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# Bart Moeyaert

Belgian candidate for the

Hans Christian Andersen Award 2020 for authors

Nominated by IBBY-Belgium – Flemish branch

## Biography

Bart Boudewijn Peter Moeyaert, the seventh out of seven boys, was born in Bruges on June 9th 1964, and this is where he grew up, in a big house on the outskirts of the town. In the Moeyaert family he tended to disappear a little. He was the kind of child that draws a lot, likes to cut and paste and to build tree- and other houses. He read a great deal and all sorts of books together.

When he was ten, Bart Moeyaert wrote his first longer story about a boy who's ill. At the age of eleven he started a first book about a secret society. And though becoming a writer was not among his ambitions because his father had told him writing was not an actual profession, he still took the step towards a publisher with his next book.

He completed the Arts Academy in Ghent, then studied Dutch, German, and history in Brussels. He made his debut (1983) with his autobiographical *Duet met valse noten* (*Duet out of tune*). The book was named the best Book of the Year in 1984 by the Belgian Children's and Young Adult Jury and has been translated into German, Catalan, and Japanese. It turned out to be a bestseller that became a classic, entering into its second life as a play as well as a musical.

Since 1995, Bart Moeyaert has made writing his profession. He has written screenplays and plays, he has published Dutch translations of books from German (by Christine Nöstlinger and by Jürg Schubiger), from English (by Carolyn Coman and by Shaun Tan) and from French (by Chris Donner and by Frédéric Clément), and for years he wrote articles about design for De Standaard Magazine, the cultural supplement of the renowned newspaper, De Standaard.

Several of his books, like *De Schepping* (*Creation*), *Het Paradijs* (*Paradise*) and *De Hemel* (*Heaven*) are projects where text, illustrations and music are combined. Performances and cd's accompany the books. The writer again is the narrator, accompanied by renowned orchestras and performers, such as Janine Janssen, the Brussels Philharmonic and the Netherlands Wind Ensemble.

In 2003 the unpublished poems that Bart wrote over the course of many years were collected. The broad success of this collection of poems and his ability to bring several arts together, brought the City of Antwerp in 2006 to

the decision to ask Bart Moeyaert as Poet's Laureate of the City of Antwerp, the city where Bart Moeyaert lives.

Since 2001 Bart Moeyaert is senior lecturer Creative Writing at the Royal Conservatory in Antwerp, division Word and Stage. In 2007, he was appointed Doctor Honoris Causa for his work by the University of Antwerp. In 2014, Bart was appointed artistic director of the guest of honour program for the Frankfurter Buchmesse 2016, where the Netherlands and Flanders were joint guests of honour.

In March 2019, Bart Moeyaert will be the ambassador of the Children's Book Month 2019, with friendship as a central theme.



As a Poet's Laureate, Moeyaert wanted his poetry to reach as many people as possible, using – for example – beer mats

## You can invite four people from the past or the present for a dinner. Who will your guests be?

I'll invite author Carson McCullers. She won't say a word about her books (which I discovered when I was twenty and still treasure). Perhaps she'll talk nineteen to the dozen about what the 1930s were like. She shared a house in New York for two years with lots of interesting people, including the composer Benjamin Britten, W.H. Auden, writers Jane and Paul Bowles, Klaus and Erika Mann and a striptease dancer. I think she'll do a lot of drinking and smoking and remain silent. Maybe Alma Mahler will refuse the invitation, because she knows Carson's coming. The two of them know each other from stories they've heard on the grapevine – not positive ones. After everything I've read about and by Alma, I want to form my own opinions about her. Her love life was a tumultuous one, to say the least: she loved composer Gustav Mahler, artist Oskar Kokoschka, architect Walter Gropius, and poet Franz Werfel, to name a few. I want my grandmother to come too, but I know that she'll keep escaping to the kitchen, under the pretext of coming to help me. Memee died before I was seven. I know her from photographs and a few vague memories. I think I'll have lots of questions for her about the castle where she was caretaker before, during and after the second world war, and where my mother grew up. These three women from the past will be pleased to find artist Elizabeth Peyton sitting at the table with them (Google her name, discover her atmospheric work). Carson and Alma knew a lot of people in the arts and Elizabeth likes to create portraits of such people, but ones who are at the heart of modern life: Kurt Cobain, Keith Richards, Liam Gallagher. I'm going to cook a really good meal for them.

## Statement on Moeyaert's contribution

### to literature for young people



Olek schoot een beer, illustration by Wolf Erlbruch

Ever since his *début* in 1983 – at the age of 19 – Bart Moeyaert has been extremely popular in Flanders and the Netherlands, and over the past two decades his fame has also grown internationally. Moeyaert's first two books primarily caught the eye of the Children's Jury, but with his third book he established the reputation of an accomplished literary author that he has not lost since. From that moment on, most of Bart Moeyaert's books have been awarded with national prizes and international mentions and the long list of translations is growing fast as ever. Not only is he loved by the critics, his books are also widely read among children, young adults, and adults.

Most of his work has been reprinted many times. His *début* *Duet met valse noten* has been reprinted for the 18th time, *Broere* for the 12th time, *Het is de liefde die we niet begrijpen* for the 9th time, *De Melkweg* for the 6th time. A third reprint of *Tegenwoordig heet iedereen Sorry*, which was first published in October 2018, is on the way. This is highly exceptional for children's books written in Dutch, especially since Moeyaert's work is so literary and rich.

But let's have a closer look at *Broere*, since this work characterizes Bart Moeyaert as an artist. First, the mere facts and figures show its popularity among critics and the general public: 12 reprints, translated up to 8 languages, and awarded 4 times (in Belgium, The Netherlands and Germany). But then there's more – much more – to it.

*Broere* is a collection of short stories in which Bart Moeyaert gives us readers an image of what it felt like to be the youngest of seven brothers. With great wit and sensitivity, it appeals to a wide audience. Adults and children alike recognize themselves and their own lives in these honest and true stories. In *Broere* – as in his other work – Bart Moeyaert shows his eye for detail, which makes a personal story highly universal. Bart Moeyaert is a master of observation. Not only of what surrounds us and of what we do, but mainly of what lives inside every one of us and of what makes us act the way we do. He is not a writer of large, epic stories. He rather 'focusses on that one small given fact', as he said in an interview on *Tegenwoordig heet iedereen Sorry*.

Moreover, *Broere* shows how versatile an artist Bart Moeyaert is. *Broere* is a book, a cd, and a theatre show with accompanying songs and music, which he performs himself, live on stage. Bart Moeyaert does not limit himself, he stretches his boundaries, he is a man of many talents. He likes to make new stories to existing pieces of music: *De Schepping* (2004), *Het Paradijs* (2010) and *De Hemel* (2015) are for instance based on Haydn's oratoria. *Iemands lief* (2013) is his take on *L'Histoire du Soldat* by Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz and Igor Stravinsky, and is written on request by violin-player Janine Jansen. All of these works he has

brought on stage, accompanied by first class musicians. The books are illustrated by illustrators like the renowned Wolf Erlbruch or the young, talented Korneel Detailleur.

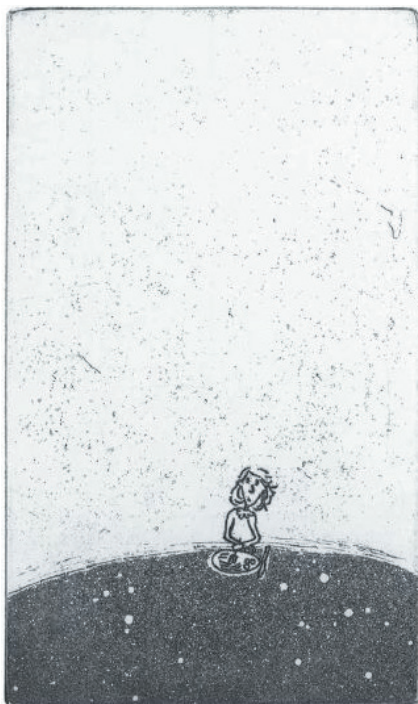
This versatility and the diversity of genres and target groups for which he writes, has resulted in a wide echo of his work. Bart Moeyaert is a noted and celebrated author, even beyond the restricted circle of young readers and their educators.

We would like to point out one last element considering *Broere*, which extends to Bart Moeyaert's entire oeuvre. Moeyaert is always moving, maybe even forcing, himself forward, wanting to grow, to explore, to try things out. Originally, in 2002, *Broere* consisted of 31 stories. The latest edition, in 2017, consisted of 49 stories, plus small illustrations by Bart Moeyaert himself. Other books as well have had revised editions over the years, or editions with completely new illustrations (for instance *Suzanne Dantine*, *Jij en ik en alle andere kinderen*, *Wij waren klaar*). Bart Moeyaert is a searching artist, which he himself – as do we – considers to be a healthy attitude.

Bart Moeyaert looks – or better: his characters look at themselves and the world with an open and critical mind. They look around them and try to find their place in the world. Typical Moeyaert are these little hide-outs, where his (young) characters retreat to think things over or even to spy on adults surrounding them. His latest character, Bianca in *Tegenwoordig heet iedereen Sorry*, has found herself a hole in a hedge to where she can retreat and find her peace. But there are just as well tables to hide under (as in *Broere*) or tables where children gather (as in *Mansoor*) in a sort of parallel – but still very much connected – universe to that of adults.

Bart Moeyaert's (young) characters think, observe, feel and find – but seldom in a straightforward way. You need to look beyond the surface and to read between the lines to fully understand them. Sturdiness often hides fear, and initially weak or silent characters can come up with an amazing strength. Communication is hardly ever straightforward in Moeyaert's novels and short stories, and characters only gradually open up. The vulnerability that you see when they do is often deeply moving. The manual which Bianca, the main character in *Tegenwoordig heet iedereen Sorry*, claims to have is a beautiful metaphor for a lot of Moeyaert's characters: 'According to my manual I may be very happy at times, though you won't see this on me. Whenever I come down the stairs, step by step and possibly slightly pounding, I may very well be extremely happy on the inside.'

Because of this, Bart Moeyaert's oeuvre often demands a form of slow reading, which is quite exceptional in children's literature. Only by taking your time and even rereading his books, you become utterly attentive to the richness of Bart Moeyaert's style, the complexity of his characters, and the notion that his



Mansoor, illustration by Annemie Heymans

worldview is never purely black and white, but subtle and thoughtful. Even his most nasty or unsympathetic characters (as Betjeman in *Blote handen*, or Bianca's mum in *Tegenwoordig heet iedereen Sorry*) are humans after all.

