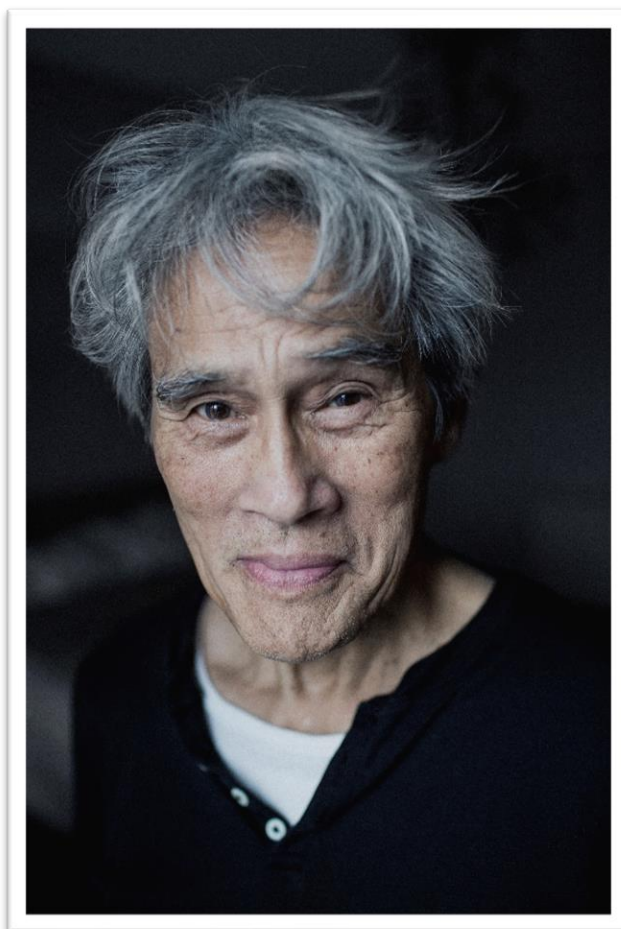


**THE HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN
AWARDS 2024**

Thé Tjong-Khing



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Candidate for the 2024 Illustrator's Award

Nominated by The National IBBY Section of The Netherlands

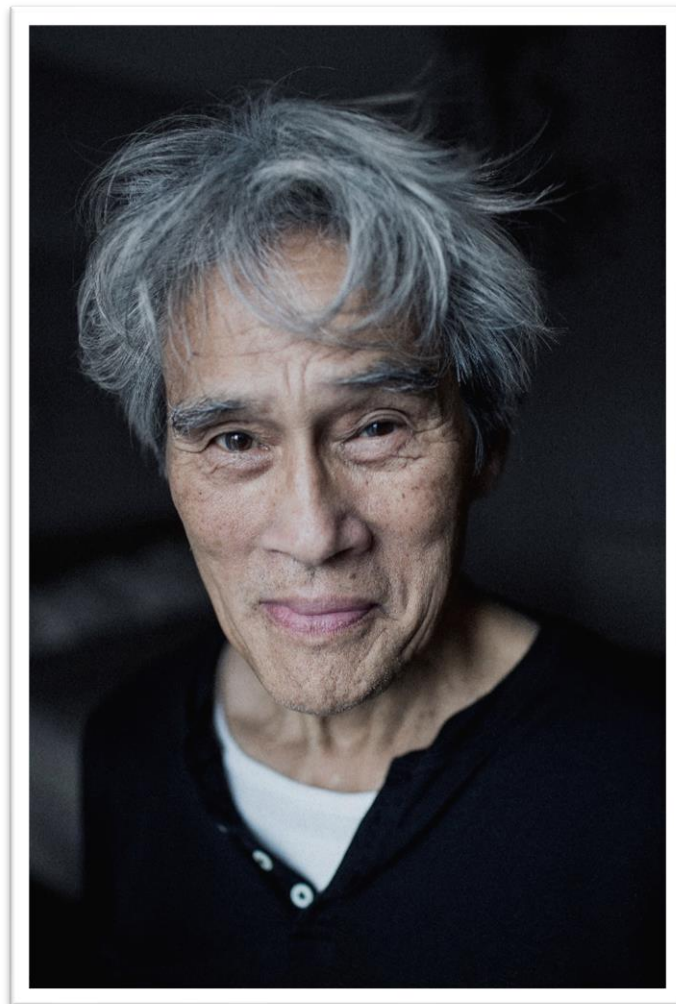
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THE HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN AWARDS 2024

Dossier on illustrator

Thé Tjong-Khing

Candidate for the 2024 **illustrator's Award**



© Jef Boes

Nominated by The National IBBY Section of The Netherlands



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NOTE:

This dossier has been compiled for the jury of the Hans Christian Andersen Awards 2024.

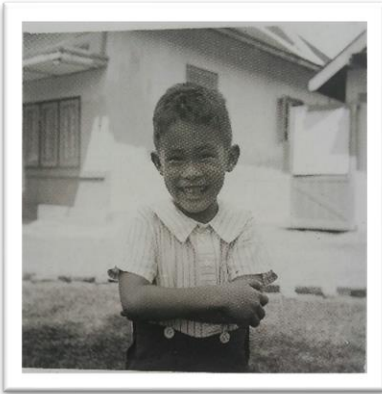
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In compiling this dossier, **references to sources** of descriptions, reviews or other secondary texts about the author and/or his books have been made for as far as it was possible to trace those sources. Please mention those sources when re-using, quoting or referring to these secondary texts.

Life and Work of Thé Tjong-Khing: A Short Biography

From Indonesia to the Netherlands

Thé Tjong-Khing was born on August 4, 1933 in Purworedjo in Indonesia in a Chinese



Indonesian family. As a child, he was a fan of the Tarzan comic strips of Edgar Rice Burroughs and he used to make drawings inspired by Indonesian fairy tales. In high school, he drew portraits of movie stars with a photographic precision. Thé (his surname) went to the *Seni Rupa* (arts) institute in Bandung. He left Indonesia at the age

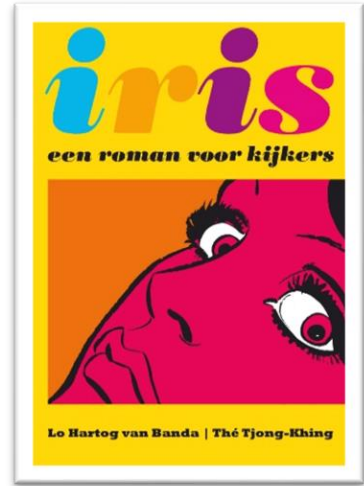
of 23 to continue his studies at the Gerrit Rietveld Art Academy in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. However, the art academy wasn't much to his liking and instead of this, Thé managed to get an internship at the drawing studios of Marten Toonder, where the most famous Dutch comics were produced back then.



From cartoons to children's books

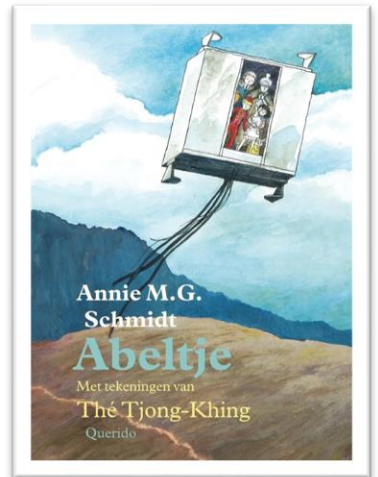
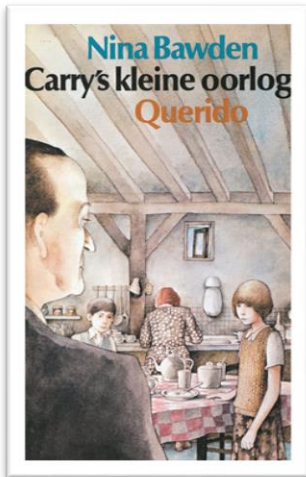
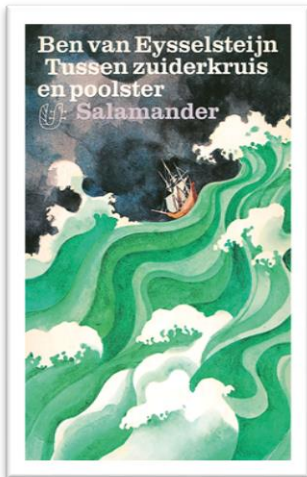
At the Toonder studios, his talent quickly became apparent and from the late 1960s, Thé worked as a cartoonist for many years. Between 1967 and 1968 he made the science-fiction strip *Iris*, with Lo Hartog van Banda writing the texts. They also created the cartoon strip *Arman & Ilva* for various newspapers. At the end of the 1970s, Thé taught illustrative design at the Rietveld Art Academy for a couple of years.





Besides this, Thé started making illustrations for (children's) magazines. In 1966, he made his first book cover, for the children's book *Micky en de vreemde rovers* [Micky and the strange robbers] by Thea Beckman. After that, many book covers followed.

