

The Belgian king on a guided tour
in a working class district

Letter to Boudewijn

WALTER VAN DEN BROECK

'Letter to Boudewijn' is framed as a single long letter from a Flemish author – Walter van den Broeck – to Boudewijn I, King of the Belgians, occasioned by the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Kingdom of Belgium. The author sets out to confront the king with the reality kept hidden during previous official visits. The king is exposed to this hard reality during an incognito visit to the working class district of Olen, the place in which the author was born. The imaginary tour reveals the pathetic conditions in which the inhabitants live and describes how they escape their misery in football, cards, pigeons, the lottery and other dreams.

The best book to have appeared by a Dutch-speaking Belgian in the last decade. It is moving, interesting and a literary jewel in terms of its form.

VRIJ NEDERLAND

'Letter to Boudewijn' is thus a lesson in social history, a meticulous description of village life, and an autobiography all in one. It is a book in which the author confronts himself with his origins, with the shift from material to spiritual poverty, and with sorrow at the loss of solid ground in a group of people who stick together.



AUTHOR



Walter van den Broeck (b. 1941) grew up in a working class district which moulded him into a writer. His classic 1980 novel 'Letter to Boudewijn' inspired him to write his magnum opus, the four part cycle 'The Siege of Laken'. Novelist, playwright and scriptwriter, van den Broeck is at his best in cycles, in portraying his own and other people's families, and is a chronicler of Flemish (social) history. *Photo © Koen Broos*

ORIGINAL TITLE Brief aan Boudewijn (1980, De Bezige Bij, 316 pp.)

PRIZES Belgian State Prize for Narrative Prose, Dirk Martens Prize, Henriëtte Roland-Holst Prize

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