Whether it is in his novels, picture books, poems or short stories, Bart Moeyaert celebrates children's view of the world. This view is not an innocent view, but a truly openminded view. It consists of everything a person needs to grow: curiosity, eagerness, sensitivity and humor. Bart Moeyaert has a unique way of combining humor and seriousness, which makes his work ever so real. Through his characters, he features the world as it is. Complex. Often painful. But also playful. That is why he is such an outstanding author for children.

But there is more. The story of Bart Moeyaert does not end on the last page of his latest book. He is not only significant for Belgian children's literature as an author, but also as someone who has inspired an entire generation of aspiring authors, and as a spokesperson for qualitative children's literature. His credo is that children's literature and its authors, illustrators and readers deserve to be respected. With his solid literary reputation and personal charm, he has been able to influence the public debate on children's books. Above all, Bart Moeyaert's unique talent in combination with the energy he puts into national and international contacts has resulted into a lively interest for children's literature from authors, readers, and critics who before considered children's literature a minor literary genre. In this respect the entire Flemish scene of children's literature is greatly indebted to him.

Vanessa Joosen is Professor of English literature and Children's literature at the University of Antwerp.

An Stessens is a critic of children's literature and works at Iedereen Leest.

## Is there much difference between writing for children and writing for adults?

I don't believe in the idea of the foolish child who doesn't know anything. Children are introduced to the adult world soon enough: after all, they're surrounded by it. They absorb everything they see. They learn the tricks of life through the people around them. The difference between them and adults might be that they know all the tricks, but they're not always so good at weighing up the consequences. Jim Morrison said in a poem that clear lines can be drawn between childhood, puberty, adolescence and adulthood. These phases are connected by death, celebrations, rituals, stories, songs and a few other personal milestones. We experience things differently, but with equal intensity. I make a point of constantly questioning the dividing line of 'for children' and 'not for children'. Emma Thompson once spoke about her father Eric Thompson in a Belgian newspaper, saying that he thought writing for children was 'a strange concept. Why should there be any difference between writing for adults and writing for children?' I was pleased that she said that. Then people can hear it from someone else for a change. When I was thirteen, I watched Carlos Saura's film *Cría cuervos*. It's a slow, melancholic film, but I enjoyed it and I remember precisely how I felt when I saw it. I'm certain that everyone – even the grumpiest educationalist – has positive memories of something that touched him or her as a child, but which wasn't actually intended for him or her at all.

## Interview & Essay

### INTERVIEW

# *I've learned how to stick up for myself*

Marnix Verplancke. – In: De Morgen, September 26th 2018  
Translated by Laura Watkinson

There is a new Bart Moeyaert (54), and we're not just talking about his novel *Tegenwoordig heet iedereen Sorry (Everyone's Sorry Nowadays)*. The writer himself has become a new person too. "I had to rebuild everything. My head and my work."

"It's going to be busy, they'd said, but of course I didn't understand what 'busy' meant. I'm so used to sitting within my own four walls all the time, writing. And it was busy, and fantastic. That packed agenda and all the travelling made it feel like writing a really big book. Even though, of course, it wasn't. Now and then someone would interview me, and their final question was inevitably: 'So you've stopped writing?' When you hear the same question three times, it hurts."

Two years ago, Bart Moeyaert was the artistic director of the Flanders and Netherlands guest-of-honour programme at the Frankfurt Book Fair. In 2014, he started work on designing the concept, the pavilion and the events. He didn't have a moment of free time and the larger his team became, the more he realized that failure was not an option. This had to be good – and it was.

But then came the backlash. "I was planning to go on holiday for a month after the Book Fair," says Moeyaert. "Luckily I listened to everyone around me who advised me not to, saying that it would be a route straight into a black hole. So I just went home, even though I had absolutely no idea how I'd ever be able to feel at home there again. When I opened a cupboard, three skeletons came tumbling out. I suddenly had to rebuild everything all over again, my own head and my own work. And that took time.

"Fortunately I'm a writer, one of the few jobs that truly allow you to clear the decks. So I said to myself: What am I going to do now? I'm going to write a book, and it's going to be a completely different book from the last one."



## BIANCA

That book is now out. *Everyone's Sorry Nowadays* is about a twelve-year-old girl who is rather easily dismissed as “unmanageable”. Bianca and her brother Alan live with their mum. Their dad recently ran off with “his Cruz”. Alan has had a couple of heart operations, so he gets more attention from their mum, and so Bianca feels abandoned by both parents. Until one day Alan invites a friend over to play, and this friend’s mum turns out to be none other than the soap actress Billie King, a woman Bianca has looked up to for years. It proves to be a day full of insights for Bianca, insights that lead her to a word that is often used but rarely meant: Sorry. But she really does mean it, from the bottom of her heart.

“Billie and Bianca go back to before 2014,” Moeyaert explains. “They appeared in a short story that was published in Germany. The two of them were among the skeletons that came tumbling out of the cupboard, but they proved to be alive and kicking – and they refused to let me go.”

Without the Book Fair, Moeyaert’s new children’s novel would not have happened, he also says, as that experience made him a different person. “If you’d spoken to me twenty years ago, then you’d have had a scared Bart Moeyaert before you. A writer has no meaning. He beavers away at his desk, entirely dependent on what other people think of his work. In Frankfurt, I learned how to stick up for myself. There was some jealousy and unfair criticism. They asked me to be the artistic director, not you, I’d think to myself.

“But that wasn’t my first wake-up call. That came in 2006/2007, when I was the city poet of Antwerp and experienced the most polarized elections in ages. It was almost impossible to write a poem at the time, because you had to make it either black or white. I was attacked for being a coward because I hadn’t nailed my colours to the mast. [Journalist] Freek Braeckman challenged me in a live interview by saying that city poets should show their political commitment and that I wasn’t doing so.”

“Thinking it through back then made me realize that I am in fact hyper-committed. I don’t say: choose black or choose white. I say that people should think about all of the colours. It’s a bit like getting your bum out and inviting people to give it a kick. I always say that they were healthy kicks, because that sounds better, but in reality it drove me crazy. I thought that people were judging far too quickly or that they were being short-sighted. There was no discussion and no poetry; no shades of grey, to use a questionable phrase. I found it hard to handle, and it made me sarcastic and cynical, which I don’t think are virtues in any way, as that means: I’m closing the door and you can go to hell.”

*Everyone's Sorry Nowadays* is neither sarcastic nor cynical. It is a plea for us to look closely and honestly, without immediately condemning. "The book is about properly evaluating everything and everyone. And that includes me. Bianca is the child who takes second place, after Alan, whose heart condition makes him hyperactive and attention-seeking."

"I'm afraid that as a child I was an Alan too, the youngest, and I wrote too, and was creative. I never realized what that must have been like for my brothers. And Frankfurt changed that as well. For a few years, I was running from pillar to post, wondering what would make other people happy. Now I wonder what makes me happy personally, so that I'm content and, as a tiny part of our society, a little more pleasant to be around."

**Even though the book is about a 12-year-old girl, is that girl you?**

"I think so. All of my books are ultimately about myself, about the times when I was stuck. I was actually stuck before Frankfurt too. What am I going to do? Write a new book. And what am I going to do after that? Write another new book... Sometimes I need a challenge like city poet or artistic director, in the same way as I need to respond to emails now by saying: 'I can't accept your offer, because I'd like to focus on my own work for a while.'"

**So does a new book make you feel free?**

"Not in itself – only when a reader tells me what it's about."

**About saying sorry and how hard it is to do?**

"Look at Facebook. You're allowed to say anything there. I can spread poison, antagonize people – and I don't have to say 'sorry'. They're my rules, and you just have to comply. I think it's a mind-boggling development.

"I'm just back from a three-week holiday in Japan, with my boyfriend. We deliberately avoided the standard hotels and within a week we were in the culture. I was hugely impressed by the calmness of the Japanese people and the rules that they keep inside their heads and follow.

"I'd barely been back in Europe for three minutes before I realized how rude we are and how little space we give one another. If you cycle a couple of meters on the pavement, you get people yelling at you: 'Hey, this isn't a bike path!' Looking at ourselves and admitting that we're wrong isn't something that we're quick to do. That always makes me think: What a strange world we live in."

**How hard is it for a 54-year-old man to climb inside the head of a 12-year-old girl?**

"It's a matter of shrinking (laughs). I think it all depends on my narrative voice. I'm about 12 and I'm telling my story to someone who's the same age. That's different from 'writing a book for readers aged 12'. While I'm telling the story, I occasionally notice the adult Moeyaert slipping in, because he's found a beautiful sentence. So then I go back to square one, to the voice of my 12-year-old. That, for me, is the pleasure of writing, discovering what really makes my characters tick.

“Perhaps I don’t find it difficult because I feel very connected to the person I was when I was seven, twelve and sixteen, everything up until the age of twenty-one. I don’t have any children myself, but I always feel an immediate connection when I meet children. In Japan we stayed at a B&B. The owners had a wonderful little two-year-old daughter. I read to her, even though I don’t speak a word of Japanese, but you can also read to someone by making the sounds of dogs, tractors or trains. I think I understand how a child looks at the world.”

**You’ve said that you’re not telling the story for a 12-year-old reader, so what kind of reader are you telling it for?**

“People like clarity and so they think a children’s writer writes for children. But it’s not that simple. I’m not focusing on an age, but on Bianca’s voice, which has to be right. I have to hear what she says. And that’s why I often read aloud what I’ve written.

“When I was about ten, I saw *Cría cuervos* by the Spanish director Carlos Saura. The film is about a girl who lives in a house with a lot of women and she’s bored for an entire summer. That’s how I saw it at the time. Years later, I discovered that the film is set during the Franco regime, and that it’s much more raw than I realized back then. For me, that film was about recognizing boredom, about the girl playing records, sometimes the same one three times in a row. By which I mean that we shouldn’t wonder what a 12-year-old may or may not take away from my book.

“Perhaps she’s like the 54-year-old man who doesn’t understand things completely either, but still thinks they’re great.”

**You were just talking about the need for variety in your work. Is that why you don’t restrict yourself to one genre, and also write poetry and plays, for example?**

“That isn’t a choice. It depends on the time of day and on the phase I’m in. If I were smart, I’d be having a poetry collection published in January 2019. My first two collections, *Verzamel de liefde (Collecting Love)* and *Gedichten voor gelukkige mensen (Poems for Happy People)*, were designed by Tessa van der Waals. So I think: she has to do the third one too, in the same format, the same kind of simple title and with some sparkle on it again. Then I’ll have three of them on the shelf, all the same size.

