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Kristien Hemmerechts

Her Blood

Original title: *Haar bloed*

NOVEL

'It's impossible to imagine our literature without Kristien Hemmerechts; over the years her impact has been unmistakable' – Tom Lanoye

About the author

Kristien Hemmerechts (1955) has published over twenty novels, collections of short stories and essays. She received both the Belgian State Prize and the Frans Kellendonk Prize for her complete oeuvre. Early in 2010, De Geus published her much-prized *Death Proposed to Me*, a diary describing death, love and life. The novel *Gitte* followed later in the same year.



About the book

When Titus is still a child, his grandfather takes him to see the body of a recently deceased man. Both afraid and curious, the boy looks at the body while his grandfather tells a story about good and bad blood. Titus is unable to forget this event and his fascination for blood grows. His medical studies enable him to examine the secrets of the red fluid more closely. It then turns out that the girl he is in love with, Roos, has a rare blood defect. The fact that no one can discover what is wrong makes her feel desperate. Titus does everything he can to find the cause, in the hope of winning Roos for himself.

Her Blood is Kristien Hemmerechts's first romantic novel. She takes the reader on a voyage of discovery along impenetrable but equally fascinating paths where blood, heart and passion encounter each another.

Kristien Hemmerechts, *Haar bloed*

ISBN 978 90 445 1828 3

Hardcover, 256 pages

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Bibliography

- Een zuil van zout* (A Pillar of Salt) (novel, 1987)
Weerberichten (Weather Forecast) (1988)
's Nachts (At Night) (1989)
Brede heupen (Wide Hips) (1989)
Zonder grenzen (Without Borders) (1991)
Kerst en andere liefdesverhalen (Christmas and Other Love Stories) (stories, 1992)
Wit zand (White Sand) (1993)
Lang geleden (A Long Time Ago) (1994)
Amsterdam retour (Return Amsterdam) (1995)
Veel vrouwen, af en toe een man (Many Women, Occasionally a Man) (1995)
Altijd met uw gezever, gij (Always Nagging, You) (1996)
Kort kort lang (Short Short Long) (1996)
Anna, Esther, Suzanne en de anderen (Anna, Esther, Suzanne and the Others) (1997)
Margot en de engelen (Margot and the Angels) (1997)
Literatuur na de dood (Literature After Death) (1998)
Taal zonder mij (Language Without Me) (autobiographical essay, 1998)
De tuin der onschuldigen (The Garden of the Innocents) (1999)
De kinderen van Arthur (Arthur's Children) (2000)
O, toen alles nog voorbij kon gaan (O, When Everything Could Still Pass) (2000)
Alle verhalen (All Stories) (2001)
Een jaar als (g)een ander. Dagboek 5 februari 2001 - 15 februari 2002 (A Year as No Other/Another. Diary 5 February 2001- 15 February 2001) (2003)
V (V) (2004)
Donderdagmiddag. Halfvier (Thursday Afternoon. Half Past Three) (2004)
De waar gebeurde geschiedenis van Victor en Clara Rooze (The True Story of Victor and Clara Rooze) (novel, 2005)
De laatste keer (The Last Time) (novel, 2006)
Als een kinderhemd (Like a Child's Shirt) (2006)
In het land van Dutroux (In Dutroux Country) (2007)
Ann (Ann) (2008)
Kleine zielen (Little Souls) (novel, 2009)
De dood heeft mij een aanzoek gedaan (Death Proposed To Me) (nonfiction, 2009)
Gitte (Gitte) (novel, 2011)
Haar bloed (Her Blood) (roman, 2012)

Prizes and awards

- 1986 - Triennial Prose Prize, Province of Brabant
1990 - Triennial Flemish National Prize
1993 - Shortlist AKO Literature Prize
1993 - Frans Kellendonk Prize
1996 - Longlist AKO Literature Prize
2002 - Longlist AKO Literature Prize
2003 - Longlist Libris Literature Prize

2004 - Longlist AKO Literature Prize
2007 - Nomination Anna Bijns Prize
2008 - Longlist Libris Literature Prize

Rights

The rights to Hemmerechts' work have been sold to numerous countries, including Spain (Intempestivas), France (La Différence, Actes Sud), Germany (Diana, Ullstein) and Czechia (Eroika).

The press

On *Her Blood*:

'Kristien Hemmerechts has been a *grande dame* since her first novel was published. Her voice and her style are still as sharp and unique as they ever were. True to her temperament she is not afraid of any taboo subject. It's impossible to imagine our literature without her; over the years her impact has been unmistakable.' – *Tom Lanoye*

On *Gitte*:

'Kristien Hemmerechts was a *grande dame* right from her debut. Her voice and style have remained sharp and unique and, faithful to her temperament, she still does not evade taboos. No one can imagine our literature without her and without the influence she has exerted on it for many years.' – *Tom Lanoye*

'*Gitte* is, quite simply, a strong novel: moving, intelligent and exciting right to the last page.' – *Vrij Nederland*

'A clever combination of thriller, love story, coming-of-age novel and romantic novel. (...) There is so much in this book that you are not likely to have a dull moment.' – *De Standaard*