In 1970, Thé illustrated his first children's book, written by Miep Diekmann. Ever since, he has been a well-known and much sought after illustrator of children's books. He worked with famous Dutch children's book authors such as Guus Kuijer, Annie M.G. Schmidt, Paul Biegel, Els Pelgrom and Dolf Verroen and has a longstanding collaboration with Belgian author Sylvia Vanden Heede. In total, Thé has illustrated over 500 books next to a smaller but significant oeuvre of his own.

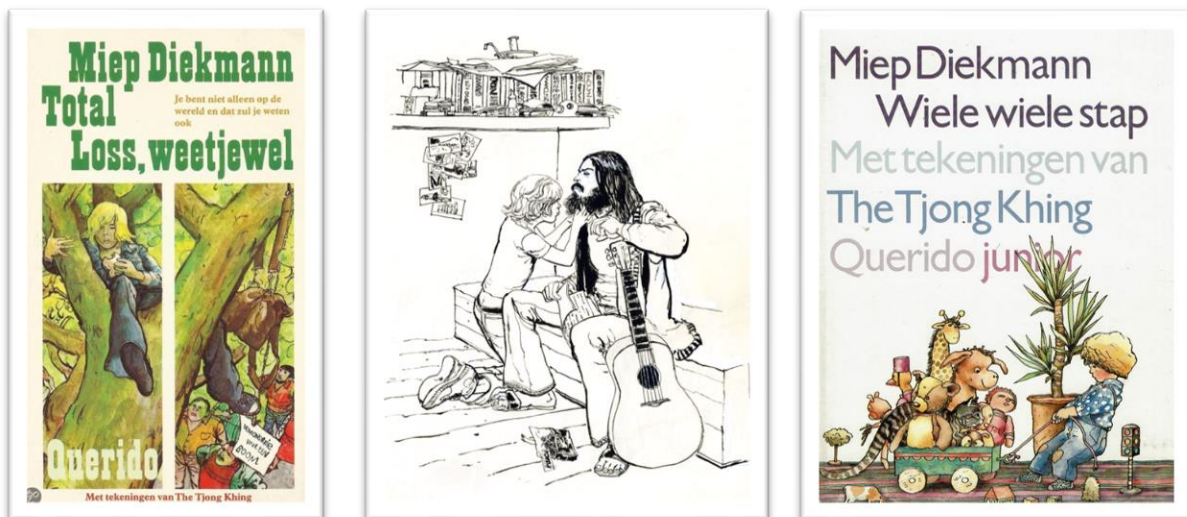


The text below consists of quotes from a portrait on Thé's work and life in the book *Tekenaars. Kinderboekenillustratoren geportretteerd* by Joukje Akveld¹:

¹ Akveld, Joukje. (2010). *Tekenaars. Kinderboekenillustratoren geportretteerd* [[Illustrators. Children's book illustrators portrayed]. Hoorn: Uitgeverij Hoogland & Van Klaveren. Quotes in this chapter are from pp. 39-43.

The first years as a children's book illustrator

In his comics, Thé drew the pictures like a film, with a lot of space for close-ups. His zoomed-in, realistic facial expressions made a big impression in the comic world, but he himself got tired of this way of drawing after a while. His head worked faster than his hand – in comics one needs to draw the same figures over and over again. In addition, the genre offered him little room for experimenting, so he switched to illustration. Now he could capture in one drawing what he would otherwise need a whole series of pictures for. Children's book writer Miep Diekmann played an important role in that career switch. She wanted a cartoonist to illustrate her books and got in touch with Thé. His pen drawings of long-legged pin-ups for *Total Loss, weetjewel* [Total loss, you know] (1973) still leaned heavily on the comic strip tradition, but his style gradually became more free. This first collaboration was followed by more joint books, including *Wiele wiele stap* [Wheel, Wheel, Step] (1977), a collection of rhythmic nursery rhymes with friendly pen drawings scattered across the pages, that was awarded both the Golden Slate Pencil and the Golden Paintbrush.²



An acclaimed illustrator

Thé mainly illustrated realistically until the idea arose to make a book together with Els Pelgrom, which became *Kleine Sofie en Lange Wapper* (*Little Sophie and Lanky Flop*, 1984, will be republished in 2023). At first he drew a rather naturalistic Sofie, but as the story progressed, she grew into the girl as the reader knows her: a captivating, bouncy little figure on thin legs in a baggy nightgown, who moves through a fairy tale landscape that recalls the meticulous pen drawings by Ernest Shepard. The fun of drawing is crystal clear: here is an illustrator at work who elatedly wrests himself away from the realistic drawing tradition and jubilantly throws himself into the adventurous fantasy story. The book was awarded both a Golden Slate Pencil, a Golden Paintbrush and the Deutsche

² The two highest annual awards for children's books in the Netherlands, see p. 27 for an explanation of these and other major awards.

Jugendliteraturpreis. Even so, after *Little Sophie*, most publishers continued to ask him for realistic stories. But when Lannoo publishers (Belgium) approached him in the late 1990s for Sylvia Vanden Heede's books about Vos and Haas (Fox and Hare), Thé returned to the fantasy story – this time for good. It led to a third Golden Paintbrush for *Het woordenboek van Vos en Haas* [The dictionary of Fox and Hare, 2002] and to a new step in his career: making his own picture book. *Waar is de taart* (*Where is the Cake?*, 2004) was jubilantly received and was the first book without text to be awarded the literary Woutertje Pieterse Prize.

With those three Golden Paintbrushes, the Woutertje Pieterse Prize and the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis, Thé Tjong-Khing is the most acclaimed illustrator in the Netherlands. In 2010, he was given the prestigious Max Velthuijs Award, awarded once every three years, honouring an illustrator's complete oeuvre.

Inspiration

“I like to incorporate real paintings into my drawings,” says Thé Tjong-Khing. “In one of the Fox and Hare books, a Warhol and a Gauguin are behind the refrigerator. Some of my cornfields are by Brueghel and the table scene with Achilles in *Helden* [Heroes, 2006] is a copy of Leonardo de Vinci's “The Last Supper”. Those references are jokes for myself, I don't mean anything with it, no one needs to see them, I just hope kids like my drawings. Many illustrators say they only work for themselves, but I don't believe that. You always have that target group in your head, don't you, when you're working. Although I don't go so far as to make something against my will. I want to illustrate a story as beautifully as possible.”





Thé says that he likes to make scary things. Drawings that you look at like this – he holds his arm straight, peers through his eyelashes – from a distance. “As a child I already had a preference for the scary, the dark. That's why fairy tales are so nice to do: danger is always lurking. (...) Usually I take refuge in the ominous, then I feel on safe ground. Just look at the opening spreads of *Meer verhalen van de sprookjesverteller* [More stories from the fairy tale teller] (2009), almost all of them have that: a dark sky in “The fisherman and his wife”, a menacing castle in “Bluebeard”, a violent storm in “The princess on the pea”.”



He is completely interwoven with his drawing, says Thé, he can't imagine that there will ever come a time when he doesn't draw anymore. “I draw all day, I'd be bored to death if I didn't. It is an exciting activity, you never know in advance how a drawing will turn out. The reason I've been able to keep it up for such a long time is that I don't always do the same thing. (...) When I got tired of comics, I started illustrating children's books and when I got bored of the naturalistic drawings, I started doing fantasy stories. That's how I keep myself awake.”

“I used to be an extremely shy child, which was not quite normal, I believe. (...) If you are shy, you are constantly watching yourself, it is a kind of over-consciousness. As a result, I can now draw for children; because of that strong awareness, I remember what it was like to be a child.”

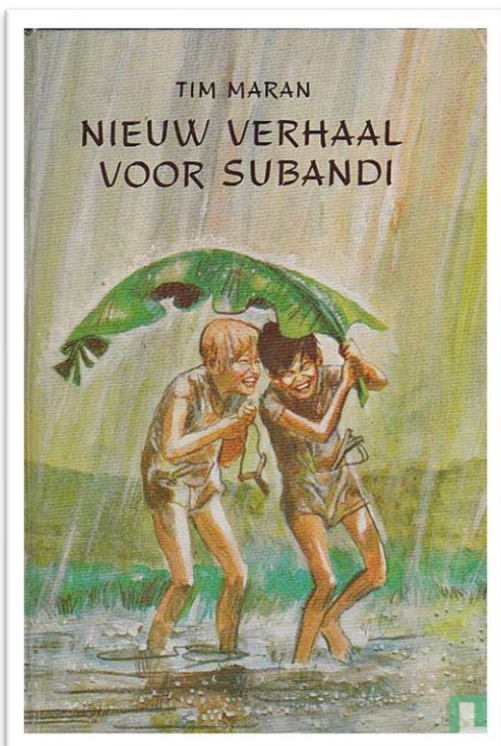


The Tjong-Khing's Contribution to Literature for Young People ³

The Tjong-Khing (1933) is an acclaimed illustrator of children's books. From comic drawings with a cinematic dynamic, his work evolved to fantastic illustrations in which he repels movement and depicts emotions in a stylised way. Thé's work has been described as mysterious and surrealistic. His ideal is to make illustrations with the open-mindedness and innocence of a children's drawing, but at the same time, his work shows depth and humour and the skills of an experienced artist.