“Which is nonsense of course, because the new collection refuses to find a title. I have a number of poems, but what are they about? At a certain point, my publisher sent me an email about the collection and halfway through I started blubbing away like a little boy, even though there was nothing in the email to get upset or emotional about. Moeyaert, I told myself, you’re doing something again that you’ve already done in the past. Who knows? Maybe your collection will end up loose-leaf or oblong. Perhaps you’ll work with a different designer. Just wait and see what happens.

“I realized that this collection is going to need time, and so it won’t be published in January. One of the things I’m longing to make now is a picture book. There are two foreign illustrators I’d like to work with. One day I’ll say: it’s time, let’s do it. That’s how it works. And that’s how it worked with my collection of

theatrical works, which is coming out today. A while ago, I decided it was the right time to publish it. So I invited Paul Verrept, the man behind Bebuquin Publishing, to talk about it – and now the book's out.”

**What was it like to see those texts again?**

“When I was compiling the collection, I suddenly realized that, contrary to what I'd thought, I haven't actually evolved that much. All the dogs in the world appear in my plays, as it's an image that I often use, along with nights, moons, finding it hard to say goodbye, and leaving and arriving somewhere. All those themes have been in there since 1992. That's an eye-opener, in a good way. Those are apparently my themes, and I'm okay with that.”

**Alan's friend turns out to have two mums. It's nice that you don't turn it into a theme, but instead have all your characters thinking it's no big deal. Is that your way of talking about diversity?**

“If you make something into a theme, then you make it special or different. Having two mums isn't different. Perhaps it's to do with the fact that I've personally never had negative reactions to my homosexuality. Or maybe just one. Archbishop Léonard had made a nasty remark about gays needing to be cured. I was giving a talk in Wetteren the next day, to a hundred woodwork students, boys of 16 or 17.

“I'd noticed one boy right from the beginning. He'd come in with a packet of crisps and sat there slouching in his chair until the teacher said something about it. The whole talk, he was obviously bored, sighing and huffing away. When the questions started, he was the first one to lazily put a hand in the air. His question was basically: 'What do you think you're doing, coming here and acting all gay and telling us your gay stories?'

“I teared up, and I launched into a seven-minute monologue, saying that with that one question he'd set some of those boys back ten years. Then I told my own story about my coming-out, and one boy started clapping and the whole group followed suit. My first thought was: Where's my handkerchief? But I was strong. I don't think my homosexuality is an issue in my life, so I won't make it an explicit issue in my work either.”

**As I was reading the book, I sometimes wondered what would become of that unmanageable problem child Bianca later. What do you think?**

“It all turns out fine. I teach Creative Writing at the conservatory in Antwerp. On audition days, I'm one of the people they have to talk to. We have a fifteen-minute conversation about reading habits and attitudes to life. I meet students who I think have real artists inside of them, and I'm jealous in a healthy way when I see how they blossom over the course of four years. A troubled girl of 12 or a troubled boy of 18 aren't so different in that respect. Everything turns out fine if they meet the right people to support them. Not to steer them, but to walk alongside them for a while. I've been doing that for more than fifteen years now, and it's wonderful to see all those young people finding their places.”

## ESSAY

## *Bart Moeyaert et son œuvre: portrait par Marie-Ange Pompignoli*

Le jeudi 4 décembre 2008, dans le cadre de la Saison culturelle européenne, en partenariat avec la Maison des écrivains, la Joie par les livres recevait Bart Moeyaert, interviewé par Anne-Laure Cognet.

Si en France, cinq de ses romans pour adolescents et quatre de ses albums sont traduits, son œuvre publiée en flamand est bien plus importante avec des romans pour adultes, du théâtre, des scripts, d'autres albums et romans pour enfants... En France, Bart Moeyaert est apparu dans le paysage éditorial au tournant des années 2000 comme une autre voix, un autre ton. (...)

À quatorze ans, alors qu'il se sent mal dans sa peau, il commence un journal intime, parce qu'il a lu le roman d'un garçon qui fait le tour du monde, écrit sous la forme d'un journal de bord. Il ne se doute absolument pas que ce n'est qu'un procédé d'écriture pour un récit fictif. Il achète un cahier, écrit des choses sur lui-même mais trouve que sa vie quotidienne n'est pas assez intéressante, aussi y met-il du piquant : des accidents, une certaine Judith, personnage inventé, censée être dans sa classe et dont il est amoureux...

« Personne ne savait que j'écrivais un roman, même moi, je ne le savais pas. » Trois cahiers et presque trois ans plus tard, il tape le tout sur une vieille machine à écrire (142 pages) et montre le résultat à ses parents qui le félicitent. Ce que ses parents détestaient par-dessus tout, c'était la paresse et l'oisiveté : jouer au foot, écrire des cartes postales ou un roman, « c'était très bien. »

Comme son père avait écrit des manuels scolaires, Bart Moeyaert trouve naturel d'envoyer son roman à des éditeurs. Le premier le refuse, le second lui répond, six mois plus tard : « Nous allons probablement l'éditer » ; on lui propose de corriger un certain nombre de points, dont le titre, car *Duo*, alors qu'il n'y a que quatre chapitres, ça ne convient pas... Mais il refuse de modifier le titre, et préfère réécrire entièrement le texte, ce qu'il fait un été durant, enfermé dans sa chambre. Cela donne finalement trente-sept chapitres, chacun étant, en alternance, le point de vue de Liselot et celui de Lander, qui forment bien, cette fois, un duo. Il a dix-neuf ans, et son livre est édité sous le titre *Duet met valse noten* [*Duo avec fausses notes*], en 1983. Il sera maintes fois réédité.

Quand il découvre *La Danse du coucou* d'Aidan Chambers, il comprend que « tout est possible avec un livre ». À l'occasion d'un travail de recherche sur cet auteur, il le rencontre pendant un quart d'heure dans le taxi entre Amsterdam et l'aéroport de Schiphol – quelques mois plus tard il lui rend visite en Angleterre. Leur rencontre durera trois jours : « Je suis arrivé comme étudiant, je suis reparti adulte. »



Afrika achter het hek, illustrated by Anna Höglund

En 1991, Jacques Dohmen, qui était l'un des rédacteurs les plus importants de la maison d'édition Querido aux Pays-Bas, lui propose d'être édité chez lui ; ce qu'il fait effectivement en 1995. Il publie *Blote handen* qui sera traduit en français sous le titre *À mains nues*, puis un petit texte (qui n'a pas encore été traduit en français), *Afrika achter het hek* [*Afrique, au-delà de la barrière*], illustré par Anna Höglund, une illustratrice qu'il apprécie. « J'ai beaucoup appris avec Anna Höglund », souligne-t-il. En effet, pour l'édition allemande, c'est un autre illustrateur qui a été choisi « parce que Anna Höglund n'est pas facile à vendre », et le livre a reçu une mauvaise critique et ne s'est pas vendu ; un an plus tard, un deuxième éditeur allemand publie l'album avec les illustrations d'Anna Höglund, et ça marche. Pour les albums suivants, Bart Moeyaert imposera son illustrateur(trice) : « C'est mon livre qui est dans les magasins, je dois vraiment en être fier. »

*À mains nues*, son premier livre traduit en français, en 1999 aux éditions du Seuil, l'a été par une traductrice qui n'« accrochait » pas à sa manière d'écrire ; le succès de l'ouvrage en France a d'ailleurs été très mitigé, ce qu'il attribue au fait qu'il n'a pas été traduit de manière adéquate. « La leçon, dit-il, c'est qu'il faut une bonne entente entre le traducteur et l'auteur. »

Par la suite, ses livres ont été traduits en français par Daniel Cunin, qui avait lu en néerlandais un certain nombre de ses ouvrages et qui l'a recommandé à Danielle Dastugue, directrice éditoriale du Rouergue, la maison d'édition principale de Bart Moeyaert aujourd'hui en France.

Avec Daniel Cunin, Bart Moeyaert échange parfois quelques méls, mais, affirme Bart Moeyaert, « si je peux lire le français, comprendre le français, je pense que le traducteur connaît mieux sa langue que moi » : il se contente donc de donner son avis sur un nom ou un détail.

Lui-même a une activité de traducteur, pour des auteurs qu'il apprécie, tels Chris Donner ou Jürg Schubiger : « Il y a mon nom dedans, je veux être fier de ce que je fais. »

Quatre de ses albums sont traduits en français : *Moi, Dieu et la création* et *Olek a tué un ours*, illustrés par Wolf Erlbruch, *Le Conte de Luna*, illustré par Gerda Dendooven (traduit par Maurice Lomré), et *Le Maître de tout*, par Katrien Matthys.

On lui a proposé de faire un livre musical, ce qu'il a accepté avec enthousiasme, parce qu'il étouffe s'il reste entre ses quatre murs d'écrivain. En néerlandais, un cd accompagne effectivement chacun de ces albums. On lui propose d'écrire un livre sur la Genèse, ce qui n'a pas été facile mais finalement, *Moi, Dieu et la création* est apprécié autant par une Église très stricte que par les non-croyants ! (...)

Ses romans proposent de partager un univers autour de la famille, et mettent des jeunes en interaction avec le monde des adultes. Pourquoi ? Il a voulu que son récit *Oreille d'homme* soit « miroir du monde des jeunes, et miroir du monde des adultes. » « Je suis resté à l'époque où je trouvais que tout était difficile, quand j'avais douze ans, et encore vingt ans, trente ans » (par exemple, comment

communiquer, avec un père très sévère, quand on a appris à dire « Oui, ça va » même quand ça ne va pas ?), même si la jeunesse, c'est en même temps « le plus beau temps de la vie, où tout est possible, où on peut choisir ce qu'on veut ». À vingt ans, dit-il, on est tourné vers le futur, alors que dans l'enfance, on est plus tourné vers la découverte, ce qui inclut douleur, tristesse. (...)

Dans *À mains nues*, le héros est poussé à faire quelque chose. Et de plus en plus, dans les livres de Bart Moeyaert, ses héros agissent, parce que « j'ai compris dans ma propre vie que quand je fais quelque chose, le monde change, et quand je ne fais rien, rien ne bouge ».

Un enfant de huit ans ne comprendra certainement pas tout de ce qu'il lit, mais « tout va ensemble ». Lui-même se souvient d'être allé, jeune, à une représentation de *La Mouette* de Tchekov, en français, dont il n'a pas compris tous les dialogues, mais il a été enthousiasmé par l'atmosphère et le cadre qui formaient un ensemble.

