

Haunting observations through
the eyes of an internee

Crackling Skulls

ROGER VAN DE VELDE

A maverick of Flemish literature, Roger Van de Velde has had a lasting impact on the current generation of Flemish authors. His life story could at the very least be called extraordinary. He was addicted to the painkiller Palfium, and after forging prescriptions he repeatedly found himself in prisons and psychiatric institutions.

In the twenty powerful short stories in 'Crackling Skulls', he portrays his 'companions in misery' in those institutions, people living on the fringes of society. He combines his own intense compassion for his fellow internees with detached and razor-sharp observations. Through his haunting descriptions, we get to know Daniël, who smokes one cigarette after another for three days because Prometheus has instructed him to do so, Jules Leroy, who kills his beloved cat after it eats his roast beef, and Marquis de la Motte, who writes out IOUs for billions of francs. He describes their madness with respect and love, and persistently goes in search of the final remnants of humanity within them.

**Penetrating and splendid, full of brilliant,
somewhat harrowing images**

NRC HANDELSBLAD

Empathy, combined with a powerful talent for observation, an eye for detail and literary flair, produces compelling portraits of lost souls. With an undertone of sometimes wry humour, Van de Velde incisively describes the dramas great and small that he witnesses. At the same time he touches upon the abuses perpetrated in the institutions, where the doctors do not actually treat anyone. His humanity, his command of style, his clarity of mind and his ability to resist sentimentality still effortlessly hold readers in their grip more than fifty years after his stories were first published.

**Top-flight prose written in a smooth, sober
style**

CUTTING EDGE

Roger
Van de Velde
**De knetterende
schedels**



AUTHOR



Roger Van de Velde (1925-1970) was a virtuoso word artist and an extraordinarily sharp observer of people and events. After a long medical ordeal, he became addicted to the painkiller Palfium. Convicted of forging prescriptions, he found himself in prison and in psychiatric institutions. In those distressing circumstances he wrote lucid, sober prose. With his crystal-clear prose, Van de Velde influenced many Flemish authors. He is praised for his deeply felt sympathy for people on the margins of society and for the laconic humour with which he describes human shortcomings.

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