



© Liesbeth Kuipers



World Rights
Publishing House De Geus
Contact: Sander van Vlerken
P.O. Box 1878
4801 BW Breda
The Netherlands
Phone: (31) 76 522 8151
Fax: (31) 76 522 2599
Email: rights@degeus.nl

DE GEUS www.degeus.nl

Annelies Verbeke

Saving Fish

Original title: *Vissen redden*

NOVEL

New novel by the author of *SLEEP!*

Rights sold to 21 countries

The bestselling debutant of 2004

More than 70,000 copies sold

Love hurts

In a last-ditch effort to smother her heartache, Monique throws herself into saving the planet; she decides to champion the fish.

About the author

Annelies Verbeke (Dendermonde, 1976) knew at the age of five that she wanted to write a novel. Over twenty years later she made her debut with *SLEEP!*, more than 70,000 copies of which have since been sold. *SLEEP!* has been published in translation in seventeen countries. It was awarded the Women and Culture Debut Prize 2004, the Flemish Debut Prize and the Gouden Ezelsoor (Golden Dog-Ear) 2005. It was also nominated for the Geert Lubberhuizen Prize and placed on the longlist of the Libris Literature Prize and the 2004 AKO Literature Prize.

In January 2006 Verbeke's second novel *GIANT* was published, followed in 2007 by *GREENER GRASS*, a collection of fifteen stories that made the Golden Owl Prize longlist.

Verbeke studied Germanic languages and literature in Ghent and script writing at the RITS in Brussels. Besides novels and short stories, she writes scripts and columns. Her columns in the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* sometimes have a philosophical slant. They are incisive and very entertaining.

Annelies Verbeke has a distinct style and an individual sense of humour. She combines realism and absurdity into a plausible reality in which the exaggeration enhances the subject matter.

www.anneliesverbeke.nl



About the book

Writer Monique Champagne has broken with literature. Since her sweetheart left her, she has thrown herself into the campaign against overfishing. Taking the view that life began in the sea and that by ravaging it man is destroying the fount of his own existence, Monique fears that life may be about to enter its final phase. Her impassioned newspaper article against overfishing doesn't go unnoticed. She is invited to brighten up scientific lectures at international fisheries congresses with a more emotional contribution.

Filled with zeal, Monique launches herself into the wonderful world of fisheries activists and maritime researchers. This noble cause justifies her flight from heartache. Although it turns out not be as simple as she had anticipated to get in with the maritime researcher crowd, she meets two fellow congress-goers who confirm her in the role she has assumed. But just how long can somebody hide behind cod and tuna?

Annelies Verbeke, *Vissen redder*
ISBN 978 90 445 1202 1
Hardcover, 192 pages
Publication: October 2009

Bibliography

Slaap! (SLEEP!) (novel, 2003)
Reus (GIANT) (novel, 2006)
Groener gras (GREENER GRASS) (short stories, 2007)
Vissen redder (SAVING FISH) (novel, 2009)

Prizes and awards

Woman and Culture Debut Award 2004
Flemish Best Debut Award 2004
Longlist Libris Literature Award 2004
Longlist AKO Literature Award 2004
Gouden Ezelsoor Award 2005 for the best sold debut
Longlist Gouden Uil Literature Award 2008
Nomination Gerard Walschapprijs 2009 for GREENER GRASS
Nomination BNG Nieuwe Literatuur Prijs 2010
Nomination OPZIJ Literatuur Prijs 2010
Longlist Libris Literature Award 2010

Rights

Rights for Annelies Verbeke's novels have been sold to more than 20 countries.

Rights for SAVING FISH has been sold to Germany (Marebuch Verlag), Tsjechië (Kniha Zlin).

Option for film rights by the Dutch production company IDTV.

The press about SAVING FISH:

'An exceptionally exciting novel, in which the writer astonishes with unexpected twists, swift changes of tone and incisive formulation. Since SLAAP!, Verbeke has undergone a striking stylistic evolution. (...) Her best so far.' – *De Standaard* (****)

'A love story of giddy proportions. (...) In an amazingly playful, vivacious way, a simple tale of disappointed love (...) is given epic dimensions.' – *NRC Handelsblad*

'Verbeke has written a highly intelligent novel about the art of self-deception, in which she maintains a laconic undertone, but also takes a great step forward stylistically.' – *De Morgen*

'SAVING FISH is a scintillating and perturbing novel, in which every sentence deserves to be read carefully. It is proof that Annelies Verbeke continues to excel herself. A story about love and its loss, to cherish dearly.' – *Goedele Magazine*

