

A little man reaching for the stars

Soft Soap/The Leg

WILLEM ELSSCHOT

The novellas 'Soft Soap' (1924) and 'The Leg' (1938) are two highlights from Elsschot's fiction, linked by a common narrative and featuring the recurring tragicomic Keatonesque character of Frans Laarmans who also appears in 'Will-o'-the-Wisp' (1946).

Elsschot possesses the rare knack of making a reader laugh, squirm and sob, all at the same time

THE NEW YORK TIMES

In 'Soft Soap', the disillusioned Laarmans falls under the spell of the charismatic business guru Boorman. Their collaboration gives him a new identity and the promise of riches, but at what cost? Laarmans helps edit the grand-sounding General World Review, actually a glossy compilation of cliché articles pasted together and sold in vast numbers to gullible businesspeople such as the disabled Mrs. Lauwereyssen. As she orders thousands of copies of the worthless magazine and is led into financial ruin, the inexperienced Laarmans feels immediate remorse, but the seasoned Boorman has no mercy.

In the later sequel, 'The Leg', the tables are turned. Some years later, Boorman accidentally knocks Mrs. Lauwereyssen over in the market and discovers she has lost a leg. His conscience begins to prick and, in a sudden bout of humanity, the con man stakes everything to pay back his victim.

'Soft Soap/The Leg' were made into a film in 2000.

Elsschot's joyful narrative sparkles with sarcasm... His oeuvre as can be counted among the greats of European literature

FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG



AUTHOR



Willem Elsschot's (1882-1960) works are classics of Dutch language literature. A dry sharp humour runs through all his books, but never at the expense of a generous compassion for his characters.

ORIGINAL TITLE Lijmen/Het been (1924/1938, 239 pp. Latest edition by Athenaeum, 2021.)

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