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Oscar van den Boogaard

Majesty

Original title: *Majesteit*

NOVEL

A fascinating, intriguing and revealing novel about the woman behind Queen Beatrix

MAJESTY gives us a speculative, behind-the-scenes glimpse of the Dutch royal family at a time when the House of Orange is having to show its human side.

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About the author

Since his debut DENTZ (1990), Oscar van den Boogaard (1964) has written eight novels under his own name and two novels under the pseudonyms Emmanuel Lipp and Pearl Sweetlife (with Steven Van Watermeulen). His best known works are JULIA'S DELIGHT, A BED FULL OF FOAM and THE VERTICAL BEACH. In his work, Oscar van den Boogaard shows an extraordinary ability to empathise with women.

Van den Boogaard also writes for theatre. His first play 'Lucia melts' (2001) has been staged in festivals in Germany, Sweden, Norway and was invited for the Edinburgh Festival 2004. Nest (2004) opened on the Lille 2004 festival.

The work of Van den Boogaard has received numerous nominations for literary prizes and has been widely translated.



About the book

Traditions, love, sorrow, doubt, intrigue and power

It is the day of the Queen's speech. A year after the death of her beloved Claus, Beatrix is doubting everything: the monarchy, the reliability of her sons, and even herself. Tensions run high when Prime Minister Balkenende wants to revise the Queen's speech at the last moment. Beatrix protests. She's had enough of dancing to the tune of others. The States-General hold their breath. Will Beatrix defend her kingdom? Will she act in its best interest? Tradition, love, sorrow, doubt, intrigue and power. At long last we get to meet the woman behind Queen Beatrix.

Based on Ger Beukenkamp's film scenario MAJESTY.

The film of the same name – produced by Fu Works, IDTV and VARA – premieres on 27 September 2010 at the Utrecht Film Festival. It is directed by Peter de Baan.

Ger Beukenkamp and Peter de Baan have collaborated before on the TV films *THE CROWN* (2005), about the political complications of the wedding of Willem-Alexander and Princess Maxima, and *THE PRINCE AND THE GIRL* (2007), about the wedding of Prince Johan Friso and Mabel Wisse Smit.

MAJESTY will be released in cinemas on 28 October 2010 by A-Film Distribution, starring Carine Crutzen, Jeroen Willems, Gijs Naber, Eelco Smits, Hadewych Minis, and Marcel Hensema.

Oscar van den Boogaard, *Majesteit*

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Bibliography

Dentz (novel, 1990)

Fremdkörper (FOREIGN BODY) (novel, 1991)

Bruno's optimisme (BRUNO'S OPTIMISM) (novel, 1993)

De heerlijkheid van Julia (JULIA'S DELIGHT) (novel, 1995)

Liefdesdood (LOVE'S DEATH) (novel, 1999)

Sensaties (SENSATIONS) (diary, 2000)

Een bed vol schuim (A BED FULL OF FOAM) (novel, 2002)

Inspiration point (diary, 2004)

Het vertical strand (THE VERTICAL BEACH) (novel, 2005)

Magic Man (novel, 2007)

Snobisme voor beginners (SNOBBERY FOR BEGINNERS) (nonfiction, 2008)

Meer dan een minnaar (MORE THAN A LOVER) (novel, 2010)

Pseudonym Emmanuel Lipp (together with Steven Van Watermeulen)

Chinchilla's song (CHINCHILLA'S SONG) (novel, 2006)

Pseudonym Pearl Sweatlife (together with Steven Van Watermeulen)

Zeeduivel voor Amalia (SEADEVIL FOR AMALIA) (roman, 2008)

Awards

JULIA'S DELIGHT: ECI-prijs, nominatie De Gouden Uil en Libris Literatuurprijs

LOVE'S DEATH: De Gouden Uil, De Generale Bank Literatuurprijs.

