

Experiences of a colonial civil servant

Gangrene 1 - Black Venus

JEF GEERAERTS

In what remains a controversial novel, 'Gangrene - Black Venus', set in the Belgian Congo at the end of the 1950s, Geeraerts portrays a white colonial civil servant who wants to free himself from the oppression of Western bourgeois mentality. In an evocative style, he describes the protagonist's obsession for a black woman, combining violence and eroticism. His life consists of hunting, sleeping, eating, drinking and copulating: man in his most primitive state.

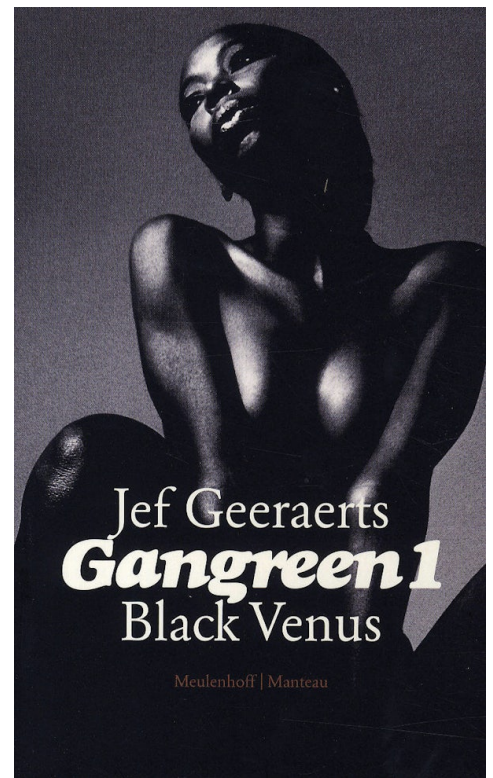
I do recommend that young people read Gangrene, but with critical guidance. And that's precisely what's been missing for years.

NADIA NSAYI

'Black Venus' is one of the most talked-about novels from post-war Flanders. To this day, the controversy surrounding the publication remains intense. Originally lauded as brilliant, today the book is mainly decried for extolling racism, colonial despotism and misogyny. The debate around the book is still very much alive: on the one hand there is recognition of its literary-historical value and the innovative writing Geeraerts introduced to Flemish literature. The unpunctuated language that 'flows like lava' is considered iconic within Flemish modernism and earned the author the triennial Flemish State Prize for Narrative Prose. At the same time, 'Gangrene 1' undeniably represents a colonial, racist and misogynist perspective, which must be read within its historical context.

With his tornado prose, Geeraerts has broken the mould of the classical novel

DE STANDAARD



AUTHOR



Jef Geeraerts (1930-2015) was born in Antwerp. The bourgeois environment from which he originated and his experience as a civil servant in the Belgian Congo left their mark on his literary work. He published his debut in 1962 and built up an impressive body of works. From the 1980s, Geeraerts devoted himself to crime novels.

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