

FICTION

Do we have to be part of a ‘We’?

We

JEROEN OLYSLAEGERS

It's the summer of 1976. Although Europe is sweltering in a tropical heatwave, everyone is migrating from north to south. Georges, a disgruntled cartoonist for a quality newspaper, retreats with his family and friends to a mountain on the Spanish Costa Brava. People plunge into the pool, flirt with each other, drink whisky and Coke and talk about freedom and self-determination in a country that itself has just experienced the death of a dictator. Georges feels constrained by the perceived obligation to be part of a community, of a ‘we’, by the common history it assumes and by the self-conscious victims who, together with him, form a circle of family and friends. Surely there must be an emergency exit somewhere?

When it comes to style, theme and narrative power, Olyslaegers proves to be a worthy bastard son of the great Hugo Claus.

HUMO

‘We’ is a saga of the demons we share, sex, family, alcohol, black money and – here and there – a shady past. It is a story about friendship that has nothing to do with friends, and ultimately one of defeat. Fast-paced and perceptive, ‘We’ is a many-layered book written in a natural, poetic language. It is a portrait of a man who is horrified by the pressure exerted by his environment as well as an incisive portrait of both the 1970s and today. Along with ‘Winnings’ and ‘Will’, ‘We’ forms a triptych on the troubled times we live in.

Ambitious, intelligent and driven

KNACK



AUTHOR



Jeroen Olyslaegers (b. 1967) writes columns, plays and prose. He is known for his social engagement both in and out of literary circles and in 2014 he was awarded the Ark Prize for Free Speech for this. His novels are lauded for their stylistic control, expressive style and narrative strength, in which the evocative power and ambiguity of words, expressions and gestures receive particular attention. His work also stands out for its punchy dialogue in a cinematic, explosive style. He views Louis Paul Boon as his spiritual father. *Photo © Koen Broos*

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