

Bestseller that helps explain
Belgium

The Belgian Labyrinth

GEERT VAN ISTENDAEL

In 'The Belgian Labyrinth' Van Istendael guides his readers through the history of Belgium, from the hunting parties of Emperor Charlemagne through Spanish, Austrian, French and Dutch rule to the creation of the Kingdom of Belgium in 1830. He describes a federation in which the Flemish, Wallonian, Brussels-based and German-speaking populations, with all their individual idiosyncrasies, have to muddle along together.

The author sketches thematic impressions of his country, analyzing the history of its language battles, social developments, church, state and politics with the sharp eye of an objective observer.

A coup de coeur

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Wishing neither to condemn nor to condone his country's past, Van Istendael suggests that the Belgians have made a virtue of disfigurement while introducing some kind of labyrinthine order to their toilsome chaos. He introduces the reader to unsuspected treasures and hidden scandals. Is Belgium starting to look like a failed imitation of a Magritte painting? Or is it in fact pointing the way to new, unimaginable forms of peaceful coexistence? 'Don't trample on Belgium. Don't let this little kingdom disappear, because if Belgium didn't exist, then Europe would have to invent it'.



AUTHOR



Geert Van Istendael (b. 1947) was a renowned reporter and newsreader for Flemish television. Since 1993 he has worked as an independent writer based in Brussels, publishing novels and collections of short stories, fairy tales, essays and poetry. He has earned great respect for his translations of German writers Goethe, Hölderlin and Brecht, and is the celebrated author of well-documented and, not least for foreigners, instructive books about Belgium and Brussels.

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TRANSLATION RIGHTS Hayo Deinum - hdeinum@atlascontact.nl

TRANSLATION GRANTS Patrick Peeters - patrick@flandersliterature.be