

Wartime resistance, the tragedy of loneliness and the meaninglessness of life

Holy Wrath

MAURICE D'HAESE

Peter, a young welder who is still living with his parents, wants to see the Second World War end as quickly as possible, so he joins the resistance. Along with his comrades he waits for arms drops, takes part in sabotage missions and fights, at great human cost, to defend a bridge. Later he joins the army units that are routing enemy troops. The nihilistic message of the book gradually comes through increasingly clearly, however. No ideological ideal can justify a war. When the country is liberated, Peter therefore feels no joy, overcome as he is by the senselessness of years of extreme violence.

The pinnacle of his oeuvre, that can easily rival the absurdist novels of ideas by Camus.

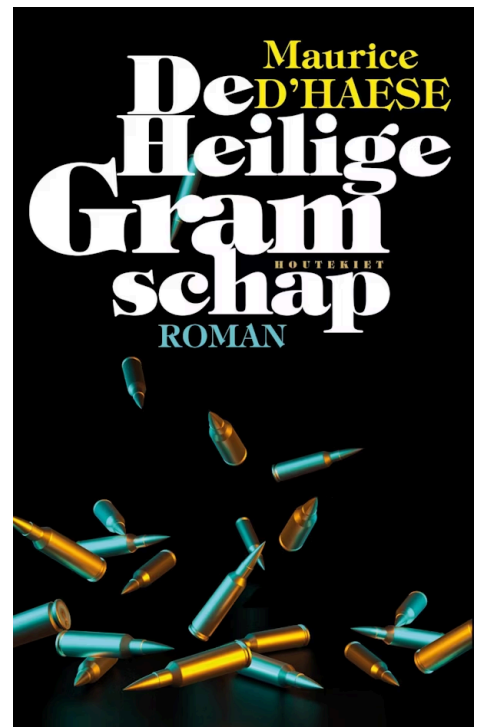
DE STANDAARD

'Holy Wrath' is not a traditional resistance novel with a clear division of roles between friend and foe, good and evil. In this novel the human condition is central. According to D'Haese, not only is warfare senseless, all of life is subject to existential doubt. The defiant and sometimes poetic prose perfectly supports the idea of that ubiquitous hopelessness and alienation.

By omitting all geographical and historical references, D'Haese enhances the universal character of the book. 'Holy Wrath', with its acerbic anti-war message, remains relevant and topical today.

I don't think I exaggerate when I say that Maurice D'Haese ought to be mentioned whenever anyone attempts to take stock of the new post-war prose.

LOUIS PAUL BOON



AUTHOR



Maurice D'Haese (1919–1981) was the author of a small but exceptional literary oeuvre. In literary history he never received the recognition he deserved as the author of one of the inescapable classics of the Second World War. His work has existentialist elements, and alienation features large. He was influenced by authors including Camus, Sartre and Kafka, and along with Hugo Claus and Louis Paul Boon he was at the forefront of the (r)evolution that defines Flemish literature to this day.

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TRANSLATION RIGHTS Vé Bobelyn - vbobelyn@vbku.be

TRANSLATION GRANTS Marieke Roels - marieke@flandersliterature.be , Yannick Geens - yannick@flandersliterature.be