Il refuse de réduire la culture enfantine aux séries télévisées, et pense qu'en matière culturelle, on peut proposer à un enfant ce que l'on propose à un adulte – même si c'est peu à peu que l'enfant en assimilera la richesse.

Son père ne lui ayant jamais dit qu'écrivain, ça pouvait être une profession, Bart Moeyaert n'en a jamais eu l'idée. Entre son premier roman (1983) et *Nid de guêpes* (1997), il a compris qu'il pouvait écrire un « kaléidoscope » : ce qu'on veut, « mais tu comprends que ta voix est la bonne ».

Aujourd'hui, il est beaucoup plus libre. Être libre n'empêche pas de se poser des questions du type : « Est-ce que ce que je fais est bien ? » (...)

Il a été également nommé « poète de la ville d'Anvers » en 2006 et 2007. Sa tâche consistait à suivre la vie de la ville et à écrire douze poèmes (en deux ans) sur le sujet. Pendant ces deux années, il n'est pas arrivé à écrire autre chose ; il devenait cynique, trouvait que le monde était noir et la vie, lourde. Quand sa fonction a cessé, il a voyagé pendant six mois, et a compris qu'il était libre lorsqu'il écrivait des histoires – ce qu'il a fait depuis, sans négliger les poèmes ou le théâtre, choses secondaires mais qui sont une respiration pour lui.

En 2009 paraît *Embrasse-moi* (en mars, traduction française de *Kus me* publié en 1991) et *Graz* [Graz], roman pour adultes. Il a été cité plusieurs fois pour le Prix Andersen, en 1998, 2002, 2004, et a obtenu divers prix, dont le Hibou d'or (De Gouden uil, prix néerlandophone) : trois fois, il a été nommé, on lui a dit « Bart, tu es jeune, ça viendra un jour », et la quatrième, il l'a eu, en 2001, pour *Le Conte de Luna*, un conte qu'il a réécrit. Il commente avec humour : « Tu reçois le prix pour une histoire qui n'est pas vraiment de toi ! »

Un auteur qui nous a fait partager avec simplicité un peu de ce qui lui tient à cœur, et que l'on peut retrouver dans ses livres... ou sur son site : [www.bartmoeyaert.com](http://www.bartmoeyaert.com).

Source : Bibliothèque nationale de France, CNLJ - La Joie par les livres.  
Merci à Marie-Ange Pompignoli et Bart Moeyaert pour l'autorisation de reproduire ce texte.

### What do you do between two books?

After I've definitely finished, I'm euphoric for three and a half minutes. As I'm tidying up, clearing the book out of my study bit by bit, I keep smiling. That cheerfulness is just a pretense. The mourning period has begun long ago. Saying goodbye to a book also means saying goodbye to a phase of my life. The publisher and I discuss the design; we look forward to the publication. Perhaps I manage to do almost nothing for a few days – there's no such thing as doing nothing. When the first interview happens, I call the book that I finished six months ago 'my new book'. But at that moment I'm quietly working away on something that really is new – it's a strange phenomenon.



## List of awards and distinctions

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### Duet met valse noten

- Best Book of the Year by the Flemish Children and Youth Jury 1984 (B)

### Suzanne Dantine

- Honourable mention four-yearly Charlotte Köhler Grant 1990 (NL)

### Een kuil om in te wonen

- Boekenwelp (Book cub) 1991 (B)

### Kus me

- Boekenleeuw (Book Lion Award) 1992 (B)
- West-Flanders Regional Award 1993 (B)
- Antwerp Regional Award 1993 (B)
- IBBY Honorlist Hans Christian Andersen Award 1994
- Owl of the Month Youth and Literature Award 1993 (G)
- Honor list German Literature for Youth Award 1994 (G)
- White Ravens 1994 (G)

### Voor altijd, altijd

- Boekenwelp 1993 (B)
- Vlag en wimpel (Flag and Pennant) 1993 (NL)
- Honor list German Literature for Youth Award 1995 (G)

### Blote handen

- Boekenleeuw (Book Lion Award) 1996 (B)
- Shortlist Nomination for Gouden Uil (Golden Owl) 1996 (B)
- Zilveren Griffel (Silver Slate-Pencil Award) 1996 (NL)
- Eyecatcher Award January 1998 (G)
- Deutsche Jugendliteratur Preis 1998 (G)
- Three-Yearly Flemish Cultural Literature for Youth Award 1998 (B)
- Norwegian Award for Translation 1999 (Norway)
- Interregional Award for Literature 1999 (B)

### Afrika achter het hek

- Samstorfer Children's Book Award 2000 (G)
- Zilveren Penseel 1996 for the illustrations by Anna Höglund (NL)

### Mansoor, of hoe we Stina bijna doodkregen

- Shortlist Nomination for Gouden Uil (Golden Owl) 1998 (B)
- Boekenwelp (Book Cub Award) 1997 (B)

### Wespennest

- Luchs (Lynx) awarded by Die Zeit & Radio Bremen (G)

**De brief die Rosie vond**

- Longlist Nomination for Gouden Uil (Golden Owl) 1998 (B)
- Boekenwelp (Book Cub Award) 1998 (B)
- Boekenpauw (Book Peacock) 1998 for the illustrations by André Sollie (B)

**Het is de liefde die we niet begrijpen**

- Boekenleeuw (Book Lion Award) 2000 (B)
- Shortlist Nomination for Gouden Uil (Golden Owl) 2000 (B)
- Prix Libbylit 2006 (meilleur roman belge) (B)

**Broere**

- Woutertje Pieterse Award 2001 (NL)
- Longlist Nomination for the Gouden Uil (Golden Owl) 2002 (B)
- Jugendbuch des Monats vom Deutschen Akademie 2007 (G)
- Luchs (Lynx) awarded by Die Zeit & Radio Bremen 2006 (G)
- Die Sieben Besten 2006 (G)

**Luna van de boom**

- De Gouden Uil (Golden Owl) 2001 (B)

**Het beest heet Mona**

- Zilveren Griffel 2002 (NL)

**Dani Bennoni**

- Boekenwelp (Book Cub Award) 2005 (B)
- Nienke van Hichtumprijs 2005 (NL)

**De Schepping**

- Boekenleeuw (Book Lion Award) 2004 (B)
- Zilveren Griffel 2004 (NL)
- Zilveren Penseel 2004 (NL) for the illustrations by Wolf Erlbruch
- Luchs (Lynx) awarded by Die Zeit & Radio Bremen 2004 (D)
- Die Sieben Besten 2003 (G)
- Shortlist Gouden Uil (Golden Owl) 2004 (B)
- Gouden Uil Prijs jonge Lezer (Golden Owl of the Young Reader) 2004 (B)

**Olek schoot een beer**

- Die Sieben Besten 2006 (G)

**De baas van alles**

- White Ravens 2008 (G)

**Durf voor drie**

- Luchs awarded by Die Zeit & Radio Bremen 2008 (G)
- Die Sieben Besten 2008 (G)
- Hörbuch Bestenliste 2009 (G)
- Nomination Deutsche Jugendliteraturpreis 2009 (G)

**Gedichten voor gelukkige mensen**

- Nomination J.C. Bloem Poetry Prize 2009 (NL)

**Graz**

- Nomination AKO Literature Prize 2009 (NL)

**Het Paradijs**

- Longlist Dioraphte Jongerenliteratuur Prijs 2011 (B-NL)
- Prijs Letterkunde van de Provincie West-Vlaanderen 2013 (B)

**De Melkweg**

- Boekenleeuw (Book Lion Award) 2012 (B)
- Prijs Letterkunde van de Provincie West-Vlaanderen 2013 (B)
- Finalist Premio Letteratura Ragazzi Cento 2018 (Italy)

**Wie klopt daar?**

- Boekenleeuw (Book Lion Award) 2013 (B)
- Zilveren Griffel 2013 (NL)
- IBBY Honour List 2014 (B)

**Jij en ik en alle andere kinderen**

- Beste 7 Bücher für Junge Leser (D)
- Buch des Monats Oktober 2016, Institut für Jugendliteratur (Austria)

**De gans en zijn broer**

- Shortlist Gouden Lijst 2015 (NL)
- Shortlist Woutertje Pieterse Award 2015 (NL)

**De Hemel**

- Shortlist Gouden Lijst 2016 (NL)
- Shortlist Woutertje Pieterseprijs 2016 (NL)

**Complete Works**

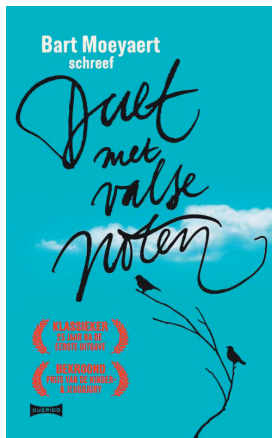
- Several nominations for the Hans Christian Andersen Award – listed as a finalist in 2006 and 2012
- Yearly nominations for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award

### Do you ever feel lost?

I was in the Yumobashi shopping complex in Osaka, on the vast third floor, where all they sell is computers. Above every computer was a sign with red Japanese characters. All around me I could see hundreds and hundreds of these signs, thousands of red Japanese characters – but I couldn't read a single one. Being lost isn't a feeling, but a sensation. And I really enjoyed it. On that computer floor at Yumobashi, it hit me for the first time that my language is within me and that that's worth a great deal but, at the same time, nothing.