'A compelling and moving read. [...] *Gitte* is an excellent, well-balanced novel brimming over with important issues and human stories.' – *Boekenkrant*

On *Death Proposed to Me*:

'A tender and haunting book. [...] Very confrontational, but always with the necessary rays of sunshine.' – *Nieuwsblad*

'Fascinating. She divulges her thoughts with unrelentingly candour.' – *Noordhollands Dagblad*

'Surprisingly enough, not a sad book: this exploration of death also generates a wealth of thoughts about life and love.' – *Gazet van Antwerpen*

‘A beautiful, intimate book that moves the reader.’ – *Algemeen Dagblad*

On *Little Souls*:

‘This novel is also about faith in the miracle that the author performs. [...] The reader is reminded of the rich and vivid imagery of Jane Austen.’ – *Het Financieele Dagblad*

‘From beginning to end, *Little Souls* remains an entertaining, easy-to-read book that deals with a variety of different themes and actually succeeds in presenting a positive message without being pedantic. One cannot but admire the way Hemmerechts transforms a historical narrative into a contemporary novel about human vanity and infidelity, and for her desire to write a solid story in which life’s blows no longer appear to be meaningless coincidences.’
– *De Standaard der Letteren*

‘Given the pen from which it flowed, the fact that *Little Souls* is a rich novel that you can read in one sitting doesn’t come as much of a surprise.’ – *Algemeen Dagblad*

‘Hemmerechts describes events with poignancy, but without cynicism. Miracles exist, if only you believe.’ – *Elsevier*

‘When she’s researching and writing essays, Hemmerechts is in her element and really has something to say.’ – *de Volkskrant*

On *Ann* :

‘The sincerity, wisdom and honesty with which the author writes about sensitive matters, about loss and death, is nothing short of touching.’ – *De Telegraaf*

‘Hemmerechts’s pure, affectionate, but never sickly or sombre tone is what holds this collection together.’ – *Trouw*

On *The Last Time*:

‘An ode to the imagination.’ – *de Volkskrant*

‘A novel that fascinates because of its melancholy, but also because of its mental leaps, somersaulting all over the place. This mourning process is as ghastly as life itself, but it has produced a magnificent book.’ – *Algemeen Dagblad*

‘A pleasantly readable mix of satire and relational humour, a deconstruction of the erotic in a light-hearted wrapper.’ – *De Standaard*

On Language Without Me:

‘More than a homage to a partner and poet: a work of integrity from a sensitive and powerful writer.’ – *NRC Handelsblad*

‘A vigorous and witty book offering an affectionate portrait of an exceptional man.’ – *Opzij*

Excerpt from the book

When Titus, holding his grandfather’s hand, entered the dead man’s house, the head had lost its purple colour, which is what the doctor had predicted. Candles were burning in the room and intoxicating lilies had been placed on and around the body. It was not warm anymore. Instead of sandals, the body wore the new black socks that had finally been cut from the paper label, and shoes that had been repaired only two weeks ago. The hair had been combed. The shirt was buttoned up, but the dirty trousers had not been replaced, which gave the impression – whether true or not – that the body had not been washed. The books about Leonardo da Vinci were layed out in tidy piles on the sideboard, which the man had inherited, together with the table with decorated legs, from his parents.

They had covered more than seven kilometres, quite a lot for a boy who had not yet outgrown his first-communion clothes. Every time they encountered someone, his grandfather had stopped to have a word. The news had reached everyone by then. His grandfather was unable to let anyone know, although he would dearly have liked to. Titus had felt the old man’s disappointment when it became clear they would certainly not be the first to greet the body. Anyone who was able to, had immediately set off. Mothers with babes in arms had hastened to the house; the sick had risen from their beds. By the time the grandfather and his grandchild turned into the dead man’s street, they had heard from three different people that Leonardo’s descendant had collapsed on the doorstep of his house. He had probably been on his way to the pub. In his trouser pocket they had found a lottery ticket, not yet validated. A few feet away from the house, the grandfather bent over to look his grandson straight in the eye.

‘Don’t be afraid, Titus.’

‘I’m not afraid.’

‘That’s what I like to hear.’

The old man smiled. His eyes were swimming in a film of moisture, as though he was permanently sad. Years later, Titus would be amazed by how old his grandpa had seemed to him then. In fact, he had only just turned sixty .

‘The blood of the man we are about to see, Titus, has come from one of the greatest geniuses ever. If anyone wants to make him rise from the dead, he will have to start with this blood.’

‘Is that possible?’

‘Anything that people believe in is possible. On condition that they believe. It starts with belief. Real belief. Some people believed that humans would travel to the moon. Were they proved right?’

Titus nodded.

‘What do you believe in, Titus?’

‘In mum and dad.’

‘That’s right.’

His grandfather kissed him. Then he lifted him up to press the bell, even though the front door was already open. The bell rang loudly and forcefully. Titus’s grandfather put him down and took him firmly by the hand. Someone inside the house loudly invited them in.

‘Take a good look, Titus.’

The boy nodded. Looking at the doorstep, you could not tell that that was the location where, barely six hours previously, a man had succumbed. The dike breach had been purely internal.

Translated by Christine Davies

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