

Returning to having never left

Beginnings

ANGELO TIJSSENS

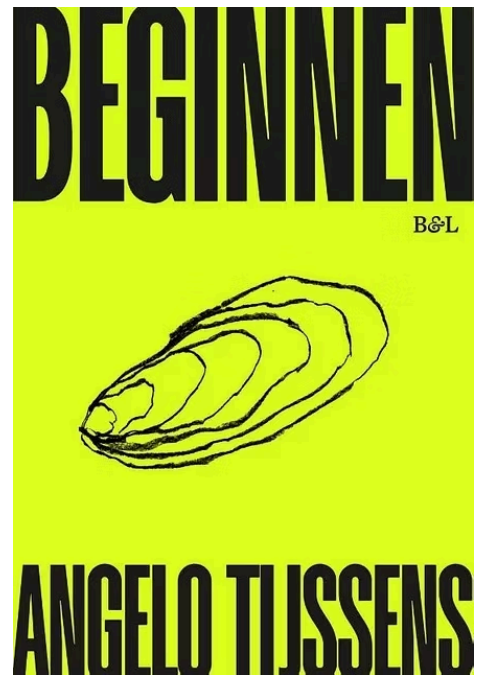
'Here, with my back to the grey sea and my feet in the sand, I look at the yellow wall of the hotel where I bit off my tongue.' In 'Beginnings' the protagonist returns to the seaside resort on the Belgian coast where he grew up. On the sea dyke he looks at the building in which his family ran a hotel for generations, a place imbued with memories, stories and scars.

The novel unfolds like a mosaic of observations in the present and snatches of the past. The narrator relives his childhood in the hotel, amid simmering saucepans, prawn croquettes and an endless stream of holidaymakers. He arrives at the memories of his first holiday romance, an unfortunate fall, and a family slowly breaking apart. Over the years the hotel has been transformed countless times, from a charming family business to a soulless holiday centre. Now all that's left is a concrete relic, slated for demolition.

'Beginnings' is a free, associative narrative in the poetic and evocative style that Angelo Tjssens has made his own. The novel is constructed out of short, sensual scenes that dig deeper and deeper into a personal and collective sense of nostalgia. Tjssens connects the history of the narrator and the hotel with broader social themes such as the gentrification of the coast, mass consumption, and a longing for authenticity in a world that is increasingly commercialized. 'Beginnings' is an ode to our capacity to give meaning to things again and again, and it invites us to reflect on how we relate to the places that formed us, and to time, which changes everything.

One of the most impressive of new European writers, for both page and screen.

JOHN BOYNE, IRISH TIMES



AUTHOR



Angelo Tjssens (b. 1986) is a scriptwriter, dramatist, actor and writer. He has co-written films including 'Girl' (Caméra d'Or, Cannes 2018) and 'Close' (Grand Prix, Cannes 2022). He also travels the world as a stage actor and director with the Ontroerend Goed theatre collective. In his work he transforms a critical view of social themes into individual stories with penetrating depictions of character. In a gripping and pared-down narrative style, his novels explore a wide spectrum of human emotions and relationships. His semi-autobiographical debut novel 'The Edges' harnesses vulnerable emotions to reflect on growing up in an environment that's not fit for purpose, that's 'on the edge'. The book was nominated for the 2023 Bronzen Uil and has been translated into French, German, English and Spanish. Photo © Willy Vandepierre

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TRANSLATION RIGHTS Marisca van der Mark - m.vandermark@schonbach.nl

TRANSLATION GRANTS Yannick Geens - yannick@flandersliterature.be, Esther de Gries - esther@flandersliterature.be, Marieke Roels - marieke@flandersliterature.be