## Complete bibliography with translated editions (year – title, publisher, country)

B Belgium                      F France  
 NL Netherlands              I Italy  
 G Germany



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 1998 – *Leander, Liselot und die Liebe*, Peter Hammer, G  
 1998 – (Japanese), Kumon, Japan  
 2001 – *Duet desafinat*, Columna, Spain (Catalan)  
 2014 – *Duett hannis hangokra*, Pagony, Hungary
- 1986 – *Terug naar Af* [*Back to square one*], Altiora, B  
 2002 – *Bocciato*, Fabbri/Bompiani, I  
 2004 – *Cateado*, Edelvives, Spain
- 1989 – *Mijn tuin uit!* [*Get out!*], Zwijsen, NL – Ill. Annemie Heymans
- 1989 – *Een klap is geen kus* [*A Kick is Not a Kiss*], Zwijsen, NL – Ill. Annet Schaap (since 2013 part of ‘*Jij en ik en alle andere kinderen*’)
- 1989 – *Het boek van Niete* [*Niete’s book*], Altiora, B – Ill. Joke van Eyck (since 2013 part of ‘*Jij en ik en alle andere kinderen*’)
- 1989 – *Suzanne Dantine*, Altiora, B  
 New edition, new title: 1997, *Wespennest*, Querido, NL
- 1990 – *Een kuil om in te wonen* [*A Hole to Live In*], Zwijsen, NL – Ill. Jan Jutte (Since 2007 part of ‘*Durf voor drie*’)
- 1991 – *Kus me* [*Kiss Me*], Altiora, B  
 1993 – *Küss mich*, Ravensburger, G  
 1994 – *Kyss meg*, Aschehoug Norsk Forlag, Norway  
 1996 – *Me-dà um Beijo*, Ediciones Ediouro, Brasil  
 1998 – *Baciarmi*, Fabbri/Bompiani, I  
 2000 – *Filisé me*, Patakis, Greece  
 2003 – (Thai), Image Publishing, Thailand  
 2008 – *Embrasse-moi*, Rouergue, F
- 1991 – *Een boot in de mist* [*A Boat in the Fog*], Zwijsen, NL – Ill. Juliette de Wit

1992 – *Voor altijd, altijd* [*Forever, always*], Zwijsen, NL – Ill. Annemie Heymans (Since 2008 part of *Missen is moeilijk*)

1994 – *Wo ist Mia?*, Ravensburger Verlag/Ravensburg, G

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1995 – *Die steeg van ons* [*That Alley of Ours*]. Zwijsen, NL – invoegen: - Ill. Annemie Heymans

1995 – *Afrika achter het hek* [*Africa Behind the Fence*], Querido, NL – Ill. Anna Höglund

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Mangia la foglia

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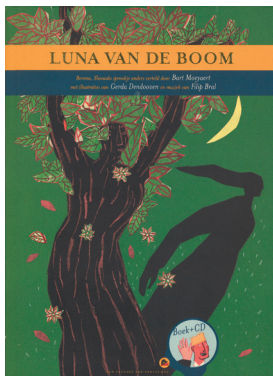
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- 2001 – *È l'amore che non comprendiamo*, Salani, I
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Luna van de boom

2000 – *Luna van de boom [Luna from the Tree]*, Pantalone, B – Ill. Gerda Dendooven, comp. Filip Bral.

2003 – *Le conte de Luna*, Autrement, F

2000 – *Broere (de oudste, de stilste, de echtste, de verste, de liefste, de snelste en ik) [Brother (the Oldest, the Quietest, the Truest, the Farthest, the Loveliest, the Fastest, and Me)]*, Querido, NL

- 2002 – *Broere*, Fremad, Danmark
- 2005 – *Brothers*, Front Street, USA
- 2006 – *Sieben Brüder*, Hanser, G
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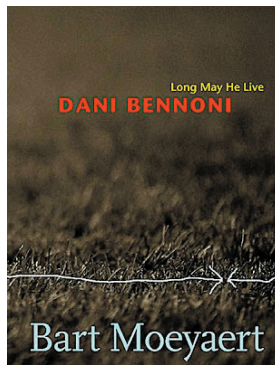
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Dani Bennoni

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- 2007 – *De baas van alles* [*The boss of everything*], Manteau, B – Ill. Katrien Matthys  
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 2011 – *Wer ist hier der Chef?*, Hanser, G

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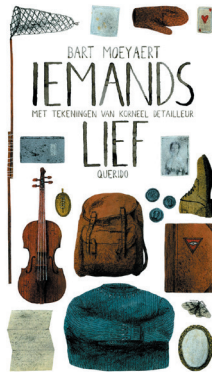


Du bist da, du bist fort

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Iemands lief

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2018 – *L'oisie et son frère*, La Joie de Lire, Switzerland

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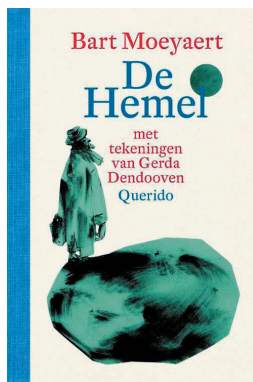
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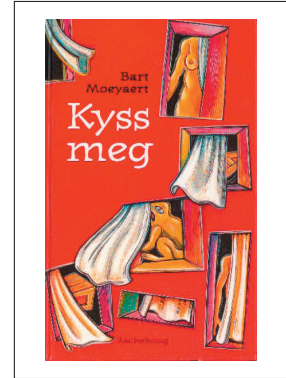
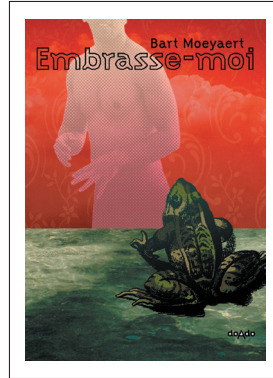
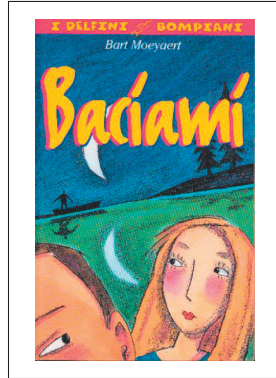
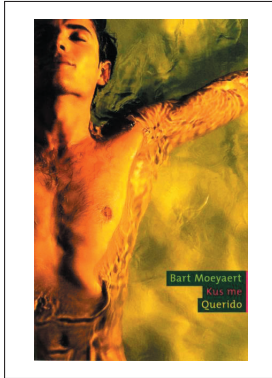


De Hemel

### Is language the tool or the material?

In the 1980s and 90s, author Janni Howker wrote some impressive books and then withdrew from the literary world. She lives in the Cumbrian countryside now, where she keeps sheep. Her works include *The Nature of the Beast* and *Martin Farrell*. When *Martin Farrell* came out, I really wanted to translate it into Dutch. It turned out to be untranslatable though, because it's 'composed' in a particular rhythm and in a particular dialect, which it's impossible to find a good equivalent for in Dutch. A French translation was published, but it doesn't have the same power as the original book. Translation isn't a matter of pulling on a pair of boots and just swaggering your way through a foreign book. In other words: language is not the hammer, but the wood.

## Ten most important titles

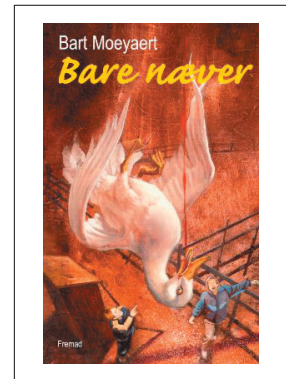
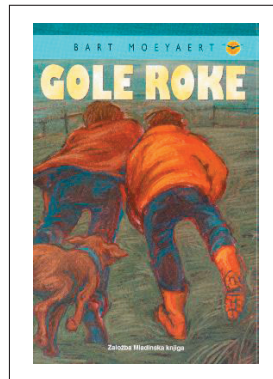
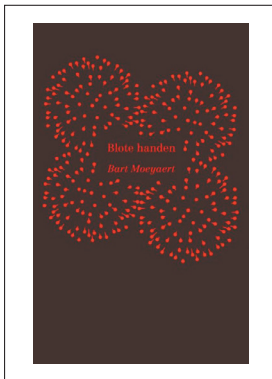


### 1991 – *Kus me* [*Kiss Me*], Altiora, B

Four young people meet each other on a hot summer afternoon at a lake. What starts as an innocent game gets out of hand.

“Young author Bart Moeyaert is a promising talent in Flanders. His language is beautiful, baroque but sharp.”

TROUW (NL)



### 1995 – *Blote handen* [*Bare Hands*], Querido, NL

On New Year's eve Ward faces the difficult decision whether or not he will tolerate the hateful Betjeman in his life, especially after all that's gone wrong already.

“You'll read the whole thing with a knot in your stomach, because it is so sad, because the writing is so breathtakingly exciting, and because you know that such things really do happen in life.”

DE GROENE AMSTERDAMMER (NL)



2000 – *Broere (de oudste, de stilste, de echtste, de verste, de liefste, de snelste en ik)*

[*Brother (the Oldest, the Quietest, the Truest, the Farthest, the Loveliest, the Fastest, and Me)*], Querido, NL

Thirty-one stories that together make up one year in Bart Moeyaert's childhood, featuring 'our father', 'our mother', and of course all of the seven brothers 'the oldest, the quietest, the truest, the farthest, the loveliest, the fastest and me'.

"Moeyaert proves without doubt that even a happy childhood can be a goldmine for a writer."

DE VOLKSKRANT (NL)

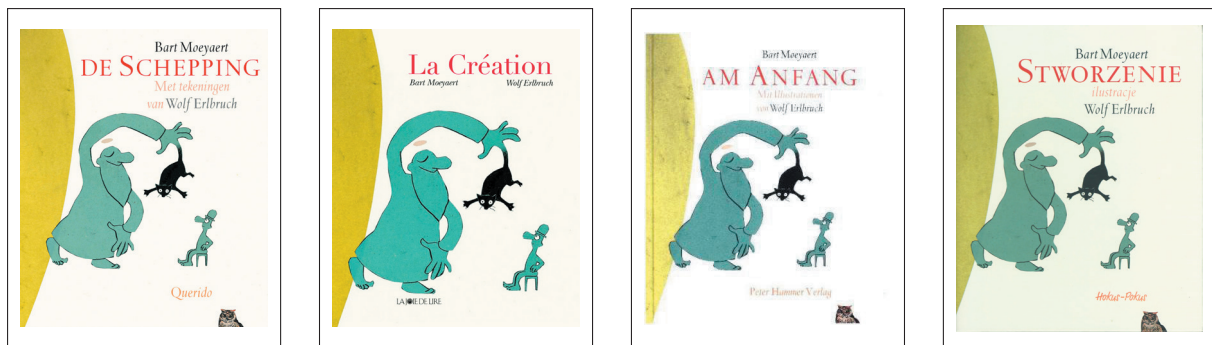


1999 – *Het is de liefde die we niet begrijpen [It's Love We Don't Understand]*, Querido, NL

Three sketches of a family without a father, a family where everybody is, in their own way, looking for love.

"If you cannot talk about something, it is better to keep silent. If you're going to write about it then do so as suggestively as Moeyaert."

DE VOLKSKRANT (NL)



2003 – *De Schepping* [*The Creation*], Querido, NL – Ill. Wolf Erlbruch

A little man watches how God creates the world and gradually finds his place in this creation.

“Moeyaert and Erlbruch form an extraordinarily fine symbiosis.”

