

Mussel becomes shipwreck reporter

# Account of the Wrecking of the Merchant Ship Mytilida

ASTRID VERPLANCKE & MARIJN BROUCKAERT

On 17 April 1685, the merchant ship Mytilida leaves on a transatlantic voyage. On board are enslaved people, child sailors and one all-seeing mussel. This remarkable mollusc keeps a log, recording everything that goes on above decks and below. As far as the mussel is concerned, everyone on board is a sailor; naturally, it knows nothing about slavery.

The sailors fill their days by striking the sails, scrubbing the deck and telling improbable stories. After a while the wind drops and the nets remain empty. There is hardly any food left, especially for the shackled 'sailors' in the hold. When an immense storm breaks out, the ship capsizes. Oyin, an enslaved woman, is the only person to surface. She saves Warl, a child sailor. But how will they ever reach land again?

**Daring but brilliantly successful. Calls our habits of thought into question.**

DE MORGEN

'Account of the Wrecking of the Merchant Ship Mytilida' is a courageous, poetic and visually powerful book. The mussel, as an unexpected but astute narrator, provides a fresh, subversive view of slavery and power structures. Its short, terse sentences contrast with the horror of the situation. The illustrations by Astrid Verplancke reinforce all of this: with robust acryl strokes and expressive charcoal work, she peoples the ship with figures reminiscent of the Flemish expressionist Constant Permeke. Meanwhile, the stormy sea recalls marine painting of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

This raw, multi-layered book gives full scope to voices that history has often left unheard, and creates a lasting impression.



## AUTHORS



**Astrid Verplancke** (b. 1992) is an illustrator, painter and graphic designer. With a lot of paint, rough brushstrokes and unsharpened pencils, she makes expressive, poetic illustrations that exude earthiness. Photo © Jens Goemaere

**Marijn Brouckaert** (b. 1985) is a writer, librarian and reading facilitator. He has researched reading as a social intervention. His projects are intended to bring people together through books. Photo © Thijs De Lange

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