

POETRY

New constellations

Choir

PETER VERHELST

For poet and novelist Peter Verhelst, creation equals destruction. His motifs and images interlock, repel and cancel each other out. Verhelst's work is immune to notions such as unity and comprehensibility; rather than taking the reader by the hand he prefers instead his language to derail. His poetry is considered intractable and sensual, bathed in apocalyptic atmosphere and brimming with references to literature, the visual arts, dance, theatre, music and classical mythology.

A monument, in the oeuvre of Verhelst as well as in the history of poetry

DE STANDAARD

Even though Verhelst pronounced the poet Verhelst dead, an eighth collection did materialise, under the title 'Alaska' (2003). Alaska features a heat-sensitive cover bearing a poem that could only be read when the cover came into human contact. Critics have interpreted it as an attempt to encapsulate the destructive in poetry. In contrast to the rigorous form-experimentation of the earlier collections, the poems in 'Alaska' seem to veer closer towards the traditional, although Verhelst succeeds in developing an own experimental, almost physical language on the great themes of love and death. Verhelst continues in a similar vein in what is his next 'final' collection, 'New Constellations' (Nieuwe sterrenbeelden; 2008): poems concerned with romantic love that are completely stripped of irony. It also includes the most classic of poetical forms, the sonnet. 'We total flame' (Wij totale vlam) was published in 2014, receiving a VSB Poetry Prize nomination and his most recent collection 'Sing sing' (Zing zing) was published in 2016.

'Choir' is the first anthology of poems Peter Verhelst selected himself out of published and unpublished works. This new context forced Verhelst not only to change the chronological order, but often also to a rewriting of several poems.



AUTHOR



Peter Verhelst (b. 1962) is a novelist, scriptwriter, myth and theatre maker, poet and picture book author all in one. As a child he wanted to become a painter, but decided to write from a live model instead. His work has been praised for its powerful images, the sensuality and richness of its language and the author's unbridled imagination. In 2018 he won the Sybren Polet Prize for Literature, a prize for authors with an experimental literary oeuvre. In 2021 he was awarded the Constantijn Huygens Prize for his oeuvre which the jury described as 'breathtaking'.
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TRANSLATION RIGHTS Marijke Nagtegaal - m.nagtegaal@debezigebij.nl

TRANSLATION GRANTS Patrick Peeters - patrick@flandersliterature.be