DIE ZEIT (G)

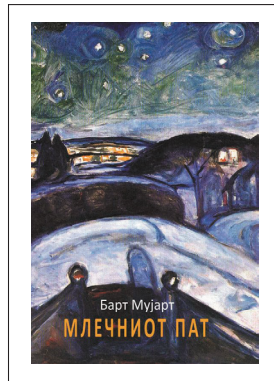
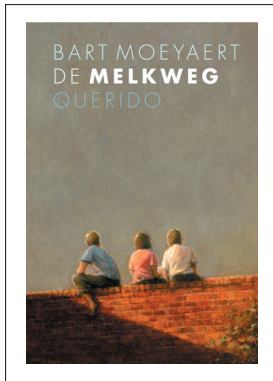


2007 – *Durf voor drie* [*Courage for three*], Querido, NL (compilation of *De brief die Rosie vond*, *Een kuil om in te wonen* en *Het beest heet Mona.*) – Ill. Rotraut Susanne Berner

Three stories for early readers about courage: Rosie has to curb her curiosity; Tom decides to stand up for himself, for the first time; and a couple of children tackle bully Mona.

“Cleverly told stories, extremely simple in language, style and structure, but Moeyaert explores subtly the relationships between the characters, and especially those between the adult and the child.”

LEESIDEE (B)



**2011 – De Melkweg [The Milky Way], Querido, NL**

Three children gather every day on top of a wall at the end of their street, viewing the street and the old woman walking her dog. Days are passing by slowly, until one of the children places a bet.

“Moeyaert is a master of the short track: the characters come alive in just a few pen strokes. Deceptive simplicity is his trademark.”

DE STANDAARD (B)



**2013 – Jij en ik en alle andere kinderen: de verzamelde verhalen en kindergedichten [You and Me and All The Other Children: collected stories and poems for children], Querido, NL - Ill. Rotraut Susanne Berner, André Sollie, Gerda Dendooven, Marije Tolman, Korneel Detailleur**

A collection of all children’s poems and stories Bart Moeyaert has produced in his thirty years as a writer.

“Wild, breathless stories in this great collection of small texts”

SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG (G)




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**2014 – *De gans en zijn broer* [The Goose and its Brother], Querido, NL – Ill. Gerda Dendooven**

Life at the farm is difficult, and the goose and his brother are overcome by melancholic thoughts. Why does the world constantly change, how do you ask for forgiveness, and if the farmer's wife leaves, does she ever return?

“As always, Moeyaert shows himself to be a master of suggestion”

TROUW (NL)




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**2018 – *Tegenwoordig heet iedereen Sorry* [Everyone's Sorry Nowadays], Querido, NL**

The story on one afternoon in the life of 12-year-old Bianca, who tries to get a grip on her disturbed family relations and on herself.

“An exceptionally intimate and intense novel. An encounter you'll never forget.”

TZUM (B)

**What clothes do you like to write in,  
and do you write with or without shoes?**

In pyjama bottoms. And with bare feet.



## List of books sent to the jurors

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1995 – *Blote handen [Bare Hands]*, Querido, NL

2000 – *Broere (de oudste, de stilste, de echtste, de verste, de liefste, de snelste en ik) [Brother (the Oldest, the Quietest, the Truest, the Farthest, the Loveliest, the Fastest, and Me)]*, Querido, NL

2003 – *De Schepping [The Creation]*, Querido, NL – Ill. Wolf Erlbruch

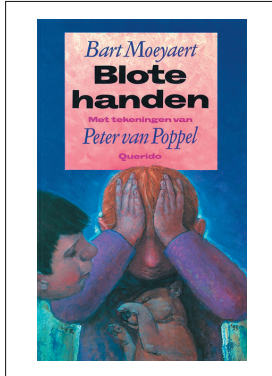
2011 – *De Melkweg [The Milky Way]*, Querido, NL

2018 – *Tegenwoordig heet iedereen Sorry [Everyone's Sorry Nowadays]*, Querido, NL

### What's your favourite first sentence and which book does it come from?

My favourite first sentence must come from the bookshelves in my study, because that's where I have the books I want to keep close to me. And of course I don't want to pick a beautiful first sentence from a book that I don't like. So, I reach for *De eikelvreters* by Els Pelgrom ('We kept the door closed.'). I open *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf ('Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.'). My favourite one today is the first sentence of Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*: 'Like most people I lived for a long time with my mother and father.' I see that I like deceptively simple first sentences. In Winterson's case, the tension of her entire story is there in just a handful of words – but you have to read the whole book.

## Published reviews of the books submitted to the jury



### On *Blote handen* [*Bare Hands*]

#### Booklist, 15 December 1998 (USA)

Gr. 3-7. Spare and heartfelt, this gripping first-person narrative gives you more than the boy's viewpoint; it seems as if you are right inside his head, feeling what he feels, physically and emotionally. The elemental story, translated from the Dutch, takes place on New Year's Eve in a country village. The boy, Ward, kills a duck that belongs to the village loner, Betjeman, who wants to move in with Ward's mother. The book opens with Betjeman chasing Ward and his best friend through the fields, until, in fury, Betjeman kills Ward's beloved dog. Overwhelmed with grief and anger, Ward hugs his dog to his body; he would just like to rush back home to the comfort of his mother and younger sister, but his friend persuades Ward to get revenge, and the boys make their way to Betjeman's rough farmhouse in search of their prey. As the tension builds to the climactic confrontation, Ward relives his wild jealousy when Betjeman has Christmas dinner with the family. He also admits Betjeman's violence and loneliness and connects them with his own. In fact, in a sense, all the characters are part of Ward. He and his best friend are like 'one pair of shoes,' and his friend pushes him the way he is already going. At the same time, he hears his mother's gentleness, and that is part of him, too. Opposed to his wild jealous anger is the aching tenderness for the dog he loved ("The way he stretched, burying his paws in my pillow"), which he now holds tight against himself. Readers will recognize the intensity of Ward's mixed-up feelings. They will rush to get to the end of the story, and then they will want to talk about it.

Hazel Rochman, starred review

#### Literair NRC Handelsblad, 29 September 1995 (The Netherlands)

#### We Were One Pair of Shoes: Sensitive and tough story by Bart Moeyaert

How distant the world of children often is from that of adults, much as we might sometimes wish it were otherwise. However hard we, big and small, try to make the world a unified whole, it all too easily falls to pieces. An adult raises his glass, his hair shines, as does his smile, and he says 'Here's to us,' thinking perhaps that he's happy, or about to become so, from now on. But the entire Christmas dinner flies into his lap, the plates, the meat, the gravy, the glasses, and a child

shouts 'Never!' The child has seen not a smile but a grin. He has looked in disgust at the man and in disgust at his mother, who is also smiling, and in disgust at his sister with her lemonade. There is no peace and happiness. This is war.

Bart Moeyaert's book *Bare Hands* is troubling from the very first sentence. Two boys are being followed by an enormous, terrifying man with a plastic hand. It's Betjeman, raging and cursing, and he'd be quite capable of beating them to death. Many mysterious things are happening. There's a dead duck, a nervous dog, ditches and barbed wire and barns, and above all this inexplicably hostile man. Slowly everything becomes clear, but the sense of oppression refuses to lift. In fact it gets worse.

The two boys, Ward and Bernie, are friends. 'We were one pair of shoes. We were safe only if I was with him and he was with me.' Both have mothers, but Ward's mother starts to giggle when Betjeman is around and Betjeman beams when he looks at her. The dead duck belongs to Betjeman, the man with the plastic hand, the man who hits things. 'He hit everything that had a heart in it. What did he care?' The nervous dog is Elmer, Ward's dog: 'In my head Elmer sat next to me. [...] He looked up at me with a smile, because he could do that, smile.' Elmer is only a small dog. And Betjeman hits very hard.

*Bare Hands* describes just a few hours in the life of a boy, the last few hours of the last day of the year, perhaps the last few hours of his old life too, because in the new year everything is going to be different. From Ward's point of view, which is the point of view from which we get to see all the things we're reading about, that's a terrible disaster. Not that that's stated in so many words; things simply impress themselves on the reader. This is a book in which everything happens fairly quietly, just as in some films there's hardly any dialogue yet despite that, or because of it, your heart pounds as you watch. There's no air, no way out, only a relentless succession of events.

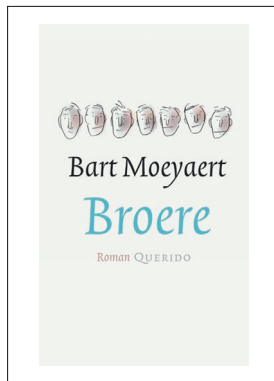
What was so great about Ward's old life, his life in the time when the world was still whole – life before Betjeman? He doesn't recall any memories of it. But it's clear what mothers mean to him. We see that quite quickly in fact. 'From where we were standing I could hear Bernie's mother singing. It sounded as if she was enticing me towards the kitchen, because she sang "Peace and Happiness, oh sleep now, I'm with you". He is desperate to go home, to his own mother, to lean on her for a while. But there's something that makes that impossible. Or rather someone: 'You're not my father.'

It's possible that Ward's future stepfather is indeed a loathsome monster. He's certainly an unpleasant person. He is also, as the mother who befriends him says, a lonely man who perhaps longs to be different. But as soon as he changes, he gets a whole Christmas dinner flung into his lap. Maybe he deserves more understanding than the boy affords him, but that's not what this is about, the objective truth, or sympathy for a difficult man. What it's about is a distraught boy whose world is being destroyed by a far too big, far too strong adult. It's about the horror of being small and powerless, resolute and determined, and meanwhile thinking: 'I wished Bernie's mother would stay with me. I needed a pair of arms, preferably around me, more than anything else around me.'

Bart Moeyaert has written nine books and is the winner of a number of Flemish literary awards. Understandably so, since few writers combine such sensitivity with such toughness. *Bare Hands* is a book about two lonely worlds side by side, hopelessly irreconcilable worlds, no matter how much desire there may be for 'Peace and Happiness, oh sleep now, I'm with you'.

