

FICTION

A mysterious search for mankind

Will-o'-the-Wisp

WILLEM ELSSCHOT

'Will-O'-The-Wisp', the last of Elsschot's novellas, tells the story of the nocturnal search by the rather washed-up Frans Laarmans and three Afghan sailors for the mysterious Maria van Dam. However, Maria proves impossible to find, and like the sleazy nighttime characters who cross their path, the police are unable to set Laarmans and his companions on the right road.

Since the questing four fail to find Maria, their search assumes almost metaphysical dimensions. That impression is strengthened by the fact that Elsschot has spiced his story with all kinds of religious references.

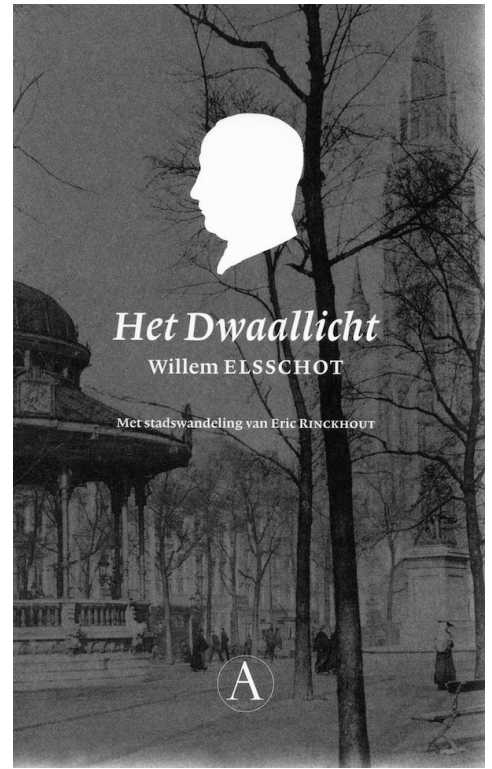
A finely tempered piece, with an intuitive sympathy for strange modes of feeling

THE TIMES

The simple plot of a fruitless search in an urban setting contains undertones of a wider parable of the quest, thus making a concentrated summary of the themes that run through all Elsschot's novels. The mixture of longing and disillusionment that characterises Elsschot's earlier works is here crystallised into near perfection: with deceptive simplicity, Elsschot depicts human endeavours as amounting to no more than chasing phantom lights in the distance. Full of sadness and melancholy, but also comic and full of irony.

A jewel in the treasure chest of the Dutch language

KADER ABDOLAH



AUTHOR



The works of **Willem Elsschot** (1882-1960) have become classics of Dutch language literature. His masterpiece 'Cheese' established him as a sophisticated stylist. His style is concise and to the point and highly appealing to the modern reader.

ORIGINAL TITLE Het dwaallicht (1946, Van Kampen, 78 pp.)

RIGHTS SOLD English (Delte / Heinemann / Maxwell / New Amsterdam Books / Subtropics / University of Florida), French (Maren Sell / Le Castor Astral), German (Unionverlag), Italian (Maia / Iperborea), Estonian (Looming 7), Danish (Husets Forlag), Swedish (CKM Förlag), Hungarian (Gondolat), Polish (PIW), Czech (Jiskry), Russian (Progress)

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