FICTION

Friendship and betrayal in Antwerp's Golden Age

Wild Woman

JEROEN OLYSLAEGERS

Innkeeper Beer is a broken man, scarred by loss and memories. He has lost no fewer than three women in childbirth. His third wife gave birth to a son before she died, while the other two died with a child in their womb. After all these losses, he considers himself to be cursed.

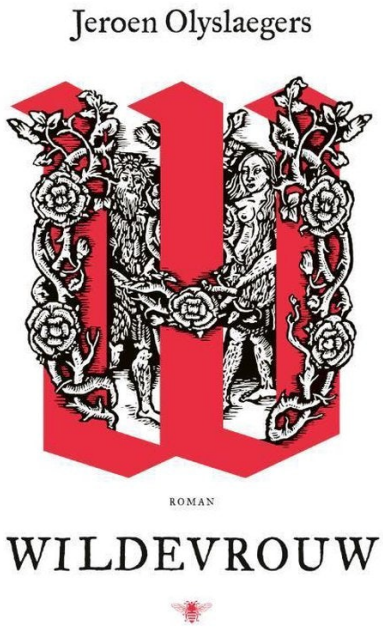
During the turbulent 1560s, trade is flourishing and Antwerp is thriving. The city is an explosive melting pot of religions, as well as the beating heart of painting, cartography and book printing. Beer's inn becomes a refuge for freethinkers and trailblazers. But everything is thrown into sharp relief when, through bullish world conquerors, a savage woman, an Inuit, ends up in his inn.

Ten years later, Beer, now in Amsterdam, looks back on the events that prompted him to flee his native city and on a tumultuous period that included the Great Iconoclasm and the beginning of the Eighty Years' War, which turned out to be a turning point in Western history. He looks back on his part in the betrayal of both his friends and the savage woman. While confessing, he keeps justifying his actions, which makes him a master of self-deception.

> **Olyslaegers reminds us of Shakespeare: warm-blooded and raw, flamboyant and compact, witty and wise.**
>
> HET PAROOL

With his rich, sumptuous and debauched language, Olyslaegers drags you into the dark alleyways of the 16th century. He vividly evokes Bruegel's time in this in-depth sociological portrait of a city falling apart. 'Wild Woman' is a novel about the longing for unity and the discovery of an inner truth, about friendship, community, faith and betrayal. It emerges that sixteenth-century reality has quite a few parallels with this day and age: back then there was also a lot of speculation on the stock market, gossiping and "fake news".

FLANDERS LITERATURE



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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TRANSLATION RIGHTS Marijke Nagtegaal - m.nagtegaal@debezigebij.nl

TRANSLATION GRANTS Marieke Roels - marieke@flandersliterature.be , Elise Vanoosthuyse - elise@flandersliterature.be ,

Yannick Geens -
yannick@flandersliterature.be