

What history does to ordinary people

Zinc

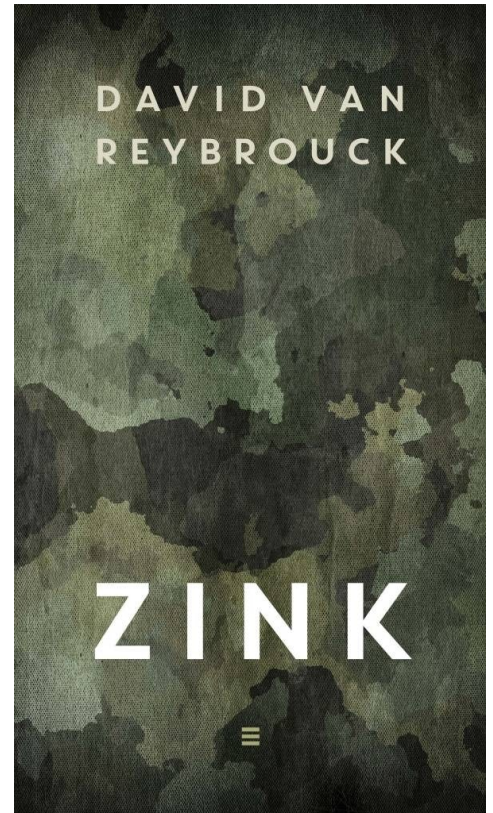
DAVID VAN REYBROUCK

‘There sits Emil, an old man at forty-two, under a blanket, coughing. He’s had five nationalities, without even moving house.’ For more than a century, the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany shared a neighbour, Neutral Moresnet, a completely forgotten mini-state that is now part of German-speaking Belgium but from 1816 to 1919 had its own flag, its own government, its own police force (one rural constable), its own postage stamp (valid for two weeks) and its own national anthem (in Esperanto, no less). It covered an area of 3.5 square kilometres, featuring zinc, distilleries, cabarets, brothels, smugglers, philanthropists and forests.

His trademark has become a personal, erudite and stirring form of history writing.

VRIJ NEDERLAND

In ‘Zinc’, his official ‘Dutch Book Week 2016’ essay, David Van Reybrouck tells the remarkable story of this forgotten country, based on the improbable fate of one of its citizens.



AUTHOR



David Van Reybrouck (b. 1971) is an archaeologist, a philosopher and a writer. His digging and thinking result in literary nonfiction, theatre plays, poetry and prose. After his award-winning debut, Van Reybrouck received national and international praise and prizes for his epic history of Congo, as well as for his urgent call for democratic reform. In 2016 he wrote the official Dutch Book Week essay. Listen to David Van Reybrouck on 'Kopje Koffie' ('Cup of Coffee'), a podcast produced by The Dutch Embassy in Berlin, the Dutch Foundation for Literature, in cooperation with Flanders Literature and the General Representation of the Government of Flanders. *Photo © Lenny Oosterwijk*

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