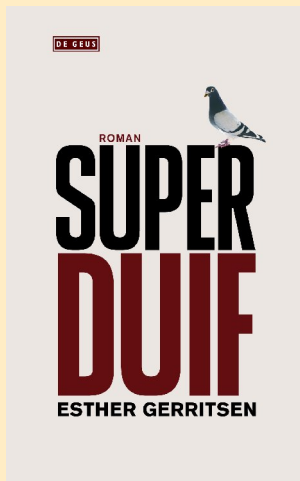




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Esther Gerritsen

Super Dove

Original title: *Superduif*

NOVEL

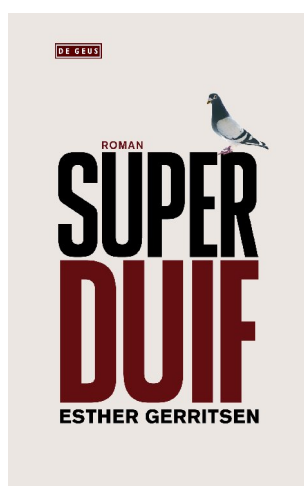
Faster than Superman, more alert than Batman: it's Super Dove!

A novel about the irrepressible urge to soar above the crowd.

'A writing style that grabs you by the short hairs: clear, rhythmical, brimming with humour and at times insightful in its recounting of her characters' thoughts.' – *de Volkskrant*

About the author

Esther Gerritsen (1972) was already an established playwright when she made her prose debut in 2000 with the collection of short stories PRIVILEGED CONSCIOUSNESS. This new departure immediately gained her recognition as one of the great up-and-coming prose talents. With her two subsequent novels, BETWEEN ONE PERSON and NORMAL DAYS, she more than lived up to those high expectations. In 2003, De Geus also published PLAYS, a collection of plays that Esther Gerritsen wrote between 1999 and 2003. She subsequently decided to stop writing for theatre and focussed exclusively on prose. In 2008 her universally acclaimed third novel THE SORRY LITTLE GOD was published.



About the book

I was a dove. A big, ugly dove. This wasn't the hero I wanted to be.

At an early age, Bonnie already knows she is destined to soar above the crowd. When she is eleven, she jumps over a garden gate and finds herself floating for a few seconds. Shortly afterwards she sees her body transform into that of a huge and rather ugly dove. She realises that she now belongs to that select group of heroes who have the ability to avert catastrophe and rescue people from danger. After her feats of heroism Bonnie always changes back into the nondescript young girl she is. Those nearest and dearest to her worry about her growing madness ... all except for her friend Ine, who relies on their friendship.

[Esther Gerritsen, *Superduif*](#)

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Bibliography

Bevoorrecht bewustzijn (PRIVILEGED CONSCIOUSNESS) (2000, stories)
Tussen een persoon (BETWEEN ONE PERSON) (2002, novel)
Toneel (PLAYS) (2003, collected plays)
Normale dagen (NORMAL DAYS) (2005, novel)
De kleine miezerige god (THE SORRY LITTLE GOD) (2008, novel)
Superduif (SUPER DOVE) (2010, novel)

Prizes and awards

2001 – Dutch-German Youth Theatre Prize in Duisburg
 2001 – Charlotte Köhler Scholarship
 2004 – Halewijn Prize of the city of Roermond
 2005 – Dif/BNG Prize
 2005 – NORMAL DAYS voted best novel by readers of the magazine *BOEK*
 2008 – Dutch-German Youth Theatre Prize in Duisburg
 2008 – Dutch-German Kaas & Kappes Playwriting Prize, for the play *De Kopvoeter*
 2010 – nominated for the Gerard Walschap Prize

The press about NORMAL DAYS

‘The power of the unspoken in an exceptional novel.’ – *de Volkskrant*

‘Breathtakingly beautiful (...) I never expected the description of the silence at someone’s deathbed to be so exciting. Read this book!’ – *BOEK*

