is worth cherishing.

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'The Dying Peasant' isn't just an anecdotal peasant novella, but a symbolic tale that excels in its simplicity. Moreover, because the action is focused inwardly, it deviates markedly from the regional novels that are often driven by external actions and developments. Van de Woestijne's novella did not only prove to be very much alive for contemporary critics, but is still counted as part of the canon today.

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MARNIX GIJSEN



AUTHOR



Karel van de Woestijne (1878-1929) did not complete his secondary education, but he nevertheless became a professor at the University of Ghent in the 1920's. Prior to this, however, his life was characterised by a consistent lack of financial means. His marriage in 1904 and the arrival of a first child made the need to provide for his family all the more pressing. In 1906, he became Brussels correspondent for the Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant (New Rotterdam Newspaper) and he combined this function with a job as a minor civil servant.

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