

Poetic fable about borders

Here

JOKE VAN LEEUWEN

'Here' is a shabby village close to the border, in a former mining region. The border is guarded by Forefather and his dog, called Dog. Rules are rules, and Forefather doesn't want to make friends with anyone in the village, because that would make his work harder. His son Bardo grows up in this closed universe. Bardo falls in love with Mara and together they have a daughter called Little One.

People from Here who travel abroad are welcome only as a source of cheap labour. Until one day the borders are shut and no one is allowed to leave the country. Resources become increasingly scarce. Bardo follows in his father's footsteps to become a military border guard and learns that it is necessary to protect his country whatever the cost. The distance between him and his wife and daughter steadily grows.

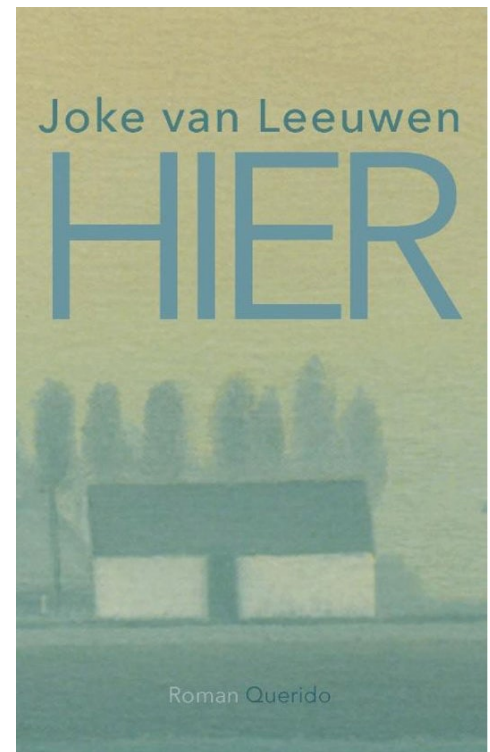
A new highpoint in her oeuvre *****

NRC HANDELSBLAD

'Here' contains everything that makes Joke van Leeuwen's work so powerful. In her poetic prose, with its apparently simple sentences, she manages to evoke a mythical world that we can connect with contemporary themes such as xenophobia, migration and totalitarian regimes. She asks what it means to be human and an outsider. What is freedom and what are we prepared to do in return for it? Above all: where is this freedom to be found? There, on the other side of the border, or here, in our heads?

A subtle novel, stripped of all context. ****

DE VOLKSKRANT

**AUTHOR**

Joke van Leeuwen (b. 1952), who studied history at the University of Brussels, performs in cabaret and theatre shows as well as writing stories and poems for children (which she illustrates herself) and fiction and poetry for adults. A Dutch author, she has lived in Antwerp since 2002. From 2014 to 2017 she was chair of PEN Flanders. She has received innumerable awards for her multifaceted work, including the prestigious Theo Thijssen Prize, a three-yearly Dutch prize for children's and young adult literature, and the Constantijn Huygens Prize. For her adult novel 'Celebration of the Beginning' she won the AKO Literature Prize. *Photo © Koos Breukel*

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