‘NORMAL DAYS once again reveals the author’s extraordinary stylistic ability to create character.’ – *Spits*

‘Gerritsen has told her story well: modest, observant and crystal clear. The content is occasionally reminiscent of Gerard Reve’s *De avonden* (‘The Evenings’), although NORMAL DAYS is never cynical.’ – *Het Parool*

‘A suffocating book, full of stubborn silences. (...) Gerritsen is the uncrowned champion of the stationary, of prose turning on its own axis.’ – *De Morgen*

‘She juggles with both balls and – surprise, surprise – they both stay in the air. Reality is complex and Gerritsen’s modest, pleasingly original novel does justice to the fact.’ – *Vrij Nederland*

‘Gerritsen cuts to the quick, while avoiding ego-trips and popular psychological blah blah. In addition to praise, this writer also deserves breathless readers.’ – *Flair*

‘At a more philosophical level, Gerritsen writes about distance and involvement, loyalty and betrayal. (...) A tragedy, in all its torpidity, reticence and clumsiness.’ – *Standaard der Letteren*

The press about THE SORRY LITTLE GOD

'In her fifth book, Esther Gerritsen has grown further in stature, to the level of an author who dares to cover everything – from comic cross-talk to poignant silences – and who with seeming casualness smuggles in little poetic statements.' – *Arjan Peters* in *de Volkskrant* (5 stars)

'[Interpersonal exchange] is an inexhaustible theme that she has so far managed to treat with great dramatic, and indeed great comic, skill.' – *NRC Handelsblad*

'Gerritsen, who has written a lot of drama and easily turns her hand to good dialogue, manages to make her characters simultaneously convincing and alienating. (...) Gerritsen has grown with this book, into one of the better young novelists.' – *Trouw*

'Three hundred pages of apprehension and not a moment's boredom. All thanks to a wonderful character. (...) Gerritsen has a great feel for painful detail and writes dialogue so electric her readers can hear the pages crackle.' – *Dagblad van het Noorden*

'Gerritsen's crystal-clear ideas are so on target they sometimes make you gasp for breath.' – *Esta*

'Everything in THE SORRY LITTLE GOD is kept consistently small, which is precisely what makes this novel so great.' – *Gazet van Antwerpen Magazine*

'In THE SORRY LITTLE GOD Esther Gerritsen proves herself to be one of the most promising of our literary talents.' – *De Morgen*

Fragment from the novel

I had always hoped for *something*. I had been waiting for *something*. As if I knew that this, this so-called life of mine, couldn't be all there was. Once I had assumed that I would blossom into something beautiful. When I was little, that seemed entirely logical, wholly appropriate for me, the wondrous and oh-so-wished-for child. By the time I was eleven, I realised that beauty wasn't going to be it. So when I floated over the garden gate that morning, it fulfilled a long-cherished expectation. I was delighted and simultaneously astonished that it was going to be *this*, but not surprised, no. I didn't set out to do it. I simply took my usual run-up to hurdle over our garden gate as high as possible. I felt that second of weightlessness, where you hang in the air, with your body still moving forward, even though you've lost all contact with the ground, but this time that second stretched. The floating just carried on and on. I felt a flow of air I'd never felt before. It held me aloft for seconds. Of its own accord. And when I landed, I was already nodding my head, as if to say: Yes, yes, of course, it's *this*.

I couldn't wait to tell my parents. I didn't hesitate. I pounded on the door with my fists. I don't understand how anybody could keep such a miracle secret. My mother opened the door. I told her to call my dad.

‘Your father is phoning America,’ said my mother. I told her I had something to show them and that it was pretty important.

‘Your father is on the phone to America.’

‘Yes, I know, but this is im-por-tant.’

‘Not now,’ she repeated, ‘your father is on the phone to America.’ The word ‘important’ apparently meant very little if I was the person saying it.

