

FICTION

A weightless book about heavy issues

Wanderland

PAUL BAETEN GRONDA

Three days before a major exhibition of his paintings in Venice Igor Nast receives a call from his half-brother, summoning him to Switzerland to his father's deathbed. A father of whom he cherishes not a single memory. Igor meets his half brothers and sisters, and his exceptional cousin. They are waiting for the father to die: an awkward situation for a family that is particularly good at keeping a distance.

Gronda writes clear prose, melancholy, but seasoned with a slight irony that alleviates the weight

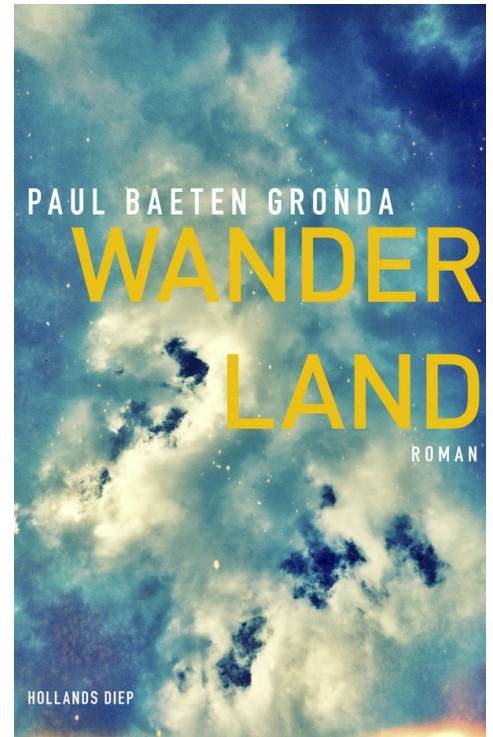
HAARLEMS DAGBLAD

Meanwhile, Igor Nast looks back at the steep climb of his artistic career and how it is overshadowed by the disappearance of his lover, Charlie Days. Igor is literally all alone in the world: no lover, his younger sister killed, his mother dead, his father dying and estranged from his family. But his father turns out to have one last surprise up his sleeve. He talks Igor into sneaking off to where he left the one real love in his life, Nova Gorica in Slovenia. They spend the last few days in an attempt at rapprochement.

'Wanderland' shows the close connection between love and loneliness. It is an evocative novel, written in subtle prose with an intriguing suggestiveness. It succeeds in using short scenes to delicately broach such great themes as love, displacement and loss.

A mixture between Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* and Thomas Vinterberg's *Festen (The Celebration)* ****

DE MORGEN



AUTHOR



Paul Baeten Gronda (b. 1981) studied scriptwriting and worked as an editor for a television production house. He also is a regular columnist for Flemish newspapers and magazines. Baeten Gronda debuted in 2008 with 'Together We Say Farewell to Love'. 'Straus Park', a cosmopolitan novel about love, family and faith, was translated into German. His fifth novel, *Wanderland*, has been acclaimed as a major step forward in his literary work. *Photo © Mauro Maiolo*

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