

POETRY

The poet and essayist who taught his people how to read poetry

The poems

HERMAN DE CONINCK

De Coninck's poems, described as "strange, original, and absolutely fabulous" by the renowned Serbian-American poet Charles Simic, owe their popularity to the clear parlando style, the balanced tone and the familiarity of themes like love, mortality and loss. For De Coninck, poetry was, sometimes literally, an exercise in loss. In later, more romantic volumes – from 'Sounding like an Oboe' and 'The Acres of Memory' to the posthumously published 'Fingerprints' – the wordplay makes way for a sparser melancholy.

His poems seem so easy and so obvious, but their core is the sense of being alone in a silent world

HUGO BREMS

A constant in his poems is the urge to bring poetry closer to everyday reality without adopting the pose of a distant observer. In his poems, De Coninck often takes a familiar situation as the point of departure, things like an autumn walk or a birthday party. He was a poet of understatement, who countered sentimentality with ironic humour, while also admiring the grandeur in the work of poets like the American bohemian Edna St. Vincent Millay, whose poems he translated. Contagious enthusiasm and a great love for language were the gentle weapons with which the poet and essayist strove to make poetry comprehensible.

**FLANDERS
LITERATURE**

Herman de Coninck
De gedichten

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AUTHOR



When **Herman de Coninck** (1944-1997) passed away, Flanders lost one her most widely-read poets. The poet and essayist who taught his people how to read poetry was no more, but even after his death, his poetry debut, 'Limber Love', a collection of playful love poems, remains one of the best-sold volumes of Dutch-language poetry. But it was not just as a poet that he left his mark on the literary world. As a poetry critic in daily and weekly newspapers and as the editor of the *Nieuw Wereldtijdschrift*, aiming for a cross-fertilisation between literature and journalism, he developed into one of the Low Countries' most prominent guides to poetry. *Photo © Chris Van Houts*

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