‘You can still show me,’ she said, smiling very sweetly as she said it, so I really thought she was eagerly anticipating the something important (I also thought that this would actually stretch out their admiration, so I could enjoy it even longer.)

I told my mother exactly where she should stand: with her back to the conifers, at the side of the garden, so she’d get a good side view of me as I lifted off. She did as I asked. But when she was standing there obediently, among the conifers, still smiling, that look of hers seemed suspiciously familiar.

It had been no fluke. The second time it went even better.

I walked back calmly into the street and took a good, but not overly long run-up. I evidently already understood that things that come naturally to you shouldn’t require too much effort. I took a couple of long strides, accelerated, set my right foot down just in front of the gate, pushed off, extended my left leg and hup, up I went. I stuck my left leg into precisely the same place in the current of air that had lifted me earlier, and right before my mother’s eyes it did it again. I was flying. Not for very long, and not very high, but I was flying, and my mother saw it ... and my mother was impressed ... the way mothers are always impressed; she shook her head in disbelief. It was then that I recognised that look, the one that she had given me just before my flight. That was the way she used to look at me when I was a toddler and wanted to do a somersault for her. That was the way she looked when I did her a drawing. That was the way she was looking at me.

‘But I was flying,’ I said. ‘It’s incredible.’

She was still shaking her head.

‘But mum, didn’t you see it? That’s not normal.’

‘No,’ said my mother, ‘that was certainly not normal.’

‘But mum,’ I said, ‘I was ... flying ... or ... floating, right?’

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I saw it. It’s incredible,’ and then she turned and started to walk back inside.

‘Do you want some tea?’ she asked. She didn’t want to see it. She didn’t want it to be true.

I chased after her and shouted: ‘Come back! Goddamn it, come back!’

‘What did you say?’ she asked.

‘You can’t just walk away,’ I shouted, my face turning red.

‘Sweetie, what’s the matter? I don’t understand,’ said my mother.

‘Don’t call me “sweetie”,’ I yelled, as the first tears welled up. ‘You have to ...’ I was crying again. Shrieking.

‘Why don’t you take off your coat and go and sit down,’ said my mother. That made me even angrier. All that everydayness, all that getting back to usual, all that denial. So I said what I always said when I was having a row with my father or mother: ‘You don’t understand me!’ and I ran upstairs to my room.

That was how it began. My life as a superhero. They let me cry myself out. And then my father knocked on my door and asked if he could come in. He came and sat beside me on the bed.

‘Your mother told me what happened,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Quite something, eh?’ thinking I sounded very grown up.

‘Yes,’ he repeated, ‘quite something.’

‘Shall I show you?’ He gave me a look I didn’t yet recognise, but one I’d soon be seeing more and more. Somewhere between exasperation and amazement.

‘I can do it again.’

‘This isn’t really the right moment, now is it, Bonnie?’ he said. ‘First I want to talk to you about what you said to your mother.’ I had said ‘goddamn’. That was apparently more worthy of notice than a miracle.

I felt a chill come over me. Literally. As if it was already dawning on me that I was on my own in this. And I said: ‘Well, I don’t want to talk to you.’

‘Bonnie,’ he asked, ‘what’s the matter?’

‘You two don’t want to see it,’ I said.

‘Don’t want to see what?’

‘That I ...’ Suddenly, it sounded childish.

‘That you what?’

‘That I can float in the air.’

‘We do want to see it,’ said my father, ‘but you have to understand that not everything goes exactly the way you want it to, and that we don’t always have time for you exactly when it suits you.’ And then he said the worst thing of all: ‘The world doesn’t revolve around you, you know.’ They’d been using that sentence more and more lately, whenever they felt I was demanding too much attention. It is the worst reproach I know. It is as if they are saying: It would have been easier all round if you hadn’t been here just now. Too bad you didn’t realise it yourself. I blushed with shame and nodded silently.

Translation: Stephen Smith
Last updated: 7-Sep-10