

# A chameleontic quest for identity

## Chameleon

CHARLOTTE VAN DEN BROECK

Charlotte Van den Broeck won her poetical spurs in a similar way to Maud Vanhauwaert, namely onstage. The accompanying familiarity of her name provided her debut 'Chameleon' with the necessary impetus. 'Chameleon' would appear to be the perfect title for a debut volume of poetry.

Changeability is the chameleon's foremost characteristic: the animal adopts various colours depending on its surroundings at any given time. By giving her first book this title, Charlotte Van den Broeck seems to be aware of the fact that not all the poems are of equal strength, but are still part of her identity. The possible criticism overcome by this attitude distances it from the Schein des Naiven that Friedrich Schiller ascribes to the female gender in the motto prefacing the volume.

### A surprisingly strong debut

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At the same time, the chameleon's changeable and convertible nature is an appropriate image to summarise the search for female identity in this volume. The poems deal with landscapes, the relationship with her grandfather, with a lover and especially with her mother, but the recurring theme is that of an I in search of identity. However, this identity appears as something difficult to attain, because it is inherent in a process of continuous assimilation to others and what is other ('I am however available in various flavours' as the poem 'Charlotte Pudding' has it) and of reacting against this ('the mother is a stone', as a line says in 'Genealogy'). The conquest of the self lies in this double bind that a chameleon puts into practice on a daily basis.



### AUTHOR



**Charlotte Van den Broeck** (b. 1991) studied English and German Literature and holds a Master in Drama (Verbal Arts) at the Royal Conservatoire in Antwerp. She has published two prize winning collections of poetry: *Chameleon* (2015) and *Nachtroer* (2017). She is known for her distinctive performances, in which she searches for a dramatic approach to the 'speakability' and physicality of oral poetry. She performed at various festivals, e.g. Saint Amour (2015), Poesiefestival Berlin, Woordfees in Stellenbosch, Ledbury Poetry Festival. In 2016, together with author Arnon Grunberg, she was the youngest writer to hold the opening speech of the Frankfurt Book Fair. In 2019 she published her prose debut *Bold Ventures*, an essayistic quest for thirteen tragic architects, who committed suicide because of a fatal flaw in their designs. The book appeared on the Bestsellers List and was shortlisted for the Boekenbon Literature Prize. Listen to Charlotte Van den Broeck on 'Kopje Koffie' ('Cup of Coffee'), a podcast produced by The Dutch Embassy in Berlin, the Dutch Foundation for Literature, in cooperation with Flanders Literature and the General Representation of the Government of Flanders.

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