

The pain of losing language and the comfort of regaining it

Speechless

TOM LANOYE

This successful novel tells the story of the life and death of the author's parents, particularly his mother's. After a thrombosis, she suffers from aphasia and behavioural problems and never recovers sufficiently to be able to live at home. Her son, the author, is deeply touched by her loss of speech, which – as an amateur actress – had been so dear to her, and his impotent anger at this from time to time makes his story a 'song of curses'. In compensation – and as a grateful and moving homage – he reconstructs her life in the abundance of language that used to be hers.

A playful, touching, and verbally extravagant memoir-novel of grief

KIRKUS REVIEWS

This is an 'unadorned account', an informal, honest testimony of a mother by her son, in which much is in what is not mentioned: good nature, gratitude, endearment, closeness. At the same time, Lanoye reflects on the actual function of writing and the vital importance of language in these circumstances. In a wider context, 'Speechless' is about a personal experience recognisable to everyone, woven into a lively fresco of a generation, a period, a life style, with astonishing brush strokes of 'la flamande profonde', masterful in its popular realism and the richness of its language.

'Speechless' far transcends the purely biographical story of a mother. It has become the portrait of a generation, of family life in the sixties and seventies.

DE TIJD



AUTHOR



Tom Lanoye (b. 1958) is a literary one-man business, and one of the most popular authors in Flanders and the Netherlands. His theatre work, novels, short stories, novellas, columns, poetry and performances can only be described as exceptional. He established his reputation with the autobiographical coming of age novel 'Cardboard Boxes'. Photo © René Los

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