The work of Thé Tjong-Khing, who sees himself as a craftsman rather than an artist, occupies a special place in the Dutch art of illustration. His illustrations are found in many books for different ages and of different genres, both in black and white and in colour. Thé's body of work can be seen both as comprehensive – spanning a career of more than 60 years – and varied, showing drastic developments of his drawing style over the years. In more than sixty years of illustrating, he has woven his Western gaze, Eastern precision and penchant for a menacing, ominous edge into a unique handwriting.

Early years



His illustrations from the early years, such as in the book *Wie had gelijk, Mary Rose?* [Who was right, Mary Rose?] by Marilyn Sachs (1973), clearly demonstrate his admiration for work by artists like Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898), Arthur Rackham (1867-1939) and Rie Cramer (1887-1977), the latter of whom was a Dutch illustrator who grew up in Indonesia. In his early work Thé used a special Chinese brush and East Indian ink, with which he drew both the finest lines and the big plains. Later, this brush was replaced by the pen, with which he with care and virtuosity managed to record the world of teenagers in several books for this age group. Because of this extremely precise and often clever rendition of their own world, teenagers felt attracted to his work.

³ This text draws heavily on the information from the online exhibition on Thé Tjong-Khing “From cartoonist to fairy tale teller” at the Literature Museum: <https://literatuurmuseum.nl/nl/ontdek-en-beleef/literatuurlab/online-exposities/the-tjong-khing/the-tjong-khing>. Another important source is Vrooland-Löb, Truusje (2011). ‘Thé Tjong-Khing’ in: Jan van Coillie, Wilma van der Pennen, Jos Staal, & Herman Tromp (1982-2014), *Lexicon van de jeugdliteratuur*. Retrieved from DBNL (KB Royal Library): https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/coilo01lexio1_01/lvdj00961.php.

A change of styles

Thé's style has developed quite drastically over time. At first, before 1975, his drawings are cinematic and comic-like. His style becomes more realistic and naturalistic, clearly influenced by comic books. From around 1975, Thé Tjong-Khing visibly searched for a new manner of composition. He stopped striving for even greater naturalistic perfection – where technical skills dominate – but made an attempt to draw with a subtle 'anti-cleverness', to bring his work closer to the way a child draws. He starts to draw in a more imaginative, naive style with less details, that fits children's perceptions of the world. Next to drawing a lot with pen and ink, he also started to work more and more with pencils.

A toddler's perspective

The simplification of Thé's style was especially visible when he turned to the young child in the books by Dolf Verroen and the toddler picture books that he made together with Miep Diekmann. In *Wiele wiele stap* [Wheel, wheel, step] (1977), a collection of poetry for which both Diekmann and Thé were awarded Gold, text and illustrations form a unity. The black and white drawings depict the world from a toddler's perspective; steps are enormous and can only be climbed with the leg stretched out.



Just as in his illustrations in books for teenagers, here it's the details from the toddler world which has been so cleverly interwoven in the drawings. The poems deal with the life of small children. All those common, daily recurring things like eating, looking out of the apartment window, taking a bath, feeding ducks, going up in the escalator and many other things, she's caught in simply worded verses, following the child's train of thought. Thé Tjong-Khing has illustrated them in complete harmony with this process. It is clear that Diekmann and Thé worked together on this with a great amount of pleasure and from a conscious formula. Thé pictures a toddler's life in a witty and accurate way. "I never thought I could, but when Miep Diekmann finally persuaded me to illustrate this text I noticed that I like drawing for young children best of all up till now", says Thé.

From the jury report of the Golden Paintbrush Award: “Thé Tjong-Khing has once more shown he is a virtuoso in drawing the most simple and everyday situations. He needs only a few lines and little space to record the life of a small child in a recognizable and humorous fashion. In *Wiele wiele stap*, text and drawing are equal, constantly complete each other in humour and ingenuity. And none of this in a complicated or labored manner, but from a continuous clarity and simplicity.”

The world of little Sophie

The phenomenon of power – and the abuse that so often accompanies it – fascinated Thé. He asked Els Pelgrom to write a story about it, so that he could illustrate it, and that is how *Kleine Sofie en Lange Wapper* (*Little Sophie and Lanky Flop*) was born (1984, the book is republished in 2023). His illustrations in this book have been called revolutionary. Here he lets go of the smooth ink line of his comics and creates a fairy tale world in finely shaded pen drawings. The cover in colour also shows the cheerful but menacing atmosphere that will become so characteristic of his work. Also striking is the way in which the depicted event seems caught in the middle of a movement. His fascination for films from his early childhood is clearly reflected in this.



In 1985, *Kleine Sofie en Lange Wapper* was awarded the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis and both the Golden Slate Pencil for text and the Golden Paintbrush for illustrations. According to the jury a “particularly beautifully constructed and moving story that because of its theme and narration technique contains all the elements to make it a classic”. Sophie, a terminally ill girl, wants to know what life is all about and what comes after life. The story is a quest for the meaning of life, a philosophical notion that author and illustrator managed to make accessible for children through their fluent collaboration.

In the book, drawings and text form a visual unity, due to careful typography and a balanced mise-en-page. The pen drawings with gossamer-thin hatchings were widely praised for their mysterious light-dark effect. They are dreamy and magical and for a large extent, they determine the accessibility of the story by inviting the reader to keep looking and discovering. *Kleine Sofie en Lange Wapper* has been called a pivotal point in Dutch children's literature because of the equivalence of text and drawings.



Fox and Hare

From the end of the 1990s, Thé started to work less and less realistic. “Something had to be done with reality,” he says. The figures become more imaginative and stylized. The sets become emptier, with large surfaces and repetitive elements. The illustrations in the series of books about Fox and Hare (1998-present), written by Sylvia Vanden Heede for early readers put him on that track for the first time. The first book about Fox and Hare was a “grow book”, based on an idea that had arisen when Vanden Heede saw her daughters toil on unimaginative books for early readers. Vanden Heede thought that an attractive and fun book in which the level of the text becomes increasingly difficult in pace with the progress of its readers would help them to enjoy learning to read. The drawings were crucial in that concept. She was delighted that Thé Tjong-Khing accepted the job. On the first pages of the first book, *Vos en Haas* [Fox and Hare] (1998) he drew Fox and Hare feasting on cheese, porridge, cream, fish and pear. The text left plenty of room for images, but as the difficulty of the words and sentences increased, the amount of illustrations decreased. For the second book, *Tot Kijk, Vos en Haas* [See you later, Fox and Hare] (1999), Thé also drew a lot of small illustrations, but he had an urgent desire to make larger images. In *Vos en Haas op het Eiland* [Fox and Hare on the island] (2002) and the follow-up books, he was given more space for this: each book contained a number of full-page color illustrations. In the large cardboard picture books *Een buur voor Vos en Haas* [A neighbor for Fox and Hare] (2006) and *Wat een kou, Vos en Haas* [Isn't it chilly, Fox and Hare] (2009), Thé was able to indulge in large-format drawings. He furnished Fox and Hare's den with all kinds of objects and he also incorporated works of art in it.



The illustrations add a lot to the stories. First of all humour, but also an essential deepening of the characters. Because the texts are rather simple, the characters are not as elaborated. They get their depth in the illustrations, through the way the characters look and dress themselves, how they behave and show their emotions and through their belongings. The illustrations make the Fox and Hare series stand out among all the books for beginning readers and one of the reasons that the books have been a success for already 25 years. For *Het woordenboek van Vos en Haas* [The dictionary of Fox and Hare] (2002), Thé got his third Golden Paintbrush, which hasn't happened often in the history of the award. The dictionary contains more than a thousand words with their meanings supported by small illustrations.





Drawing characters

Thé prefers drawing people and animals and their characters; things that are not alive, such as buildings, are not really his favorite. Dolf Verroen, one of the many authors Thé has worked with, once said that Thé not only depicts the appearance of the characters, but he also expresses what they feel with their body language and their looks. About the cover of *Maak dat je weggkomt* [Get out of here] (1978), on which an angry man with a pointing arm is pictured, Verroen says: “That arm lives, it shakes. You can see that the man is angry. Khing told me once that he tried thirty times to picture the arm before it looked good on paper. He eventually stood in front of the mirror to see what an angry arm looks like.” Next to illustrating characters, Thé enjoys making ominous and frightening illustrations. He has had this fascination since childhood: he preferred dark and scary things, where danger is always close by. In later work, such as his fairy tale drawings, Thé shifts the emotions more and more to the surrounding landscape. Trees, bushes and other greenery serve the atmosphere, the movement, the composition and the emotions.