SNOBBERY FOR BEGINNERS: Nominatie Jan Hanlo Essay Prijs 2009

MORE THAN A LOVER: Nominated for AKO Literatur Prize 2010

Rights

LOVE'S DEATH: Germany (Fischer), (UK Farrar, Straus and Giroux), Frankrijk (Sabine Wespieser)

JULIA'S DELIGHT: Spain (Andrès Bello), Germany (Fischer), Frankrijk (Sabine Wespieser)

A BED FULL OF FOAM: Frankrijk (Sabine Wespieser)

THE VERTICAL BEACH: Frankrijk (Sabine Wespieser)

International press

'Oscar van den Boogaard is one of the Netherlands' most fascinating writers. His dramatic talent turns reality into fantasy, and fantasy into reality.' – *Die Zeit*

'Oscar van den Boogaard creates a compelling, delightful and always astonishing universe.' – *Le Monde*

'All or nothing. That seems to be the motto under which Oscar van den Boogaard is creating an oeuvre unparalleled in the Dutch literature of recent decades.' – *Ons Erfdeel*

'Van den Boogaard brings literature back to the essentials, to what it is all about.' – *Het Parool*

'A new highlight in the extensive and outstanding oeuvre of the expatriate Dutchman.' – *Standaard der Letteren* about *Het verticale strand*

'Those who dare to immerse themselves in his mysterious and sensitive imagination, end up in a wonderfully deep sea that critical, analytical sound can barely penetrate.' – *Rob Schouten* in *Trouw*

About MORE THAN A LOVER

'Van den Boogaard unfolds an impressive package of settings, atmospheres and moods, but he creates real characters, flesh-and-blood people, you might almost say, with whom you can empathise, without any irritating, contrived social commitment. (...) His vision is original.' – *Het Parool*

'Delicious observations in chunks of worldly wisdom and chunks of language on which it is delightful to chew.' – *HUMO*

'In his tenth, virtuoso novel, Oscar van den Boogaard doesn't slacken his grip.' – *NRC Handelsblad*

Loss, Longing and Lamentation. The Work of Oscar van den Boogaard

Since the publication in 1995 of his great novel *Julia's Delight* (*De heerlijkheid van Julia*), the Dutch writer Oscar van den Boogaard, who was born in 1964, has been considered to be one of the finest literary talents in the Dutch-speaking world. The novel depicts the life of Julia Callebaut, a woman married to an older man, whose greatest delight is what a seventeenth-century text so beautifully termed 'pretiosissimum donum Dei' the coupling of man and woman, and the associated ecstasy. What she cannot find with her husband she gets from an even older, but randier, farmer who lives a hundred yards up the road. Or, when the fire seems to be going out there too, from the sandy beaches of Brazil. This is much more than a regional novel; it can also be regarded as a novel of ideas, in which the author makes his character into the vehicle for his view that you must make your imagination accord with reality and vice versa. For Van den Boogaard ecstasy is the greatest good.

Julia's Delight was nominated for three major literary awards, comparable to the Booker Prize. The light tone of the work was rightly praised, together with the supple, associative language, rich in imagery and the astounding composition. These qualities are to be found in all Van den Boogaard's books. They are studies in passion and longing such as Dutch literature has rarely produced. In his empathy for female characters and their emotional life, and in the expressive power of his prose, the author is the equal of his predecessors, Hugo Claus, of catholic origin, and Jan Siebelink, born into the Calvinist faith. Yet he is free from the religious past that played such a big part in their lives. His writing was shaped by his youth which, because of his father's mobility (he was a professional soldier) and his mother's alcoholism, lacked stability and security. Born in the small town of Harderwijk, on the IJsselmeer, he spent his early years in the former Dutch colony of Surinam and subsequently grew up, with his two sisters, in the little town of Deventer. After studying French in Montpellier and Law in Amsterdam he established himself as a solicitor in Brussels, but after a year opted for writing. In Brussels, so he said, he felt at home for the first time in his life. Yet presently he lives in Berlin.