'The best novel in Annelies Verbeke's oeuvre. Well-balanced and flawlessly told. The story has an air of the absurd, because of the many fish facts, but the author achieves much more than that. This novel intrigues us with its philosophical passages about the meaning of life and moves us through Monique's great sorrow.' – *Het Belang van Limburg*

'Annelies Verbeke has a penchant for idiosyncratic characters and absurd events, but she always writes about recognisable emotions. This is also true of her latest novel SAVING FISH.' – *Gazet van Antwerpen* (****)

'An idiosyncratic sort of book. Sensitive and committed, witty and incisive, but also ballsy and brave, with aggressive undertones.' – *Opzij*

'Verbeke handles an age-old theme in an original manner.' – *Het Nieuwsblad*

'A tragicomic story that grippingly portrays the devastating impact of a breakup.' – *Libelle*

'A surprising and ingeniously fashioned novel. Verbeke combines intriguing philosophical passages about the meaning of life with humour and commitment.' – *Metro*

'Verbeke has written Flemish novels that contain "interestingly formulated insights" and implicitly touch upon "topical ethical issues".' – *Arjen Fortuin in Passionate*

'We are greatly impressed by the novel Annelies Verbeke has distilled from her own heartache. 182 pages of poignant beauty.' – *Feeling*

'Sobbing hard without shedding a tear; moreover, in a book in which there is so much to laugh about. It's simply irresistible.' – *de Volkskrant* ****

‘Verbeke plays the expectations game consummately, she also finds a wonderful balance between clarity and lyricism, sobriety and intoxication. SAVING FISH is a new step in Verbeke’s oeuvre: closer to reality and deeper into the inner world.’ – *Recensieweb.nl*

‘Successful madness.’ – *Boek*

‘In a story written in crystal-clear language, Verbeke manages to keep everything exceptionally light and thus extremely readable thanks to the powerful metaphors, drily comical humour, unexpected twists and many pieces of scientific information about fish with which she has peppered her story. (...) SAVING FISH reveals an Annelies Verbeke who has come to full maturity as a writer with this intelligent novel and produced the provisional highlight of her highly imaginative oeuvre.’ – *Cuttingedge.be*

‘Sentences you hope you’ll remember.’ – *Leeuwarder Courant*

The Press about GREENER GRASS:

‘With this new collection, Verbeke shows that there is absolutely no reason to eschew the short story – on the contrary, the short story fits her like a glove. (...) Verbeke is witty and original; in a couple of accurate images, she distils an individual and an entire life.’ – *de Volkskrant*

‘The humour that lifts ‘Greener Grass’ is in the pointed details.’ – *Humo*

‘What a great collection of stories she has produced. (...) Each one is a book in itself, with so much love, humour, pace and feel for language that stopping wasn’t an option.’ – *Libelle be*

‘GREENER GRASS is a pleasure to read. Verbeke has a wonderful feel for irony and dry wit, and an eye for the telling detail.’ – *De Standaard*

‘Again, Verbeke lends her generous powers of imagination to her hallmark: a sobriety that suddenly takes flight, always mixed with her unique, sometimes perplexing irony.’ – *De Morgen*

‘Verbeke understands the art of making the fate of her characters more bearable through her irony.’ – *Friesch Dagblad*

The press about SLEEP!

‘It is rare for anyone to exhibit as much passion, narrative pleasure, fantasy – in short, so much real writing – in their first novel as this young Flemish woman has done. SLEEP! Is the most impressive debut to have appeared in Dutch literature since Arnon Grunberg’s *Blue Mondays*. Read it!’ – Elsbeth Etty, *NRC Handelsblad*

‘A real must read!’ – *Jury Libris Literature Prize*

‘A literary phenomena.’ – *Trouw*

‘A real dream debut.’ – *Marie Claire*

‘A debut most budding authors can only dream of (...) a really splendid debut.’ – *Spits*

‘Belongs to the best I read over the past years (...) appropriately called the best debut since BLUE MONDAYS [from Arnon Grunberg] an unequalled tragicomedy.’ – *Eindhovens Dagblad*

‘A superior debut (...) Annelies Verbeke will not *become* great, she already *is*.’ – *Tubantia*

Excerpt

Monique Champagne was good at giving parties. She had learned that at home; doing your best for others, perfectionism, confetti. An hour and a half before her first guests were due to arrive, she had everything under control. The hot appetizers were on the oven rack anticipating the heat, an abacus of cherry tomatoes and mozzarella balls, surrounded by vegetarian nibbles, was waiting in the fridge and the stereo was shuffling smoothly to the next atmospheric intro. Monique cast a last look at the festoons of blue, paper fish that radiated out from the dust-free bookshelves to every corner of the sitting room. And then she hurried to the bathroom to turn off the tap.