Marjoleine de Vos

Translated by Liz Waters



**On Broere (de oudste, de stilste, de echtste, de verste, de liefste, de snelste en ik)  
[Brother (the Oldest, the Quietest, the Truest, the Farthest, the Loveliest, the Fastest, and Me)]**

**School Library Journal, January 2008 (USA)**

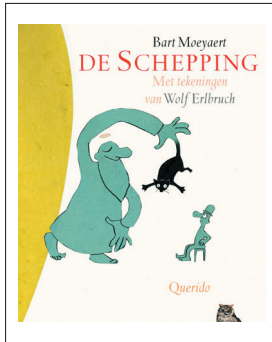
Gr 6 Up – This candid first-person memoir evokes the innocence, imagination, and gullibility of youth. Moeyaert’s short vignettes, none longer than four pages, tell of his experiences as the youngest of seven brothers growing up in Belgium in the late 1960s and ‘70s. Conveyed in the sparest of prose, the day-to-day drama and adventures present the sweet, pungent, and poignant tale of life in a large family. When mother is hospitalized, a woman comes in to lend a hand. When she sets the boys to cutting up scrap fabric, their freedom gone, they begin to grouse, “We counted the days. We glowered at the help from under our eyebrows and made it clear with our bodies what we thought of her. We let the corners of our mouths droop, we hunched our backs, we pulled in our stomachs – that was what we thought of her.” Later the woman unveils a patchwork quilt that the boys unwittingly helped to make for their mother’s homecoming. Tucked within the charming misadventures and misconceptions of the “littlest one” is the finely tuned perfection of language. This is a careful translation in which nothing seems lost, and what is gained is the appreciation of a fresh, original voice.

Alison Follos, North Country School, Lake Placid, NY.

**La Libre Belgique, 3rd April 2009 (Belgium)**

Savoureuse chronique familiale, *Frères* affiche à la fois une couleur flamande et universelle. Le nouveau roman de Bart Moeyaert respire, en effet, l’enfance, la tartine, l’œuf dur et la barre de chocolat des jours d’excursion, les bêtises familiales, la fraternité et les peurs à retardement. Car celui qui manque à table est peut-être resté enterré dans la fosse en sable... Avec son humour parfois proche de celui de Gosciny dans *Le Petit Nicolas*, son désir de transmettre et de témoigner, Bart Moeyaert, auteur d’une trentaine de livres très appréciés en Flandre, se raconte avec pudeur, simplicité et détachement. Benjamin d’une famille de sept enfants – ce qui lui valut d’avoir le roi Baudouin pour parrain, d’aller dans les cabines des filles à la plage, d’être toujours le plus mignon mais également de se faire mener au bateau –, il nous séduit avec ces 42 récits venus rappeler combien faire partie d’une bande de frères, ce n’est pas rien...

L.B.



## On De Schepping [The Creation]

### Revista Babar (Spain)

Nos encontramos ante un libro álbum de edición muy cuidada. Imaginemos que estamos en el primer día de la Creación: lo primero que se hizo fue la luz. Este libro es una confabulación de claro-oscuros. Las ilustraciones de Wolf Erlbruch iluminan/aclaran el oscuro texto de Bart Moeyaert. Lo único que molesta, a mi parecer, son ciertos adornos en la tipografía, repartidos aleatoriamente a lo largo del texto. Pero nos falta el original para comprobar si no nos estamos equivocando para hacer esta valoración. Aunque desde hace algunos años se viene experimentando con la tipografía, rara es la ocasión en que el resultado es completamente satisfactorio. ¿Por qué? Porque queda reducido a un mero adorno carente de significado para el lector, no se trata de una llave que nos facilitara algún tipo de incursión más profunda en las entrañas del libro.

Este libro álbum es realmente un delicioso ejercicio de imaginación. Es un doble reto: por un lado, sólo cuando consigas hacer desaparecer muchas cosas, incluso a tu propia madre, lograrás imaginarte cómo es la nada, y por otro, después de este esfuerzo, volver a ubicar en esa nada a Dios, al protagonista y encima, por ejemplo, una silla, para esperar más cómodamente a que ocurra algo. Porque sin los personajes, las cosas: ¿de qué se podría hablar? ¿Qué se puede expresar sin conceptos, sin palabras? La nada al mismo tiempo es algo muy simple, pero terriblemente complicado. Hagamos un esfuerzo, intentemos imaginarnos la presencia de una nada voraz y al mismo tiempo plana, la que todo engulle y nada contiene. Comprobaremos que nuestra imaginación merma con los años. Quiero creer, estoy prácticamente segura, de que aunque esté en juego la propia madre (referencia esencial durante muchos años), se trata de un ejercicio mucho más fácil para los niños: «Si quieres ver el principio de las cosas, debes hacer desaparecer muchas cosas. Incluso a tu madre».

Un discurso inteligente, poético, nada superfluo ni facilón (aunque complicado, oscuro y críptico para niños) y desde una perspectiva muy actual contrasta con las imágenes sencillas, luminosas, de trazo etéreo que se concretan cuando van apareciendo los objetos tangibles de las manos de Dios. Sencillas, sí, pero magistrales; Wolf Erlbruch se atreve con inmensas páginas blancas en las que sitúa sus ilustraciones mínimamente coloreadas. Naturalmente esta situación va cambiando según la nada desaparece bajo el mundo material, pero aún así, el blanco es el telón de fondo de su imaginario.

Sus ilustraciones de trazo muy simple son tremendamente expresivas. Uno no deja de asombrarse cuando vuelve a constatar lo expresivo que puede ser un simple trazo, el significado que puede tener una línea... Fruto de esta expresividad son unos personajes terriblemente simpáticos: justo en la frontera genial del cliché, en el mejor de los sentidos, y la firma del autor. No nos extraña su apariencia y, al mismo tiempo, son ilustraciones vivas, con carisma, frescura y originalidad. El texto de Bart Moeyaert es otra delicia que te deja volando en un extraño lugar en el que confluye lo sabido, lo que ya hemos leído con anterioridad y una nueva perspectiva, la de un ser humano actual e inconformista,

un hombre desnudo y con sombrero. Su misión: la Creación como espectáculo precisa de un público, un espectador. Un hombre consciente de su pequeñez en el universo y que, aún así, se enfada por ser un mero espectador, orgullo herido al ver hay alguien más poderoso que él. Nuestro Dios es parco en palabras, es un obrante, operante, la acción más allá del pensamiento. Es humano en su cansancio al séptimo día, cae rendido, se queda dormido como un bebé. Es divino en su capacidad de disfrutar de su obra. Es simple y prepotente al mismo tiempo.

Lo que más nos extraña de esta visión moderna de la Creación es el desencante. ¿Pero podíamos esperar otro? ¿En el título no leemos claramente dos palabras: La Creación? El desencanto y el disgusto de nuestro hombrecito con bombín desaparecen cuando recibe a su compañera, al otro igual a su naturaleza que necesita para poder disfrutar de la Creación, una mujer con la que poder compartir y así matar la propia soledad. ¿Machista? Simplemente la esencia cultural de lo que es la Creación, pero nos choca mucho más después de haber volado en significados más libres. De hecho, la mujer que surge es de un rojo tierra, el color más fuerte de todo el álbum.

Un álbum interesante. Nos abre signos de interrogación, nos deleita... ¿Como único álbum en nuestra estantería? No lo creo, le falta una vuelta de tuerca para ser uno de esos álbumes más representativos y esplendorosos. Y al niño tendremos que guiarle entre las palabras, con las imágenes no será necesario...

Moka Seco Reeg

#### NRC Handelsblad, 26th September 2003 (The Netherlands)

##### Bananas on God's nose

Seldom was God so amiable, so serene and at the same time so unfathomable as in illustrator Wolf Erlbruch's interpretation in this stunningly beautiful picture book for all ages, but most particularly for children from six years: *Creation*. Rare too is the way in which text and images go together in this book, a new text which Bart Moeyaert wrote for an adaptation of Haydn's oratorio *Die Schöpfung*, commissioned by the Dutch Wind Ensemble. The interpretation has been performed various times since then, next autumn it will be performed several times more, but now there's the book too. And if desired, a special edition with CD.

Moeyaert's genius is apparent from the first page. His personal Genesis begins thus: "In the beginning there was nothing. It's hard for you to imagine that. Everything that exists now has not to exist yet. You have to turn out the light, not be there yourself, and then forget all the dark too, because in the beginning there was nothing, not even dark. If you want to see the beginning of everything you must blank out a lot. Even your mother."

The mother gives this passage light and humor, but mainly demonstrates Moeyaert's ability to see the world through a child's eyes, without instantly reverting to strained coziness. "In the beginning was my mother", of course, it takes a person years to get past this thought. In the accompanying illustration, mum is shown inching out of the bottom of the image. You can no longer see her



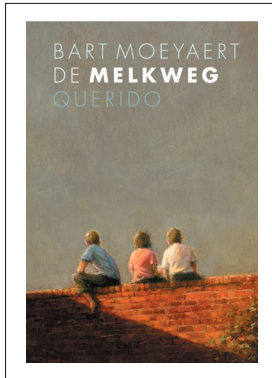
head. Erlbruch has drawn an archetypal mother's body, with slippers, a tartan skirt, an apron and, the most important of course: an obligingly proffered tray with a glass of something. Milk, probably. Or squash.

Moeyaert sustains his powerful narrative manner right to the end. The dialogues between God and the I figure are each worth quoting. God with his large eyes closed and his practically triumphant halo is very pleased at the prospect of His Works. He is a stranger to doubt. The first thing He creates is daytime: "I only realized a few hours later, when it got dark." God sticks up his thumb. But apart from God, Moeyaert's other characters do wrestle with things. The I figure in *Creation* soon suffers from being human. "Why did you first make light, and only later the sun? Shouldn't it have been the other way round? Shouldn't it have been simultaneous?" [...] 'I could have slapped myself. What began as a well-meant question, suddenly twisted. My saliva was venom.'

These changes of mood are elegantly portrayed by illustrator Erlbruch. The blasé leaning back of the I figure, a little man with a bowler hat, the grimness of the thin line of his mouth all of a sudden, says it all. The uniqueness of Erlbruch's forms is that they are at once robust and graceful. He combines different types of paper and techniques, from paper cutting to painting, to clear compositions with instant appeal, but which on further inspection convey everything. When Moeyaert writes that "everything [...] grew and budded and blossomed," Erlbruch fills the page with diverging forms and lines. All of a sudden, three bananas balance on the tip of God's nose.

Judith Eiselin

Translated by Michele Hutchison



## On De Melkweg [The Milky Way]

**Knack, 25th May 2011 (Belgium)**

Telling stories to combat the big and scary:  
Bart Moeyaert is a master at capturing childhood fears,  
as he proves once again in *The Milky Way*.

Bart Moeyaert's *The Milky Way* sets out from a single location: a wall next to Old Iron Ltd., the yard where two outcasts heap up cast-off goods. Three children are sitting on the wall nearby: brothers Bossie and Oskar and their friend Geesje. In their heads they have turned the wall into a proper club house, complete with cat, fridge and armchairs. Beyond it lies the Milky Way, a dead street. It's summer and hot, the holiday is nearing its end and boredom threatens, but then the clock strikes six and a certain Nancy Sinatra and her dog Jeckyll shuffle by.