For all their 'oceanic' longing, his characters are always looking for security. They are incapable of forming lasting relationships, but remain optimistic in their striving for unity of body and soul. The paradox in all Van den Boogaard's work is that characters want to feel safe in strong relationships while at the same time claiming considerable independence in those relationships. It looks to us very like the paradox of the present generation of young Europeans, those in their thirties and early forties, often without children, many of them divorced or never married, but seriously searching.

In the novels that preceded *Julia's delight* Van den Boogaard also examined family relationships. In his first novel *Dentz* (1990) he concentrated on a narcissistic widow from Amsterdam-South, who cannot let her son go. *Fremdkörper* (1991), set in Brussels, has three characters who test the boundaries of the possible with regard to love. In *Bruno's Optimism* (*Bruno's Optimisme*, 1993) the homosexual, Bruno Oblanski, tries to escape from his life in the Alps: particularly in the relationship between the title character and his friend, the novel shows all kinds of other nuances of passion.

In the novel *Love's Death* (*Liefdesdood*, 1997), which also appeared in an English translation, the passion has to be repressed, while it develops relentlessly in the shadow cast by the death of a little girl. A woman is there when the little eight-year-old girl who lives next

door to her overdoes her game of holding her breath under water for as long as she can, and drowns. The woman is called Inez, and she has a relationship with Hans. The drowned girl, Vera, is the daughter of Oda and Paul, a big cheese in the army. This Oda, as we readers immediately suspect, has every reason to feel guilty over her daughter's drowning, but precisely why this is we only find out at the end of the novel. And then again an older colleague of her husband, one Emile, has something to do with it.

Love's Death is composed of four parts. The action takes place in periods far separate from each other in time: 10 August 1973, November 1980, no date i.e. probably also in 1980, and 1987. And this is for a reason. Love's Death begins with a sentence which draws its significance from repetition. 'Once there was a sailor who swallowed the end of a rope and through the convolutions of his intestines was run up the mast'. One could see this image as a metaphor for the life that one brings upon oneself. Such a death by guilt is a life-sentence, however much the four main characters try to get away from the fact – Inez and Hans, for instance, by taking a foster-daughter, Paul by going to Surinam, his wife by seeking escape in adultery. Hanged with the rope they swallowed. The remarkable thing about the composition is that Inez, the woman on whom the spotlight falls at the beginning, and her husband Hans, virtually vanish from the story after the first part. They briefly reappear to lend, as it were, the little American girl who is staying with them to the couple who have lost their daughter through drowning. Daisy, for that is the little girl's name, seems to fit the role of substitute daughter for a while, but when it comes to it she disappears as inconspicuously as she arrived. And then the fourth and final part tells us who is the real father of the drowned girl. With hindsight, this explains why, from the time she drowned, her mother Oda, has more or less banished her husband from her bed and her vagina.

These people wallow in their grief, particularly the mother, but not because they had loved the child so very much. At least, one only feels that at one point, with the father. And it is precisely the relationship between Vera's parents that explains the book's title. The fact that Vera's death means the end of Oda's love for her husband – so great and unending is her grief, so seemingly impossible to share – can only be explained by the secret Oda shared with, again, the even older general, Emile; note the parallel here with Julia's Delight. The book also contains beautifully written pages that are worth enjoying in themselves, where commas replace full stops and string sentences together to form lyrical passages.

Since Love's Death Van den Boogaard has developed into a highly versatile author, whose ability to write lively and witty dialogue has led not only to a quartet of plays, but also to the beautiful, intimate novel *A Bed Full of Foam* (*Een bed vol schuim*, 2002). This work adds another dimension to the interpretation of Love's Death: the longing for a degree of self-containment, for the maintenance of one's own domain in whatever loving relationship, which is still unexpressed in the earlier novel but made explicit here. In this the prose of Oscar van den Boogaard transcends the everyday realism so typical of Dutch prose and takes on a broader meaning.

Wam de Moor

Oscar van den Boogaard, *Love's death*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001: 152 pp.
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