

Orpheus and Eurydice

Lament for Agnes

MARNIX GIJSEN

'Lament for Agnes' is essentially an autobiographical novel. The character of Agnes is in many respects that of Gijzen's own fiancé who died of TB, while the narrator has much in common with the authors as a young man. 'Lament for Agnes' is a novel that is once deeply personal and a fully independent work of art.

Superior style

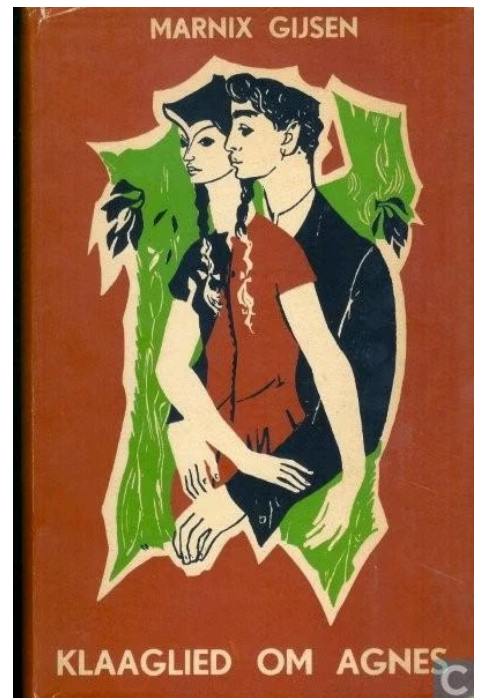
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The story takes place at the end of World War I and a few years afterwards. An introvert scholar, a bookworm, slowly discovers the outside world. His relationship with his mother is poor and he has little sense of reality. His work environment (a boring office), the compulsory military service and, above all, the encounter with the sober Agnes and her impoverished surroundings allow him to taste the 'real' world. With Agnes, he enters into an ardent platonic love affair. It is short-lived, though, as Agnes is suffering from TB and, despite being nursed in sanatoria, she dies. His lament is not only for the lost Agnes but for the love that he never demonstrated.

An unusually accomplished book

LIBERTINAGE

Coming of age and a predilection for the pure are the primary themes of this book. Meanwhile, in an almost pragmatic, but ironic manner, Gijzen also criticises bureaucracy, church and military service in his story.



AUTHOR



Marnix Gijzen (1899-1984), a pseudonym for Jan Albert Goris, was born in Antwerp. He obtained a PhD in history and moral sciences at the Catholic University of Leuven and went on to study at the Universities of Freiburg, Paris (Sorbonne) and London (London School of Economics). He started his literary career as a poet in the expressionist group 'Ruimte' (Space). He won the Belgian State Prize for Narrative Prose in 1959 and the Dutch-Flemish Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren in 1974.

ORIGINAL TITLE Klaaglied om Agnes (1951, Nijgh & Van Ditmar, 214 pp.)

PRIZES Grand Prize for Literature

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