It's impossible to sum up *The Milky Way* in a nutshell, but we can reveal that as so often with Moeyaert, this is very much a tale of families and brothers. One brother, Oskar, is small and extremely sensitive. He records everything in meticulous detail. The other, Bossie, is several strides ahead of him. At the point where the story takes off their parents are absent: mother is in Italy contemplating how to deal with the 'tangle' in her head and father shuts himself up in his office at home. He is a journalist writing about banal realities but at the same time he throws up a wall against the reality immediately surrounding him. Then there are the girls, who circle around the two brothers: Geesje, who has to say a gradual goodbye to her favorite aunt, and Calista, who turns Bossie's head with her long legs.

The story emerges from the inner worlds of the characters. Oskar records and narrates. The most important things are in between the lines, or in the pauses. The adventure lies within or between people. Death is a strong presence. At the start the children take bets on who will die first: the old woman who totters along the Milky Way every day or her dog. From that moment their souls know no peace. What if bets or black humor influence reality? The story takes the trio to the graveyard, to a hospital corridor full of old people in decline – a slightly less convincing passage – and to the source of their own anxieties.

The Milky Way symbolizes the vast space in which we all have to find our place. As a title it also points to a fear children commonly have of floating alone in the universe, like an astronaut set adrift, or Laika the dog. The brothers tear themselves loose from each other and that evolution is cleverly portrayed by Moeyaert. One of the most beautiful passages in the book is the one in which, in the middle of the night, Oskar crosses the carpet to go to his brother. 'Try to be a bit less of a brother,' Bossie tells him.

When it comes to capturing fears, especially childhood fears, in language and emotion, Moeyaert remains a master. Who hasn't lain in bed as a child making up stories to get to sleep? Oskar and Bossie are fortunate enough to know newspaper stories, passed on by their father. Those anecdotes, which often have streaks of absurdity, provide a counterweight to the larger reality and ensure

humor is always around. Moeyaert is also extremely good at describing children's excitement, like the thrill of having a folded up, rustling banknote in your trouser pocket with which you'll soon be able to buy an ice cream. Or the taste of a kind of lemonade you've never tried before.

The motto of the book is: dare to strike out. Follow your own route, if need be without a map or GPS.

*The Milky Way* is about solidarity and loneliness, about falling out and making up, about race and class, enjoying company and keeping a distance, holding on and letting go. It's also about the thin boundary between fiction and reality, about inventing stories to build a dam against the big and scary, and about wanting to stay small and having to grow up.

Annelies de Waele

Translated by Liz Waters

#### De Standaard, 13 May 2011 (Belgium)

Little Men in the Moon: Being a child isn't child's play. Neither is writing about children. Bart Moeyaert does it with verve in *The Milky Way*

An endless, boring summer and a quiet street called the Milky Way, with the crumbling wall of Old Iron Ltd on one side. On top of the wall, looking out over the street, are two boys, Oskar and his older brother Bossie, and a girl, Geesje. They've been sitting there all summer, doing nothing as only children can. They're suffering from 'slugginess', since not a lot goes on in the Milky Way. It's as if everything has fallen silent, and 'falling silent is the same as dying,' says Geesje. The highpoint of each day is the moment when the wheezy dachshund Jeckyll and his boss Nancy Sinatra – an elderly woman so called on account of her strange boots – shuffle past. They are the unifying factor in this intimate story of growing pains, loss and mortality. Geesje is struggling with the illness and approaching death of a favorite aunt; Oskar and Bossie are glad to escape their house on Pomona Street and their father, a workaholic journalist whose thoughts are on his job more often than not. 'He pretended he was still there, but his eyes were already somewhere else, turned inwards.' Their mother has been in Italy for the past eight weeks, trying to bring some order to the 'tangle' in her head, and they rarely hear from her. The boys miss their parents, but they never say a word to each other about that. They're fragile and tough at the same time.

#### Who's going to die first?

The real action starts when Nancy and Jeckyll fail to appear in the street and the children take bets on who will die first: the dog or the old woman. The children's imaginations run wild, leading to all kinds of complications that make their emotional upheavals plain to see. There's a rift in the relationship between the brothers for a while when brash Bossie's eye falls on a new girl, 'who can't

replace Geesje'. For his part Bossie believes dreamy Oskar ought to be 'a bit less of a brother', and there are squabbles with Geesje too. It's summer and baking hot – 'the heat shrank our world' – and the characters' heads teem with emotion. They are all battling their own worries and problems without being able to express them – just like scrap merchants Petra and Priit, who barely understand Dutch and speak 'Scrapmetal'. It occurs to Oskar that 'if no one speaks your language and you don't understand anyone, it must feel as if you're walking around on the moon'. Sure enough, it's rather as if all the characters in this book are walking on the moon, and in their lack of understanding for each other's sensitivities they clash repeatedly. Deliverance comes only when their empathy gains the upper hand.

### **The short track**

Seeing the world through children's eyes and describing their emotions in such a way that no false adult notes are struck: it may seem deceptively simple, but it demands a great degree of control as well as empathy. Bart Moeyaert is a master at it – deceptive simplicity is his trademark. With his short, clear, distilled sentences he understands the trick of suggesting just as much as is actually said, and he manages to keep sentimentality at a safe distance. He's a master of the short track; his characters emerge instantly, in a few telling strokes of the pen. However sparing his language may be, it's extremely evocative. The opening scene – three children on an old factory wall in a deserted street – is instantly unforgettable. *The Milky Way* is an extraordinarily atmospheric little novel, almost a novella, and truly enjoyable for non-children too.

THE AUTHOR: writer, poet and performer who finds it easy to cross the boundary between child and adult audiences.

THE BOOK: children attempt to come to terms with loss and loneliness.

OUR VERDICT: evocative novella about loss and the pain we call growing up.

Veerle Vanden Bosch

Translated by Liz Waters



## On Tegenwoordig heet iedereen Sorry [Everyone's sorry nowadays]

De Standaard, 5 October 2018 (Belgium)

### In the shadow of brother dearest

Bart Moeyaert last had a novel for children published in 2011. *Everyone's Sorry Nowadays* was worth the wait.

It might be the most beautiful cover image of the year: the child staring at you from the front of Bart Moeyaert's new book, created by the Korean illustrator JangMyeong Uk. Her name is Bianca, but she prefers to be called Perdón. "Perdón is a very old name that's hardly ever used anymore," she explains. "Everyone's Sorry nowadays." After just a few sentences of the book, you find out that Bianca is "unmanageable", which is why her father has decided that she can't come over to stay the weekend with him and his girlfriend quite as often. But the cover tells a different story: the story of a child who is not just moody but also vulnerable – a girl who forces you to look at her, even though the expression on her face is simultaneously trying to repel you.

*Everyone's Sorry Nowadays* tells the story of a day in Bianca's life. The story begins at lunch, but Bianca hints via flashbacks that she's done something that morning that she's starting to regret. The reason why Bianca sometimes hides and sometimes lashes out is clear right from the beginning, when she describes her brother: "There's an exclamation mark on Alan's bare chest." That exclamation mark is an indication not only of the operations on his heart, but also of the way Alan constantly monopolizes their mum's attention. Bianca feels as if she is living in the shadow of her sick brother.

For the rest of the day, the tension in the family slowly but surely builds up. Bianca's mum has prepared a surprise: a friend of Alan's is coming to play, and this friend's mum is Billie King, an actress in a soap opera that Bianca watches every day. While everyone tries to make a positive impression on Billie, the reader can already guess that the afternoon is going to get out of hand – the only question is how. And how far will Bianca dare to go to demand attention and to vent her anger?

### Subtle hints

Bart Moeyaert has already proved himself a master at building up tension and minutely dissecting painful situations, in books such as *Blote handen* (published in English as *Bare Hands*) and *Het is de liefde die we niet begrijpen* (published in English as *It's Love We Don't Understand*). He does not idealize childhood and his protagonists choose to rebel, both with their language and with actions that don't always achieve the desired effect. Bianca seems awkward rather than unmanageable. But she has a talent for reading situations and picking up subtle hints. This results in many astute observations, which are described in a visual and evocative way. For example, after a conversation between Bianca's mum and a yelling neighbour: "As the door closes, my mum's big smile becomes thinner

and thinner and thinner too, until there's nothing left of it." Bianca's observations also lead to a lot of frustration though, as she focuses mainly on other people's flaws.

Picking up subtle hints is what Moeyaert expects from his readers too. As always, his use of language is remarkably subtle and many of the most important things are left unsaid. Just as Bianca hides from her family, she does not reveal all of her secrets to the reader either. Acting is a theme that runs throughout the book. "I take a step forward. I am a different, nicer girl from that child who was here a moment ago," Bianca notes when she goes to talk to Billie King. This change of mood also applies to the way she tells her story. Whether Bianca is making things up or they actually happened can also be a guessing game at times.

### **Reading and rereading**

Among all the frustration and tension, Moeyaert also blows a necessary breath of fresh air. This can be seen partly in the familiarity of the situations: Alan making the paddling pool overflow by pushing its side down, the Capri-Suns that Bianca keeps for herself, the game of Operation and the storylines from the soap opera. The absurd humour also frequently serves to relieve the tension. Bianca, for instance, describes her own situation as follows: "In my instruction manual, it says that I'm sometimes really happy, but you can't always tell by looking at me. If I come downstairs slowly, one step at a time and with a bit of a bump, then it's possible that I'm actually very happy inside." A little later, a surreal conversation takes place as Bianca sits down with Billie King and asks her: "How do you die?" Because she's read that Billie's character is going to die in December. The actress explains that she can't say anything because of a clause in her contract: "I'm going to have to be careful not to spill the beans – until the day I die."

Bart Moeyaert last had a children's book published in 2011: *De melkweg* (*The Milky Way*). *Everyone's Sorry Nowadays* has had a long time to mature and does not give away all of its beauty upon the first reading. Reading the book slowly and then rereading it reveals just how closely all the elements of the story are interconnected and what a good balance the author has found between tension and release, fury and cautious joy, revealing and concealing. It was worth the wait.

Vanessa Joosen

Translated by Laura Watkinson

“In this world, we are too often focused on the grand gestures and the loud voices. Instead, I prefer to consider one small morsel of thought at a time. The thoughts of a child are a splendid microcosm when you examine them under a microscope.”

**The child in the shadow**

Interview with Bart Moeyaert

Marjolijn de Cocq. – In: Het Parool, 9 oktober 2018 (NL)