

FICTION

A sprawling self-portrait

# The Charred Alphabet

PAUL DE WISPELAERE

'The Charred Alphabet' follows the life of the author from October 1990 to September 1991 and draws associative connections between current affairs and events from the past. This literary diary is a colourful mixture of stories, impressions of and reflections on literature, art, love, nature, politics and growing old. A thread runs through it all, one of sensitive memories of lost loves interwoven with the experience of new love, marked inevitably by the process of ageing.

## A masterpiece

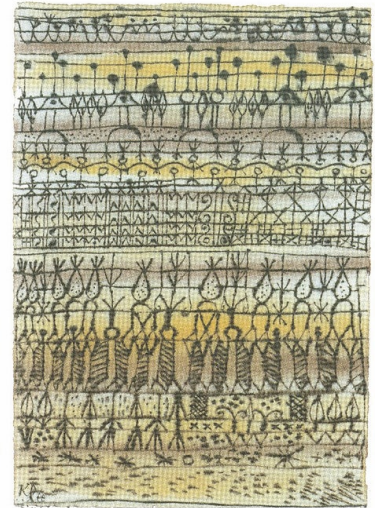
HET NIEUWSBLAD

According to the author, 'The Charred Alphabet' – the title is taken from a verse by Octavio Paz – is a perfect articulation of De Wispelaere's 'middle position' in life. Born too late to experience his parents' still mythical world of craftsmanship, and born too early to fully embrace modernity and technological progress. The title also alludes to a language and a world shot to pieces by two world wars. At the same time, it contains an image of new life: the silence that follows the burning of that old, dilapidated alphabet sounds like the opening chord of a new language.

## The most beautiful love-hymn in our literature

HET LAATSTE NIEUWS

PAUL DE WISPELAERE



Het verkoolde alfabet

## AUTHOR



**Paul de Wispelaere** (1928-2016) was professor of modern Dutch literature, served as editor of literary journals and was responsible for a vast amount of literary critique, essays and fiction. In 1998 he was awarded the triennial 'Prijz der Nederlandse Letteren', the most prestigious literature prize in Flanders and the Netherlands. *Photo © Frank Toussaint*

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