FICTION

An ironic homage to world literature

Trains and Rooms

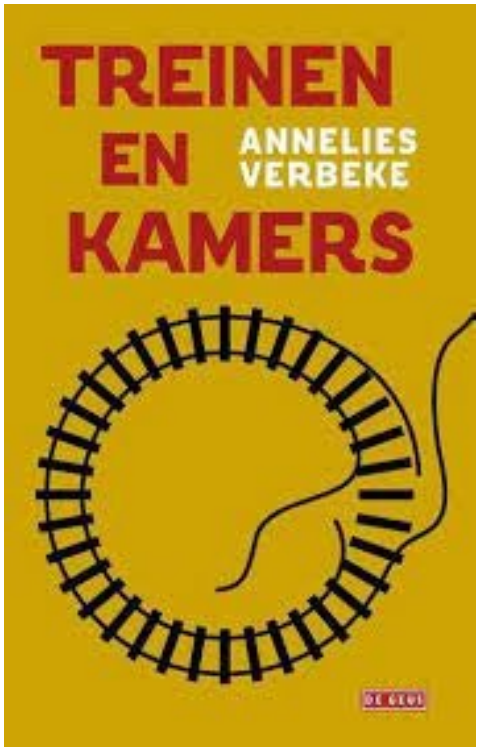
ANNELIES VERBEKE

In 'Trains and Rooms' Annelies Verbeke interweaves more than four thousand years' worth of literature from around the world. Inspired by better and lesser known classics from before 1900, the fifteen pieces in this collection form a kaleidoscope full of interrelated moments. Verbeke freely experiments with literary forms, which has resulted in a mix of short stories, theatre texts and poetry. She uses certain characters again and again and plays with intertextuality. The stories were inspired by western highlights, including 'Don Quixote' by Miguel Cervantes and Herman Melville's 'Moby Dick', as well as the likes of 'The Pillowbook' by the Japanese Sei Shōnagon and 'The Exaltation of Inanna', which was written around 2,260 BC by the Sumerian Enheduanna.

The author herself makes a cameo appearance in her collection. In the opening story 'Desertion', she meets some of the greats of world literature: Thomas Mann, Goethe and a few of their famous characters, including Young Werther. While having playful conversations about their craft, she asks deeper questions about (female) authorship. Meanwhile, in other stories, she does not shy away from contemporary issues such as the refugee crisis, decolonisation, robots and incels. She manages to get to the heart of love, grief and humiliation with both humour and irony, but also with immense compassion for man and animal alike. 'Trains and Rooms' is like a hall of mirrors in which new doors keep opening up into other eras and narratives. This is yet another highlight in Verbeke's career, and one that reinforces her reputation as the 'Queen of the Flemish short story'.

> Verbeke only needs a few lines to give her characters a pulse and to make them truly memorable.
>
> HET PAROOL

FLANDERS LITERATURE



AUTHOR

Annelies Verbeke (b. 1976) is a leading figure in Flemish literature. With translations in over 20 countries, her novel 'Slaap' is the most widely translated Flemish debut of all time. Her love of the short story form has made her an advocate of the genre. In addition, she has written columns, scripts, theatre texts, a graphic novel and a children's book. What makes her characters so powerful is their angular personality: they are familiar in their ordinariness, but also have a dark and unexpected side. Keywords: snappy, slightly absurdist, wistful nostalgia with keen observations. In 2022, she received the Ultima for Literature (The Flemish state prize for literature). *Photo © Alex Salinas*

ORIGINAL TITLE Treinen en kamers (De Geus, 2021, 288 pp.)

RIGHTS SOLD Two short stories of this book are published in German by Golden Luft

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