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# Robert Haasnoot

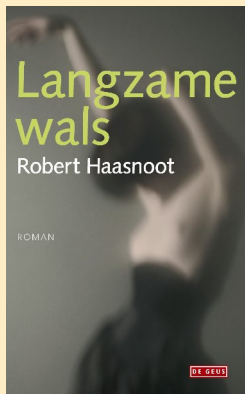


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## *Slow Waltz*

Original title: *Langzame wals*

NOVEL



*Slow Waltz* is a dazzling historical novel, partially inspired by the life of Lodewijk Pincoffs, the greatest fraud in Dutch history. Virtually single-handedly, Pincoffs brought prosperity to the city of Rotterdam and its port in the second half of the nineteenth century. His charisma was so great that bankers, businessmen, and politicians trusted him unconditionally. Until it appeared that instead of a positive balance, he had only debts. So much so that the city of Rotterdam was only a small step away from a financial abyss.

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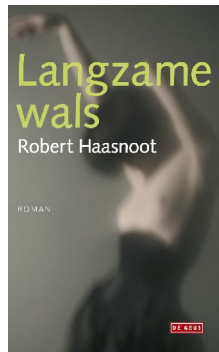
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Robert Haasnoot  
*Slow Waltz*

### **About the author**

Robert Haasnoot (1961) was born in the United States, in the city of Paterson, New Jersey. When he was five years of age, his family moved to the Dutch fishing village of Katwijk, a place known for its devout inhabitants, dispersed among a variety of religious denominations. His Catholic-born American mother slowly adjusted to the new surroundings. Haasnoot felt the pressures of faith as a child. When he turned seventeen, he left Katwijk and made his way to Paterson. After a few years, he returned to Katwijk.

Robert Haasnoot made his debut in 1997 with the novel *The Power of the Forest*, and his second novel, *Sea of Delusion*, was awarded the Prix des Ambassadeurs in 2000. *Stone Child* was published in 2002, followed by *The Scribe* in 2005. In preparation of *Slow Waltz*, Robert Haasnoot spent a few months at his birthplace, Paterson, New Jersey.



### **About the book**

Robert Haasnoot unleashes a resplendent novel

In 1879, the once-celebrated businessman and politician from Rotterdam, Lodewijk Pincoffs and his family make a hasty escape to the United States. Pincoffs is attempting to avoid a lengthy prison sentence for a bookkeeping scandal that brought Rotterdam on the verge of bankruptcy. In a saloon in Paterson, Pincoffs strikes up a conversation with Emma, a prostitute of Dutch origin. She is worried about the disappearance of her husband, Harm. He is involved with an Irish movement that, operating from the USA, is actively devoted to the liberation of Ireland in a number of ways, including the use of the recently invented one-man submarine. Emma suspects that Harm is drifting over the ocean on a secret mission. She is intent on taking revenge on those who convinced him to do this.

During the conversation, Pincoffs's and Emma's thoughts wander and their stories are unfurled before the reader.

Robert Haasnoot *Langzame wals*  
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*Slow Waltz*

### **Bibliography**

*De kracht van het woud* ('The Power of the Forest') (1997, novel)  
*Waanzee* ('Sea of Delusion') (2000, novel)  
*Steenkind* ('Stone Child') (2002, novel)  
*De heugling* ('The Scribe') (2005, novel)  
*Langzame wals* ('Slow Waltz') (2008, novel)

### **The press about Robert Haasnoot**

'Stunningly beautiful' - *Trouw* about *Sea of Delusion*

'A moving portrait of a little boy who is at the mercy of riddles.' - *NRC Handelsblad* about *Stone Child*

'*Sea of Delusion* was suspenseful and terrifying because of the bizarre story, *Stone Child* was subtle (...) a tender and moving story, but *The Scribe* is perhaps the most accomplished one, in literary terms.' - *VPRO Gids*

### **The press about *Slow Waltz***

'With three story lines, he weaves a fascinating novel. (...) And Haasnoot succeeds in telling his story in beautiful, melodious sentences, almost old-fashioned in their beauty. A fascinating book.' – *GPD-BLADEN*

'An engrossing novel (...) There are few authors who choose their words as carefully as Robert Haasnoot. (...) A whole world lurks behind every word.' – *Elsevier*

### **Rights**

Rights of Robert Haasnoot's novels have been sold to Germany (Berlin Verlag) and Spain (Lengua de Trapo)

### **A fragment from the book**

He fishes a cigar from his waistcoat pocket and lets it roll between his fingers. His last Upmann. He decides to wait with lighting it and nods sympathetically at Emma, who is saying that she has hardly made any friends in the three years that she has been living in Paterson. There are hundreds of fellow countrymen in the district of Riverside, but they all give her the cold shoulder. She has only one good friend. An Irish woman called Deirdre.

He is again haunted by thoughts of the letter from his sister. Adriana's bitter letter full of harsh reproaches. The newspaper clippings that she enclosed to illustrate what he, aside from causing her personal suffering and that of her family, had done in Rotterdam. Adriana does not only hold him responsible for the fall of the African

Trading Association, which is perhaps commendable, but also, and above all, she blames him for the tragic fate that befell her husband, Henry Kerdijk, his business partner and brother-in-law. He worked with him for thirty years. She was blind all those years, Adriana wrote. But now her eyes have opened.

Her letter, which was forwarded to him last week from his previous address in Manhattan, chafes and crushes. Yet he continues to reread and dissect it, searching for phrases that offer openings to defence and reconciliation. Even on the train to Paterson he worked on the rough version of his retort, despite the tension because of young Bosland's arrival and the insecurity about his future would sometimes rise to the point of suffocation. He cannot lose Adriana. She was like a mother to him in his youth, even though it would be impossible for him to know what having a mother is like; he was only fifteen months old, still an infant, when he lost his mother. He will rectify Adriana's distorted conception of the situation and refute her accusations. Carefully though, in sorrowful tonality. How could she blame him for all those years that Henry secretly felt underestimated and dominated by him? He loved his brother-in-law. Her depictions of the atrocious events in Antwerp left him shocked and paralysed.

Henry Kerdijk had likewise taken refuge in Belgium, on the same day as Lodewijk and his family. At first, he was also heading to Brussels, under the guise of a business meeting.

Torn by despair and repentance, Henry wandered through the old centre of Brussels. One of his cloak pockets held a bottle of chloroform, the other a pistol, because Henry did not know what to do: either commit suicide, or await the collapse of both the African and Rotterdam Trade Associations in Brussels, and there, when his nerves had calmed, assess his chances of receiving a lenient penalty. A third possibility - which Lodewijk had suggested four days before, during their last conversation - was to flee to America. Once safe in New York, Henry would send for Adriana and the children. Their families would support each other there.

At the end of the afternoon, after roaming for hours, and bruised by his whirling thoughts, Henry selected yet another possibility: he would return to Holland and surrender himself at the border. Forty-five minutes before Lodewijk and Adolph arrived at Brussels South Station, Henry had taken the train to Rotterdam from the same station. It is not inconceivable that their trains passed each other somewhere between Brussels and Antwerp. At the very beginning of the journey, however, his doubts returned. He ended up reconsidering his decision, because while Lodewijk and his family were having coffee and tea with waffles and *smouteballen*, Henry, with a mind filled with suicidal thoughts, left the train in Antwerp and walked over to Hotel Saint Antoine in nearby Groenplaats. There, he registered under the name of Karels, a trader from Rotterdam. He requested a pen, ink, and paper, and ordered a lavish dinner to be brought to his room. He ate as evening fell, and subsequently sat at a small writing table by the window. Looking out over the great square in front of the Basilica of the Virgin Mary, where up to a century ago the cemetery for the city's poor was and where the uprooted souls still clung to the trees like spider webs of beard moss, he dipped his pen into the ink and started the long farewell letter which, in her own words, opened Adriana's eyes.