

‘Great Flemish Novel’ about an unexceptional human life

The Two Prong Crown

GUIDO VAN HEULENDONK

During a visit to the barber's, news of the death of Peter Green, founder of Fleetwood Mac, casts seventy-year-old Werner back to the days of his youth. Conny, who falls pregnant to the local ‘Don Juan’ Rafaël and is then promptly dumped, becomes his first wife. Werner is the father to an illegitimate daughter called Hedda and then has a second daughter with Conny, Paulien. When Hedda hears about her biological father she becomes unmanageable and flees into extreme Catholic devotion, which causes her to break with her family not long after. When Conny dies several years later in a climbing accident in the US, the family has to deal with loss for a second time.

The formidable command of language, exceptional psychological insight and restrained humour make ‘The Two Prong Crown’ an outstanding novel. ****

HUMO

In ‘The Two Prong Crown’, Guido Van Heulendonk immerses himself in a character's life that at first sight seems far from spectacular. While major dramas take place on the world stage, the novel tells of the accidents of fate that have far-reaching effects on the lives of a man and his family. Drawing upon diverse narrative perspectives and episodes from different eras, Werner's story takes shape, and as the perspective on each individual character grows, so does our view of the Vrysoone family as a whole.

In this novel, Van Heulendonk makes a fascinating and broad spectrum of textual forms interlock. In a chameleonic style, ‘The Two Prong Crown’ switches between lectures, newspaper reports, diaries and other forms of narrative. With each character and type of text, Van Heulendonk's style takes on a new colour. More than a tragic soap, the novel is a condensation of a human life, which here never emerges as a single story but as an amalgamation of events that sooner or later find expression in language and text. With a masterful structure and an endless variety of references reminiscent of authors like Haruki Murakami,



AUTHOR



Guido van Heulendonk (b. 1951) is the author of novels, short stories and essays. A recurring theme in his work is fate and the – often negative – consequences accidental circumstances can have for the lives, social position and relationships of the characters in his narratives. His stories and novels are epitomised by the tragicomic and the grotesque in combination with existential questions and philosophical conceptions of time, destiny, semblance and reality. Humour is ever-present in his work, but often in a subtle way that invokes Thomas Mann. © Koos Breukel

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Jennifer Egan and Ian McEwan, 'The Two Prong Crown' elevates a normal life to become literature of the highest order.

How a normal life can be rich and extraordinary. Literary prowess.

NRC HANDELSBLAD