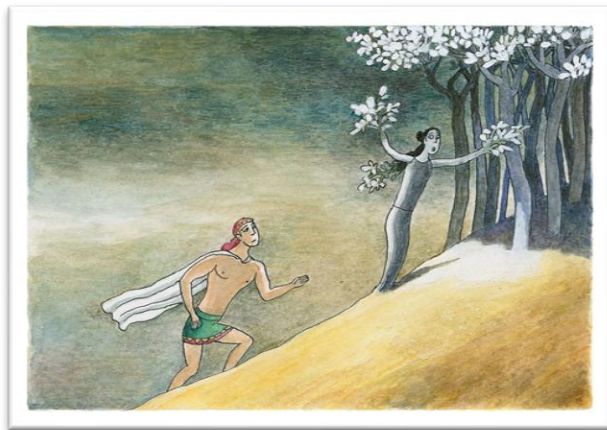
Caught in a movement

There are few drawings that retrospectively make Thé Tjong-Khing happy, but if you ask him about his own favourites, you will hear: *Griekse mythen* [The Greek myths]. Like Theseus, who is attacked in a dark corner by the Minotaur. And Medea, who races across the purple sky in her serpent chariot. “Because of the color, the darkness, the goofy characters. So many crazy things happen, no other story can compete with that,” Thé recounts.

Griekse mythen with text by Els Pelgrom consists of two volumes: *Helden* [Heroes] (2006) and *Donder en bliksem* [Thunder and Lightning] (2007). The books form another breaking point in Thé's oeuvre. In *Het grote avontuur van God en mens* [The great adventure of God and man] (2004) and *De sprookjesverteller* [The Fairy tale teller] (2007), he had already taken the first steps towards stillness. With the Greek myths he went a step further and dared to freeze scenes for the first time. In these two books everything is reduced to the essentials. Streaks of blood cling to the tips of swords, from Hera's breast a dead straight jet of mother's milk spews. The impassive attitudes adopted by the characters contrast with their bizarre experiences. Five muses carry Orpheus' mutilated body to the grave with serene faces. The proud Medea fearlessly attacks a fire-breathing dragon with a bottle of sleep-inducing droplets.

At the time, this stillness was a personal breakthrough for Thé, who had already tried everything to get rid of the sleight of hand from his comic period. The almost absurd stories about the Greek gods, monsters and heroes lent themselves perfectly for a new direction in Thé's work. They tapped into a new artistic source. “It's amazing that I wasn't hindered at all by all the illustrations that are already there,” says Thé. The myths

stimulated his imagination.

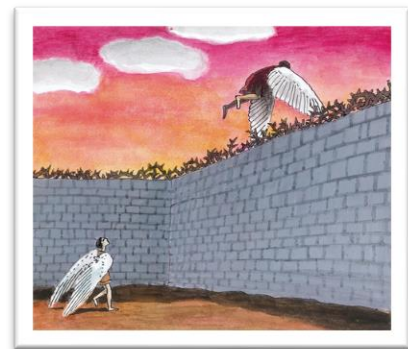


The use of color in the Greek drawings is freer than ever before. Daphne takes root on an ochre slope; Daedalus flies to his freedom against a fuchsia-orange sunset. The sky is alternately purple, sea green or soft blue; the Mediterranean Sea is overwhelmed by blue-green hues. The palette sparkles, but remains in an exciting balance. That was also a victory for Thé who was afraid to use color at

the beginning of his career because he had no experience with it. What is also striking is the effective play with light and dark.

Writing and illustrating fairy tales

For an illustrator with a preference for the dark, for frightening elements, the fairy tale is a form of storytelling in which he can indulge himself. Already as a child, Thé used to draw Rie Cramer-like illustrations for Indonesian fairy tales and in his long career, he has illustrated many fairy tales written or adapted by other authors. In recent years, Thé has gained publicity for his imaginative, colourful fairy tales, in which costumes and drama play big roles. With his series *De sprookjesverteller* [The fairy tale teller], which he both writes and illustrates, he adapts fairy tales from all over the world for children from the age of 4. The illustrations with dragons, witches, princesses and many chandeliers can be recognized at a glance as Thé Tjong-Khing's: not gruesome but unmistakably menacing, not funny but with a lot of humour. And there is always suspense; something is about to happen, or maybe not yet. Thé himself says that children should be able to relate to an image, they must feel invited to empathize with the characters and wonder "Will this be going alright...?".



He started the series more or less by accident, and it was a surprise to himself too, because he thought he had no talent for writing. At one point when he was reading fairy tales to his eldest grandson, he noticed how much he had to cut out, how many side paths he found too long-winded to read to a child. He told the fairy tales his way, with the occasional quirky remark or witty conclusion, and his grandson enjoyed it. Then he wrote them down on a few A-4 pages so that he could read them exactly the same way next time. Shortly afterwards, when a publisher asked him to make a fairy tale book, the beginning was already there.

The cake-series

Another highlight in Thé's oeuvre are his wordless picture books in the 'cake-series': *Waar is de taart?* (*Where is the cake?*, 2004), *Picknick met taart* (*Where is the cake now?*, 2005), *Verjaardag met taart* (*The birthday cake mystery*, 2010), and *Kunst met taart* (*Art with cake*, 2015), that combine different elements of his talent. His images have become more static and have a surreal character. The simplicity of form is combined with a refined staged mise-en-page. The influence of film (mimicry of the figures, solidified action) and the comic strip (cartoon line and viewing pace) and the eye-catching use of colour are the main ingredients of these books. Because it is a silent book, everything has to come from the image.



For *Waar is de taart*, Thé was awarded the Woutertje Pieterse Prijs 2005 for the best literary children's book of the year. From the jury report: "Although the jury is aware that the creator of the story Woutertje Pieterse was a great writer; the awarded book does not have words this year. It goes to a great illustrator. It goes to someone who very eloquently, without using a word, tells a story. Multiple stories. Stories that start on the cover and all continue within the book and come to a satisfying end."

Thé has found his ultimate form in the cake books. He doesn't illustrate someone's story, but draws from his own mind and builds up the ever-changing landscape layer by layer. This scenic structure is indebted to the Asian visual tradition. At the same time, the forest edges, splashing streams and rocks pass by like in a movie. The animals run and jump,

they are frozen in the middle of their action. Fellow illustrator Sieb Posthuma saw in this work a mix of two visual cultures: “Since I have been to Bali, I know for sure: Khing's drawings are un-Dutch; all that green in his work, that impenetrable plant world – that is Indonesia. In Asia there are these intricate ornamented miniatures, pictures with little depth and perspective. Khing's work has that too, that naivety and at the same time the refinement that is characteristic of the printing art from there. That is the eastern influence that is visible throughout his whole oeuvre. In fact, Khing's illustrations reflect the meeting of two worlds. In doing so, he has created his very own visual language.”

In *Art with cake*, Thé borrowed the decors from iconic paintings: “I wanted to let the animals run through modern paintings, from Wassily Kandinsky to Co Westerik. The story became an art theft by a crook in a classic striped suit, who manages to escape again and again.” It turned out to be a puzzle to smoothly interweave all the sets. You can see the decor of *The Scream* by Edvard Munch and that of *Gas* by Edward Hopper in different vistas from the same room; the animal parade rushes past it at breakneck speed.



Another silent book that followed the cake-series is the picture book Thé made on the occasion of the Bosch Year 2016 that honored the Dutch 15th century painter Jheronimus Bosch. It started a bit stiffly ('I never had anything to do with Bosch and I didn't see a story that quickly'), but the ominousness of Bosch's paintings took hold of him. In *Bosch: het vreemde verhaal van Jeroen, zijn pet, zijn rugzak en de bal...* (*Bosch: the strange story of Jeroen, his cap, his backpack and the ball...*, 2015), Thé detached Bosch's devilish figures from their original surroundings and made his own compositions with them. The story

structure with textless panels is his own, but Bosch's dark magic resonates. Bosch's eerie atmosphere fits Thé like a glove.



In 2010 Thé was awarded the Max Velthuis Prijs for his whole oeuvre. From the jury report: “At various levels, great dynamics characterize the creative power of Thé Tjong-Khing. His numerous brainchildren are remarkably agile and graceful, even in their notorious clumsiness or clumsiness. (...) Their emotional expressiveness and relational vitality run the gamut from sleep-drunk to terrified, from oppressive loneliness to madly in love. (...) The combination of clear and figurative accessibility and continuous quality innovation make his signature recognizable and his creatures widely loved and known.”

More work by Thé Tjong-Khing can be seen in the online exhibition “From cartoonist to fairy tale teller” from the Literature Museum at <https://literatuurmuseum.nl/nl/ontdek-en-beleef/literatuurlab/online-exposities/the-tjong-khing/the-tjong-khing>.

Thé gives a guided tour through an exhibition of his work (2020, in Dutch, but with lots of images, sketches and Thé at work):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3qAgKA4oQI>.

Another exhibition can still be visited virtually:

<https://www.kranenburgh.nl/tentoonstelling/95/the-tjong-khing-in-het-atelier-van-de-meesterillustrator>.

Appreciative Essays About Thé Tjong-Khing

‘FINALLY, I AM SATISFIED’

By Pjotr van Lenteren

18-09-2010

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Thé Tjong-Khing has won all thinkable awards for his illustrations. Now he receives the Max Velthuijs Prize as a crowning glory. But he’s not going to retire...

‘Modest? Me? Why do people think that? That’s what they write every time. Am I modest, Mino?’ His wife, who is glazing ceramics behind the sliding door, says: ‘No, you are not modest.’ Triumphantly: ‘You see?’

