

NONFICTION

# A Flemish family history

# My Parents' Banquet Hall

ELS SNICK

In 'My Parents' Banquet Hall', Els Snick opens the doors one last time to the iconic De Visscherie in Oostrozebeke, West Flanders. For generations, hundreds of families celebrated weddings, anniversaries and even funerals there. Shortly before the building was demolished in 2017, Snick organised one final, warm reunion – a return to a place full of high spirits, traditions and hidden histories.

During this farewell gathering, painful stories surfaced. Priest and poet Cyriel Verschaeve, once a leading figure of the Flemish Movement but sentenced to death after the war for collaboration, casts a stark shadow over the past. Snick discovers that the banquet hall's previous owners, the wealthy siblings Jozef and Maria Lootens, played a decisive role in the adulation that surrounded Verschaeve.

Her personal search for the ties between her own family and the Lootens leads Snick ever further back in time. As she gradually reveals how a well-meaning Catholic family allowed itself to be carried away by Verschaeve's malevolent ideas, she is also forced to address her own pro-Flemish upbringing.

With affectionate acuity, Snick demonstrates how adopting a contemporary perspective makes space for new insights. 'My Parents' Banquet Hall' is an openhearted story about family, identity and the power of critical retrospection: what happens when old heroes fall off their pedestals and new narratives emerge?

**An extraordinary, beautifully told chunk of microhistory, overshadowed by a dark chunk of macrohistory.**

KNACK



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## AUTHOR

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Els Snick (b. 1966) translates German literature and teaches at Ghent University. Her PhD explored the literary networks of Joseph Roth in the Netherlands and Flanders, and in 2014 she founded the Joseph Roth Society. Books she has translated include a collection of Roth's journalistic work and his correspondence with Stefan Zweig. Van Oorschot has published her translations of Roth's 'The Radetzky March', 'Strawberries' and a collection of his journalism entitled 'Between the Armies'. © photo: Paul Snauwaert

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