Just a quick dip, she promised herself. Under the water, she prodded her scrawny body like a disappointed butcher. Once she had been more muscled, more toned. She’d have to start working on that again soon. Cycling wasn’t enough. After all, it was primarily a matter of looking healthy.

After Monique had rinsed the conditioner from her hair, she pointed the showerhead between her legs for a moment. She didn’t touch anything, and to her relief didn’t have to fantasise. In next to no time, seething and unremitting, the jet of water brought her off, the spreading, the swelling, the wetness. Her cheeks barely had time to colour. When she finished with a sigh, a little ripple of water splashed against the edge of the bath, that was all. Vital, thought Monique approvingly, yet slightly surprised.

A quarter of an hour before the starting time she had given, the bell rang. In her stockinged feet and with only one eye made up, she hurried to the door. In front of her stood Jan and An, who found the combination of their names too banal and therefore liked to be addressed as Jean and Nana, which seldom happened. They had called the baby in the Maxi-Cosi, with which they pushed open the door, Dolf, which according to them, was again morally acceptable but still extremely unusual. Jan and An, who were both wearing makeshift necklaces of shells, took two crumpled sailor’s caps out from among the nappies and put them on their heads.

‘We came a little earlier because Dolf woke up,’ Jan explained.

‘And so we haven’t really dressed for it, and we’ll also have to leave fairly early, sorry,’ added An. From her face it seemed she was expecting Monique to give her a good hiding.

Monique couldn't understand the reasoning behind their announcements but she blamed that on herself.

'No problem, come in, hasn't he got big, oh thank you,' she mumbled during the exchange of welcoming kisses and delighted glances at the child and the wine label. An thought she was looking very nice and that she was wearing something very nice and that her hair colour was very nice. Monique thanked her and explained her one made-up eye, which reminded Jan of Malcolm McDowell in *A Clockwork Orange*, which An and Monique laughingly affirmed. After she had provided the parents with drinks, Monique put on the tuna suit she had made the previous evening. An thought it was very nicely made. When she turned on the oven, the bell rang again, followed by a whining yell from Dolf.

At the door stood Diederik, whom she had expected to arrive first, because he was always the first to arrive. Perhaps putting on a black eye patch had slowed him down a little. As he wasn't otherwise dressed as a pirate, the patch was more reminiscent of a treatment for a lazy eye.

'Am I late?' he asked in panic, when he heard the voices of Jan and An.

Monique put his mind at rest.

'Happy birthday,' said Diederik dolefully, handing over a book he had wrapped in newspaper. Monique explained amiably that he shouldn't have, that it wasn't even her birthday, just a farewell party. That came as a blow to Diederik; it was already his seventh farewell party in a month and always for people who meant a lot to him. Some were celebrating that they were emigrating, but most had cancer, it was probably their last celebration. While she listened, Monique stroked his shoulder kind-heartedly. She had known Diederik for a long time now. The lies he came up with had become more excessive and tragic every year. Often, he was moved to tears by the tragedy he had dreamt up for himself. His aberration had driven away many people. For ages Monique had been suppressing the urge to banish him from her life, but time and again she'd found it wasn't the moment to sever their contact. She even said nothing when she saw Diederik sticking a snotball underneath her tabletop.

The majority of her female guests were dressed as glamorous mermaids, as was one of the men. The living room was also filled with the hustle and bustle of two octopuses, a jumbo mussel, something covered in shells, a lobster and four shrimp fishers. Diederik's eye patch elastic snapped. Without this minimal disguise he stood out even more. Monique turned up the music and carried trays of glasses and edibles around the room at an even faster tempo. Everywhere she went she had mini-conversations that ended with a little laugh.

'How are you?' asked an extremely concerned mermaid, her nails digging into the tuna suit. Monique said she was just fine and smiled in conclusion. But the mermaid wanted to know if that was really true, if she really was fine. When Monique tried to wriggle past her with a reassuring look, another mermaid blocked her path.

'Monique,' said this one, 'I wouldn't like to be in your shoes. But you're really incredibly strong.'

'Oh, but I see it as a privilege that I can travel all over Europe and inform people about the sad state of the tuna stocks. At last, something useful.'