Conversations with Thé Tjong-Khing (1933) flap in every direction, just like the lively tones in his voice. He is still full of ideas. Only his body isn’t that eager anymore. Thé just, somewhat tired, descended the stairs, thin and lightly bent; he wipes his hand at his pants before he gives a hand, but the white acryl paint isn’t coming off. Just before the interview he was wiping away failed shadows in the illustrations for *The prince on the white horse*, the new book by Dolf Verroen.

He has won all thinkable awards and as a crowning glory he will receive the Max Velthuijs Prijs next Thursday, the P.C. Hooft Prize for illustrators. But retirement, no. He’s not thinking about that. ‘I saved some money, but if it’s enough? Well! Money. It doesn’t interest me.’ He works because he doesn’t want to do anything else than drawing. And he is still frequently asked to illustrate books. The past one and a half years ten books that he illustrated were published at four publishers.

He also wrote a few books himself, among which *De sprookjesverteller* [The fairy tale teller] (2007) was the first. For everyone who doesn’t know him, this was a surprise, not least for Thé himself. ‘I can’t write, this was an accident. It was meant for my grandson.’ He and his second wife have seven grandchildren. Tobias is the eldest one and during reading aloud to him, Thé discovered that Tobias found every fairy tale book – even the ones meant to be accessible – tedious. ‘All those sideways! I kept on leaving things out.’

A critical note for his writing colleagues? 'No of course not. I just told those stories in my own way and then I finally got attention. Tobias changed in a salt pillar. So I thought: I will write it down for the next time. And by chance one of my publishers asked me if I wanted to make a fairy tale book.' His grandchildren were of course very proud of their famous grandfather. 'Mothers nudge each other in the schoolyard when they see him. That's nice, yes. That didn't happen with my own children.'

Interesting fact: as a child he started with drawing images of Indonesian fairy tales, inspired by Rie Cramer. Then he miserably failed, according to himself. Is he gradually becoming more satisfied with his own work? 'Appreciation is nice, of course. I was very satisfied with *Wheel wheel step* and *Little Sophie and Lanky Flop* – the books that got him two Golden Paintbrushes – 'And because everyone said to me: you did that so well. But I think one of my later projects is more important.' That is *Greek myths* (2006, with text by Els Pelgrom). There were almost no reviews about this book, but this is something he doesn't care about. 'It is my best work until now. I am fi-na-lly satisfied.'

To be able to create these tranquil illustrations of gods and people, King researched images of Greek myths through the ages. When he arrived at Greek vase art, he was struck by something he had never seen before. 'Those expressionless drawings are so eloquent. How is that possible? I looked at whole series of Daphne being chased by Apollo, painted and drawn many times and not by the least, and I always came back to those weird old vases.'

Then the artist knew: one should never imitate reality again. This is clearly visible in his successful *Where is the cake*-series: the drama is often not portrayed, but instead the focus is on the preceding events and the consequences afterwards. If there are emotions, such as fright, it looks like a puppet theatre doll panicking; a kind of frozen slapstick fright.

'Yes, how does one get frightened?' Thé raises his hands very exaggeratedly and rolls his eyes. 'I can copy a photo, but I can also stylize it. I keep looking, it never ends.' He draws, makes a mistake, erases it and accidentally erases a character's hip. Suddenly he sees it. The hip should be like this, the hand should be like this. Not like in reality, but stylized. 'Like a writer who accidentally finds the right word. That's how it goes. You have to have a lot of patience for it. And a little luck.'

A long search preceded that great 'Fi-na-lly' of Thé Tjong-Khing. He left Indonesia at the age of 23 in 1956, not because of Sukarno (even though stones sometimes went through the windows of Chinese families after the signing of independence), but because he wanted to go to the Art Academy in Amsterdam and perhaps even more so because he wanted to leave behind everything he didn't like about himself. 'I was an extremely shy

kid. That ruined my life. I hid behind my mother's sarong, preferring not to say anything at all. I expressed myself in drawings.'

Worse was that his father didn't take seriously the one thing he was good at. He was allowed to act as an illustrator for visitors, but his father considered a career with dip pen a disappointing prospect for the future. Thé doesn't like to talk about it, something adolescent comes over him when you ask. 'Writers are always expected to tell everything about themselves. I don't like that. Just stop talking about it.' Thé did not return to Indonesia for the rest of his life, except for one brief visit.

It is therefore easy to imagine how important it must have been for him that his parents shook hands with his teacher Maarten Toonder years ago when they visited their son in the Netherlands. 'That man saved my life.'

The Rietveld Art Academy – breeding ground of the most famous illustrators in the Netherlands – did not yet have a real illustration department back then. For reasons that are unclear, Thé did not end up with the famous model artist Piet Klaasse who was teaching at the Academy, but with the advertising designers section. There he was unhappy. 'But if I would quit I had to go back to Indonesia and that was a nightmare.'

He knew the name Toonder from the Tom Poes comics from an Indonesian newspaper and found it in the telephone book. And so it happened that Thé became a sort of volunteer at the Toonder Studios, for 60 guilders a week.

'One day Maarten called me upstairs. He sat behind his desk with some of my drawings. "Look, this picture is great. The way those two just don't look at each other. You can see that something is not right, that something bad has happened. But what? That's drawing." After 25 years of being told that I couldn't do anything, someone in authority finally said that what I made was worth something. I had always been so confused with myself. I then left all that behind me.'

He started drawing passionately, with heart and soul, day and night, for whoever would pay him. But even though he worked in the best possible place, with the best young cartoonists in the Netherlands, with whom he founded the anti-authoritarian and provocative *Vrije Balloen* in 1975, the profession of a cartoonist was not his world either. 'Drawing the same figures page after page or a gag every day, you have to be a bit crazy for that. And I never really knew who those guys were talking about. I've drawn comics with heart and soul, but never enjoyed reading one, would you believe that?'

Just when he was once again in serious doubt about how to proceed, a publisher called him to ask if he wanted to illustrate a book by Miep Diekmann: the teenagers book *Total*

loss, you know (1973). His illustrations were still completely the works of a cartoonist: long-legged film girls, almost pin-ups. Shortly afterwards Thé drew the well-known, thin dip pen children of *Wiele wiele stap* for the first time, with which he earned his first award.

He was lucky again: Diekmann was one of the biggest names in the children's book industry in those days. In 1973 he arrived in the children's book world which he never left again.

'Since I was in the Netherlands I have always been very lucky with my work. It has always been that way: in my first month I ran into the Indonesian writer Tim Maran at a party. He promised me on the spot that I could illustrate all his books. He kept his word. And that's how it's always been. I've never had to peddle with my work. This whole discussion about whether illustrators get paid enough doesn't really apply to me. I drew a lot in my younger years. From early in the morning until late at night.'

'Even during the weekends,' says his wife from the conservatory. Thé, slightly unhappy: 'But I can't do that anymore.' Is it never finished? 'No. Now I want to get rid of those lines. They're starting to bother me. I don't know yet if that will work. I've drawn lines all my life.' Another sigh, wringing arms: 'Sensitive subject. Let me say this: in the end it always starts to itch again.'

Then, eyes shining: 'It's no fun wanting something you can't do yet. But I am already looking forward to being satisfied again later.'

His wife, from the conservatory: 'Do you believe it yourself? That's boring, man.'



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Children's book illustrator Thé Tjong-Khing is as ambitious as ever

By Paul Onkenhout

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We are awaiting the (re)opening of Thé Tjong-Khing's retrospective exhibition, but we still want to know how the legendary illustrator (87) deals with today's life. By drawing, he says, every day.

Thé Tjong-Khing, 87 years old, opens a picture book in his house in Haarlem in which Mr. and Mrs. Dog's cake is stolen, among many other things, and starts to grumble about the drawings. His own drawings, that is. 'I would draw these trees differently now. Those rocks too. This too. And this. If I'm honest: I would do it all very differently.'

We are talking about *Where is the cake?*, the masterly, acclaimed story with which Thé gave his artistry – more on this later – a new dimension in 2004. It was the first book of his own, more would follow.

Thé (his surname) is as active and ambitious as ever. He contributed intensively to a family exhibition about his work in Museum Kranenburg in Bergen, North Holland, with mostly recent work. The three playful themes in Bergen suit him well: laughing, shuddering and copying (or stealing). Due to Covid, the exhibition was postponed to a date to be determined later. An (adjusted) visit is possible online.

Master illustrator, the museum called him in the announcement. That's right. With his drawings he gave (children's) books by, among others, Miep Diekmann, Els Pelgrom, Guus Kuijer and Dolf Verroen an extra dimension. Just as impressive as his work is his productivity. Thé estimates that he has illustrated about five hundred books.

'Or six hundred, I lost count. I've been at it for a hundred years. Some books have one drawing per page, so check it out.'

The praise was not limited to the Netherlands, with the wordless *Where is the cake?* as the most appealing example. He crossed the border with it. The proofs, about twenty,

are on his book shelf: *Where is the Cake?*, *Die Torte ist weg*, *Gdzie jest tort?*, *La course au gâteau*, *Var är tårtan?* Putting the success into perspective: 'They only had to translate the title.'

After some insistence: 'Because *Where's the cake?* is my first book and I came up with the story myself, I am very indulgent, but in terms of drawing, it is not a highlight. My fairy tale books are better. *Where's the cake?* is more of a trophy to me, like a deer's head on the wall.'

The pandemic has no effect on him, he decides his rhythm himself, in his own world. 'For me there is not that much of a difference, I spend all day behind the drawing board. But I can't go anywhere, that's boring.'

Thé draws daily in the room at the front of the house, from 6 am. "I go to bed at 10 p.m., and sometimes right after dinner." Not everything is unchanged. His hand is less steady, he tires more quickly.

Very annoying, he says. And yes, he should be happy that he is still so active at the age of 87, and that the quality of his work is still so high. My wife often says it too. Be happy, you're 87. Yes, I know that too. But I'm just annoyed. I'm becoming a less good illustrator. Luckily I still have a lot of fun with it. And luckily I am still being asked."

When the commissions stop, it's done. Casually: 'Then I won't draw anymore.' It has to do with his inability to create something from scratch, he says. Thé has never made anything for himself, he only works on commission.

'I'm not an artist, that's the whole point. I need the story, a beginning. Artists are horrified by this limitation, but I actually like it. And that's why I find it uncomfortable when I'm called an artist. I can't start from zero, with nothing.'

He once asked a painter, Michel van Overbeeke, how he started a painting. I make a brush on a canvas, said Van Overbeeke, and then a painting emerges by itself. 'I tried that then. My swipe became a doll. That is of course not the intention.'

And no, *where's the cake?* is no exception. That idea was also handed to him by the publisher of the Fox and Hare series. 'The publisher wanted to exploit that. The idea was delivered, as always, and I brewed something from it. I got pushed again. And since I had no experience with writing back then, I've turned it into a wordless book.'

Work continues. Thé is currently working on three books at the same time. 'But I also decline a lot. I'm not interested in stories that take place in reality, in the everyday. Then

someone else can do it better. It must be fairy tale like, something fantastic. I love myths and legends. I need something to happen in books, preferably murder and manslaughter. At least that's not boring.'

He laughs loudly and opens a book, *The Greek Myths* by Els Pelgrom. The illustrations are his. One man is sawed to pieces, another burned alive.

'It can be stylized like that, right? It's not gross or cruel. This may not be nice, but it doesn't involve a drop of blood.' He likes the drama, he says. In another drawing, a baby flies through the air into a ravine. 'Nice, right? The woman is Hera, the goddess of love. She's having a baby, but she doesn't like it. She throws him away. You can come up with a very dramatic drawing for that, but I let her make a nonchalant gesture. Get rid of it. I have drawn a neat civil path, and the Olympus in the background. Those are fun things to do. I am still satisfied with this drawing. That happens too, you know.'



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List of Awards and Other Distinctions

Winner Max Velthuijs Prijs

Complete oeuvre (2010)

Nomination Hans Christian Andersen Award

Complete oeuvre (1972, 1988, 2008, 2018, 2024)

Nomination Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award

Complete oeuvre (2009, 2010, 2022, 2023)

Gouden Penseel (Golden Paintbrush)

- Wiele wiele stap (1978)
- Kleine Sofie en Lange Wapper (1985)
- Het woordenboek van Vos en Haas (2003)



Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis

- Kleine Sofie en Lange Wapper (1986)
- Waar is de taart (nomination, 2007)

Woutertje Pieterse Prijs

- Waar is de taart? (2005)

Zilveren Penseel (Silver Paintbrush)

- Waar is de taart? (2005)



Vlag & Wimpel (Flag & Streamer)

- Een krekkel voor de keizer (1981)
- De dieren van het Duitensbos (1983)
- Het Witte Herten Park (1985)
- Hoor je wat ik doe? (1985)
- Vos en Haas (1999)
- Avonturen van Baron von Münchhausen (2011)
- Vos en Haas. Een boef in het bos (2020)

Pluim van de maand (best book of the month)

- Vos en Haas (1999)
- Het Aa Bee See van Vos en Haas (2003)
- Waar is de taart? (2004)
- De sprookjesverteller (2008)
- Van wie is de hoed? (2015)

Golden Owl (prestigious Flemish literary award)

- Picknick met taart (nomination, 2006)
- Koek koek Vos en Haas (2008)

Kinder- en Jeugdjury Vlaanderen (Flemish children's choice)

- Vos en Haas en de dief van Iek (2007)

Brief explanation of some of the awards

Zilveren and Gouden Griffel, Zilveren and Gouden Penseel, Vlag & Wimpel

Most important annual awards for children's literature in The Netherlands, for illustration (Zilveren en Gouden Penseel / Silver and Golden Paintbrush) and text (Zilveren en Gouden Griffel / Silver and Golden Slate Pencil), established by the CPNB (Collective Propaganda for the Dutch Book). An independent jury awards books in different categories with Silver Paintbrushes and Silver Slate Pencils. From the awarded books, one is then selected as winner of the Golden Paintbrush and one as the Golden Slate Pencil. The awards were introduced in 1981 and 1973 respectively. The Vlag en Wimpel (Flag and Streamer) was an honourable mention for this award, but this prize has been abolished since 2022.

Woutertje Pieterse Prijs

The Woutertje Pieterse Prize was established in 1987, and awarded for the first time in 1988. Libris, a bookseller's chain, sponsors the prize, which is intended for children's books of Dutch origin with literary merit. The laureate receives 15.000 euro. The goal of the Woutertje Pieterse Prize is to improve the quality of children's writing by means of the award. The jury is free not to grant an award when there is no book of sufficient quality. The prize owes its name to the character Woutertje Pieterse, since the story of this boy by Multatuli is said to be one of the finest ever written. Besides the Golden and Silver Slate Pencils and Paintbrushes, the Woutertje Pieterse Prijs is regarded as the most important award for authors of children's literature.

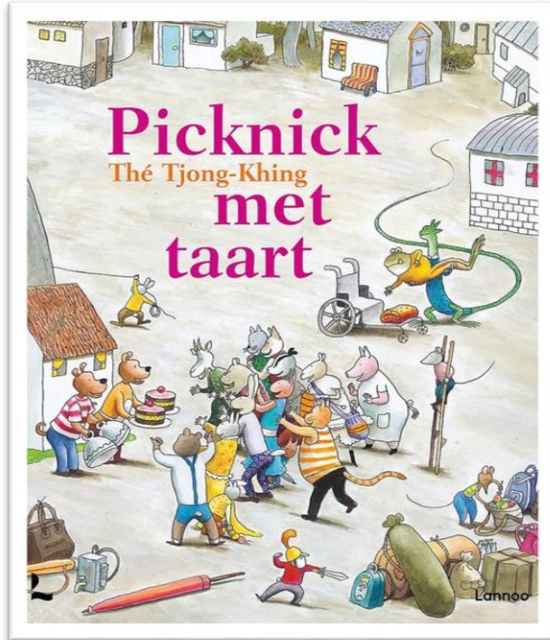
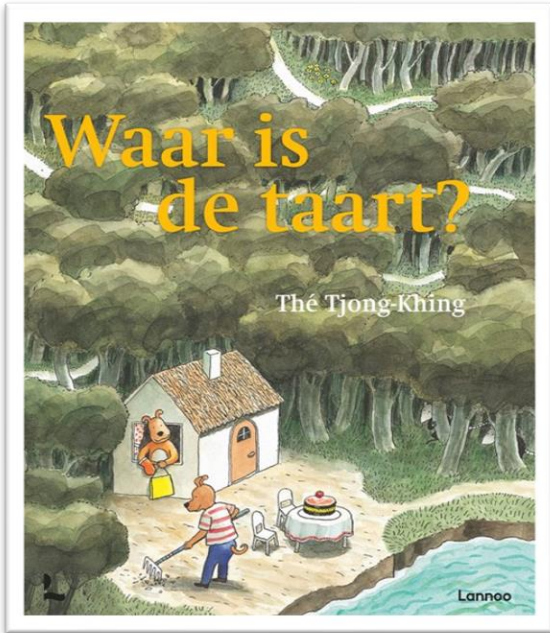
Max Velthuijs Prijs

The Max Velthuijs is a Dutch award awarded once every three years to an illustrator of children's books. The award is not given for a particular work, but for the entire oeuvre. The award is named after Dutch painter, illustrator and writer Max Velthuijs (1923 – 2005, creator of the famous books about Frog and winner of the H.C. Andersen Award in 2004). The winner of the Max Velthuijs Award receives €60,000. The award is organized by the Stichting P.C. Hooft-prijs voor Letterkunde which also awards the prestigious P.C. Hooft-prijs and Theo Thijssen-prijs. The award was established in 2006 and first awarded in 2007.

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- Thé Tjong-Khing. *Een mooi plekje* [A beautiful place]. 2013. Amsterdam: Rubinstein.
- Thé Tjong-Khing & Christian Ouwens. *Het koffietafelboek* [The coffee table book]. 2014. Rotterdam: Christian Ouwens.
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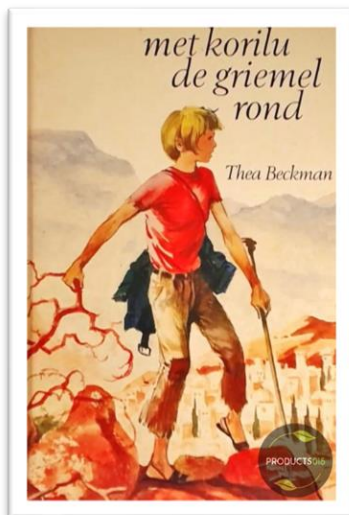
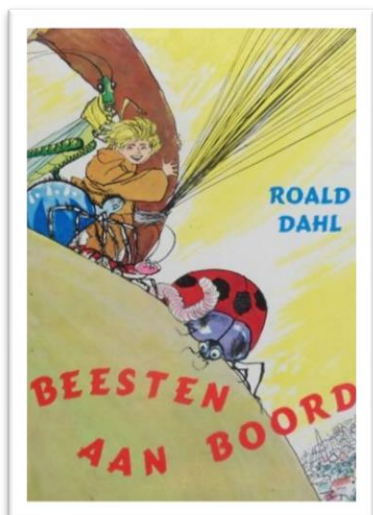
Titles illustrated by Thé Tjong-Khing (a selection)

Thé has illustrated over 500 books, below is a selection of his work. Besides the list below, Thé Tjong-Khing illustrated a large number of book covers.

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- Mathilde Roofds & Thé Tjong-Khing (ill.). *Verhalen over God, de mensen en de wereld* [Stories about God, humans and the world]. 1968. Amsterdam: Deltos Elsevier.
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- Hans Werner & Thé Tjong-Khing (ill.). *De wind in de wieken* [The wind in the wings]. 1974. Amsterdam, Deltos Elsevier.
- Anton Quintana & Thé Tjong-Khing (ill.). *De adelaar* [The eagle]. 1974. Leiden, A.W. Sijthoff.
- Marilyn Sachs & Thé Tjong-Khing (ill.). *Wat stelt dat nou voor, Mary?* [What is that supposed to mean, Mary?]. 1974. Amsterdam: Querido.

- Betsy Byars & Thé Tjong-Khing (ill.). *Het huis met de vogels* [The house with the birds]. 1975. Amsterdam: Kosmos.
- Guus Kuijer & Thé Tjong-Khing (ill.). *Een gat in de grens* [A hole in the border]. 1975. Amsterdam: Querido.
- Diana Lebac & Thé Tjong-Khing (ill.). *Nancho van Bonaire* [Nancho of Bonaire]. 1975. Den Haag, Leopold.
- Dolf Verroen & Thé Tjong-Khing (ill.). *Paarden, van die enge grote* [Horses, those scary tall ones]. 1975. Den Haag: Leopold.
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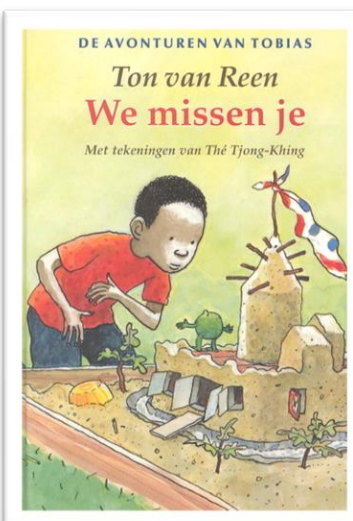
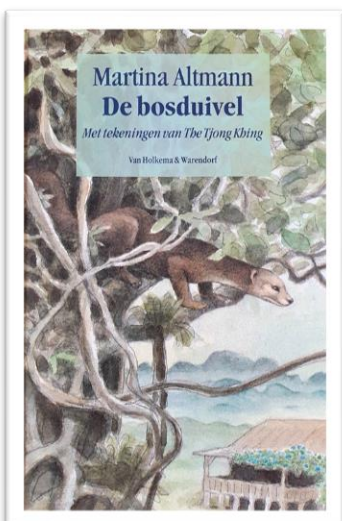
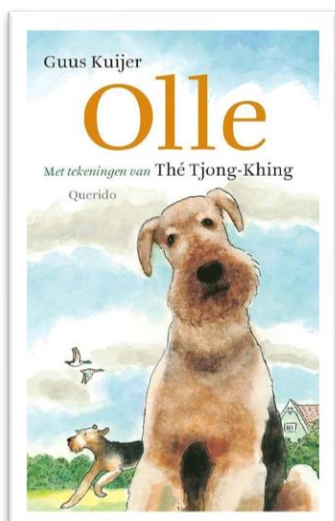
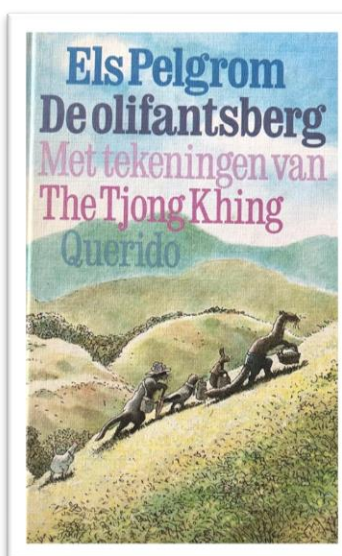
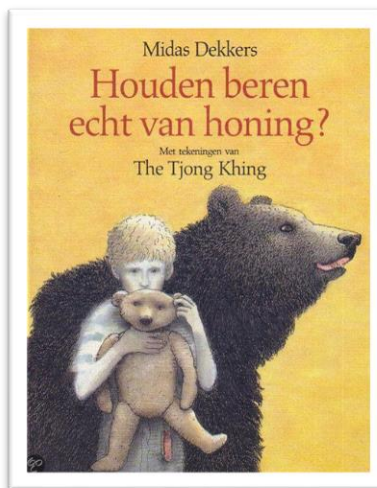
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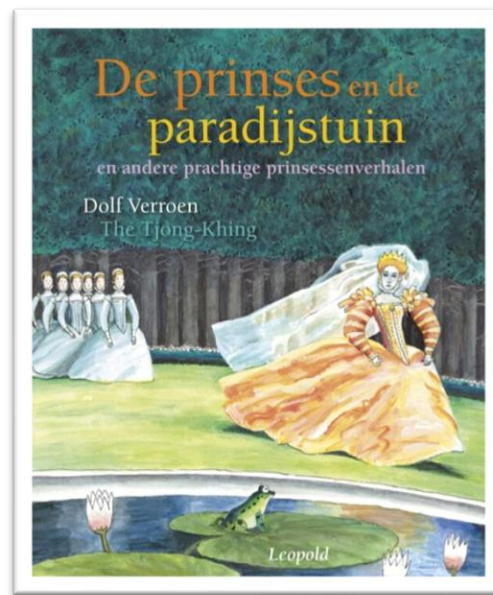
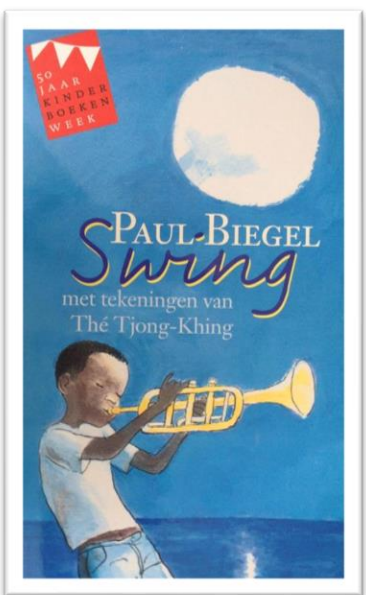
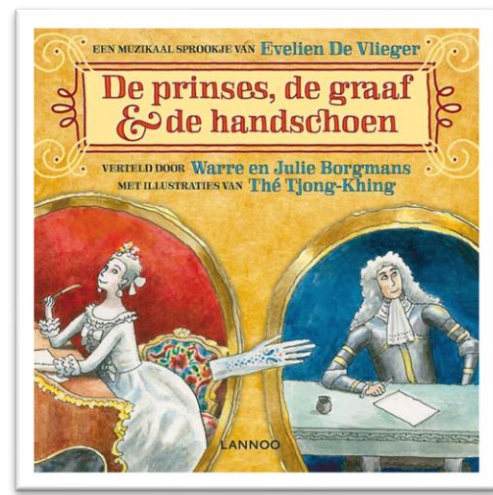
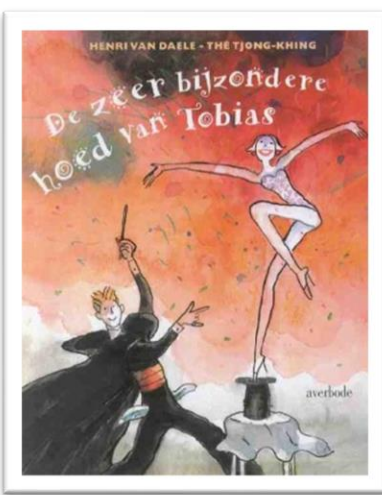
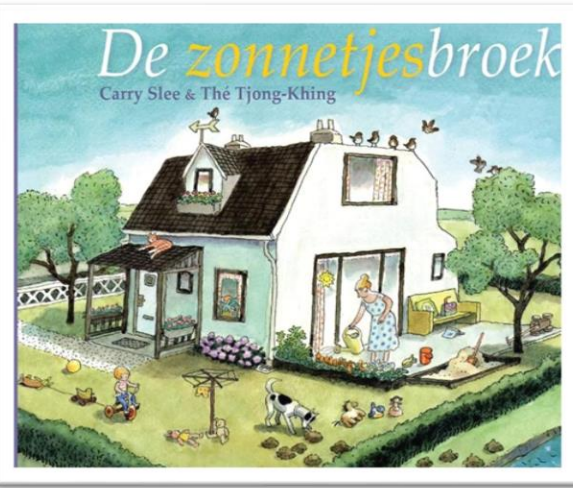


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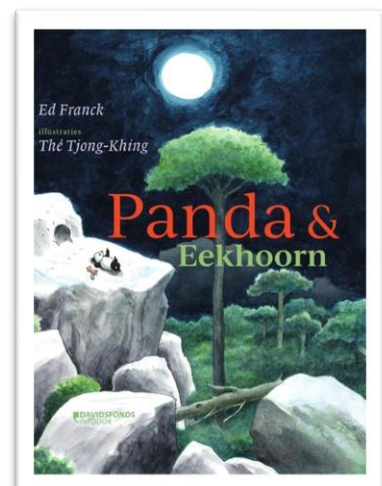
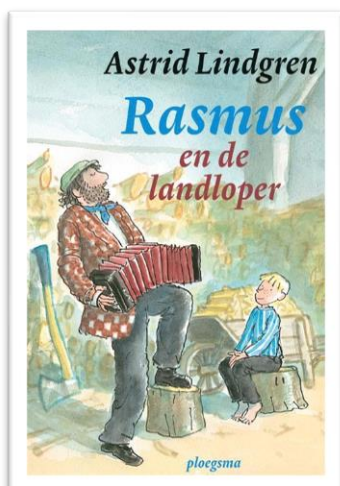
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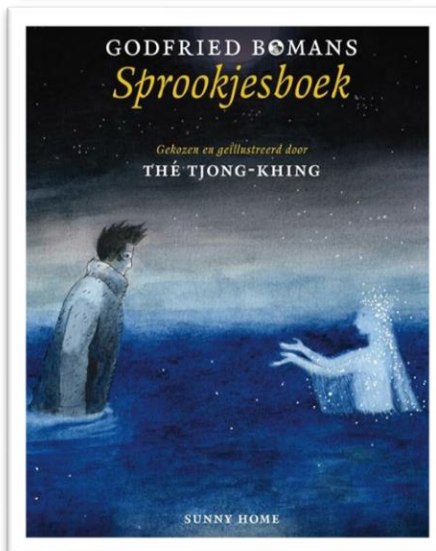
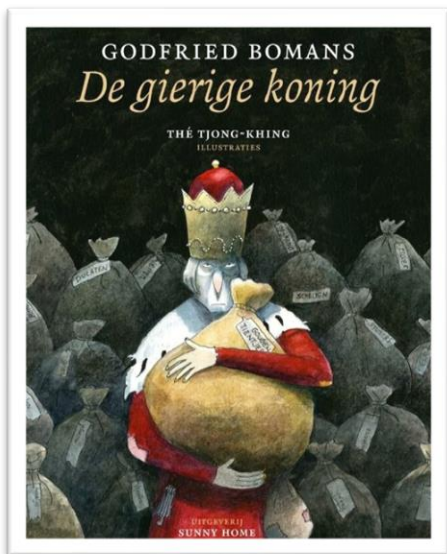
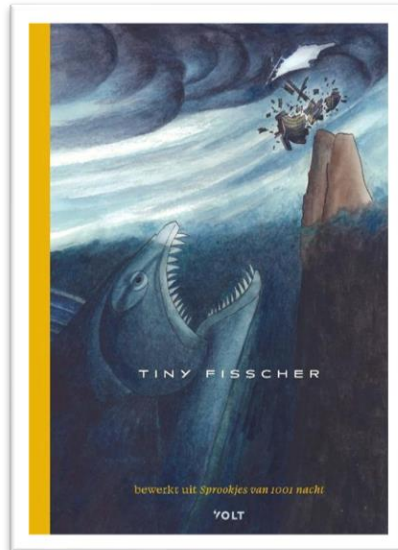
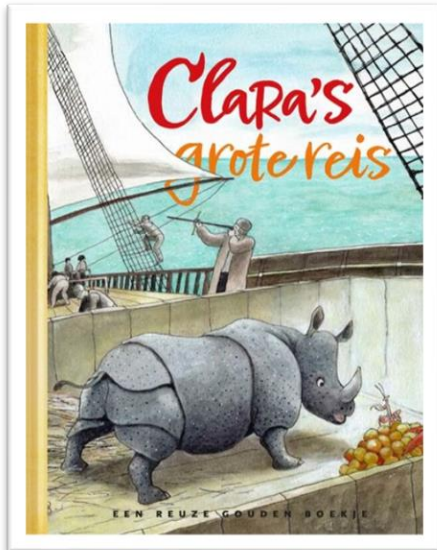
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- Awee Prins & Thé Tjong-Khing (ill.). *De dag dat de zee weg was en andere verhalen* [The day the sea was gone and other stories]. 2017. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij.
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- Ed Franck & Thé Tjong-Khing (ill.). *Op reis met een vriend. Meer verhalen van Panda en Eekhoorn* [A journey with a friend. More stories about Panda and Squirrel]. 2022. Antwerpen: Davidsfonds Infodok.
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- Godfried Bomans & Thé Tjong-Khing (ill.). *Sprookjesboek* [Fairy tale book]. 2022. Hengelo: Sunny Home.
- Erik van Os & Elle van Lieshout & Thé Tjong-Khing (ill.). *Twee schatjes van ratjes* [Two sweet rats]. 2023. Haarlem: Gottmer.



List of Translations⁴

Thé Tjong-Khing's own books have been translated to Afrikaans, Catalan, Chinese, Danish, English, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish. In addition, the books that he illustrated have apart from the above languages been translated to Arabic, Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian, Icelandic, Latvian, Lithuanian, Papiamentu, Portuguese, Russian, Ukrainian.

Titles by Thé Tjong-Khing

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Catalan

Tjong-Khing, Thé. *Art amb pastís*. Catalan / transl. from Dutch by Cristina Casas Peregrina. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Barcelona: Mediterrània, 2018. Children's Books; Picturebook, gebonden. Original title: Kunst met taart. Tiel: Lannoo, 2015. Without text. Vertalersnaam in boek: Cristina Casas. Published with support from the Nederlands Letterenfonds.

Chinese

Tjong-Khing, Thé. *[(Bosch)]*. Chinese / transl. from Dutch by n.n.. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Beijing: Duku Cultural Exchange, 2017. Children's Books; Picturebook, gebonden. Original title: Bosch. Amsterdam: Leopold, 2015. Published with support from the Nederlands Letterenfonds.

Danish

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⁴ Source: <https://letterenfonds.secure.force.com/vertalingendatabase/>.

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English

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Tjong-Khing, Thé. **Hartog van Banda**, Lo. (*Iris*). English / transl. from Dutch by Laura Watkinson. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, since 2019, expected 2022. Graphic novel, gebonden. Original title: Iris. Haarlem: Sherpa Strips, 2018. Published with support from the Nederlands Letterenfonds.

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French

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Tjong-Khing, Thé. *Jack et le T.rex*. French / transl. from Dutch by Myriam Bouzid. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Parijs: L'Agrume, 2020. Children's Books; Picturebook, gebonden. Original title: Jake en de T.rex. Amsterdam: Leopold, 2016. Published with support from the Nederlands Letterenfonds.

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Tjong-Khing, Thé. *Henry bei den Dinosauriern*. German / transl. from Dutch by Isabelle Brandstetter. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Frankfurt am Main: Moritz, 2018. Children's Books; Picturebook, gebonden. Original title: Jake en de T.rex. Amsterdam: Leopold, 2016.

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Tjong-Khing, Thé. *Gdzie jest tort?* Polish / transl. from Dutch by n.n.. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Gdansk: EneDueRabe, 2008. Children's Books; Picturebook, gebonden. Original title: Waar is de taart?. Tielt: Lannoo, 2004.

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Tjong-Khing, Thé. *¿Dónde está el pastel?*. Spanish / transl. from Dutch by n.n.. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. México City: Castillo, 2007. Children's Books; Picturebook, gebonden. Original title: Waar is de taart?. Tielt: Lannoo, 2004. Published with support from the Literair Productiefonds.

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Arabic

auteurs, div.. [*Een boek voor jou*]. Arabic / transl. from Dutch by Amina Abed. Amsterdam: Querido, 2017. Children's Books; Picturebook, gebonden. Original title: Bloemlezing. s.l.: n.n., Een boek voor jou is een initiatief van Marit Törnqvist en is uitgegeven door Em. Querido's Kinderboeken Uitgeverij i.s.m. Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland. Bevat werk van: Thé Tjong-Khing, Annie M.G. Schmidt, