

his creativity in producing a work of modernist literature that is exciting to read, giving this reader a taste and feel of occupied Antwerp that no historical narrative can provide.

The mood of disillusionment is brilliantly evoked in 'Sous les Ponts de Paris', a more conventional-looking poem of couplets which addresses a 'You' whose corpse and wounds have been put on display:

Our faith is so small and so weak
like the flame that dances at your feet

You are displayed on every corner HARLEQUIN
with your beaten attitude and Your suffering

Among us again in all Your statues You are one
with the occupied city (...)

We cannot see God but as a Harlequin
our times are so full of pain and suffering

In the second poem of 'Sous les Ponts de Paris', God and Harlequin become a deserter heading into the dance hall. This is where forgetfulness is found, in the music hall, the cinema, the bar, the dance hall, and in desire, passion or love.

Occupied City ends with the withdrawal of the German occupiers and a frenzy of celebration. The line 'everything is meaningless / now' leads not to despair but to a sense of energy and surging life, though we are left wondering where this will lead: 'maybe some day / the need will grow so great / all the dykes will break'.

JANE FENOULHET

Paul van Ostaijen, *Occupied City*, translated from the Dutch by David Colmer, Smokestack Books, Ripon, 2016.

- 1 For instance, M. Bradbury & J. McFarlane, *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, Harmondsworth, 1991 or P. Lewis (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to European Modernism*, Cambridge, 2011.
- 2 The spaces are part of the printed poem. Note that the absence of page references is due to the lack of pagination of *Occupied City*, a choice which is in keeping with the typographical experimentation of the text.

Start Early and Keep Going

Flanders and the Netherlands at the Frankfurt Book Fair

It sounds simple. Every year some 150,000 people in the book business travel from all over the world to the Frankfurt Book Fair. Suddenly the country or language area that can promote its literature as *Ehregast* is on the map. But in fact it's not so simple. All these book people are in Frankfurt to work. Day in day out they run from one appointment to the next. They know there is a country that is Guest of Honour, but which is it? By no means can every regular fair visitor still remember that a few months after the *Buchmesse*.

When the Netherlands and Flanders were Guests of Honour in October 2016, the organisers had a hard job to stand out. Just sending a trainload of the new generation of writers – from Joost de Vries and Niña Weijers to Bregje Hofstede and Charlotte Van den Broek – to the capital of the book world is not enough to get them translated into the most important world languages. Let alone sticking posters on all the buses and trams in Frankfurt for a few days, as previous Guest of Honour countries had been known to do.

So Team Frankfurt, the joint project committee of the Dutch Foundation for Literature and the Flemish Literature Fund, chose not to peak just for a few days during the fair. Their Guest of Honour preparations began a long time in advance, primarily by allowing the German publishers from various disciplines to become acquainted with the Dutch publishing sector on the spot, but also by ensuring Dutch-language authors were on the programme at German festivals for an entire year. In addition, from July 2016 there was a whole bookselling campaign with author appearances and a brochure. Everyone in the *Buchmesse* homeland was already warmed up when the fair opened.

A masterstroke was the appointment of Bart Moeyaert as artistic director. This internationally renowned author, whose almost entire output has been translated into German, meant that being Guest of Honour was not just a matter of carrying out policy objectives, but that there was also a coherent vision underlying these. This was expressed in the choice (dazzling in its simplicity) of the North Sea – the sea shared by the Netherlands,

Flanders and Germany – as the underlying theme, a well-thought out design and, above all, an effective slogan.

‘This is what we share’ – read the Dutch-Flemish motto. That referred naturally to the common language, by means of which writers on either side of the border enrich each other through the differences in culture. Right from the opening, when very cleverly the kings of both countries (alias the heads of national marketing) made an appearance, it seemed that everyone adopted the phrase as the essence of what happens in Frankfurt: the handling of translation rights, by means of which everyone all over the world can share each other’s power of ideas and imagination. So the Netherlands and Flanders became the talking point of the fair almost automatically.

Of course the big question is what being Guest of Honour has achieved. That’s not easy to measure. There’s the number of translations that were published in German before the *Buchmesse*: 454, of which over 300 were literary translations. An unprecedentedly high number for a Guest of Honour country. There’s the number of articles, reports and reviews of the translated works in the world media. The number of German-language pieces alone that appeared online topped six thousand, according to the proud press release from the literature foundations afterwards.

But what do these statistics tell us about the impact of being Guest of Honour country? The traffic in Dutch literature can seem to be a huge flash in the pan. The German publishers of all these newly discovered writers may stop after a single translation, on account of poor sales figures or lack of recognition on the part of critics. And publishers in other languages, who have to be tempted by the Guest of Honour status, together with all these *Neuerscheinungen*, to taste what the new generation from Flanders and the Netherlands have to offer, may be disappointed and lose interest. In that case being Guest of Honour has been a failure.

Only time will tell. The first signs are favourable. Immediately after the fair, the literature foundations reported good sales results for a few titles. 8,000 copies of *Boy*, by Wytse Versteeg, had been sold in Germany, 35,000 copies of *Die Eismacher* by Ernest van der Kwast, and Joost Zwagerman’s *Duell* was into a third impression, which meant the



Photo D. Van Assche

publisher wanted to translate his *Gimmick!* as well. New deals had also been struck. Milkweed Editions is bringing out an anthology of Dutch-language poetry in English and the Kalachuvadu publishing house one in Tamil.

Fine. But these are no more than first steps – no more striking than the good news the literature foundations always send out to the world after this sort of fair. So it’s heartening that the Dutch and Flemish organisations have thought about the aftermath of being Guest of Honour. That’s why the campaign ran all through the autumn and there’s now a deliberate translation and presentation policy for the French- and English-language areas.

MAARTEN DESSING

Translated by Sheila M. Dale

An Ingenious ‘Exercice de Style’ *The Evenings* by Gerard Reve

It is astonishing that we have had to wait till 2016 for an English translation of Gerard Reve’s famous 1947 debut novel, *The Evenings*. For not only does it, and very characteristically, mark the beginning of a literary career that blended critical admiration, moral controversy and popularity in about equal, and sometimes fused, proportions, it is itself a work of palpable originality, with a distinctive atmosphere which caught the mood of a whole generation – and spoke to its successors. Its gov-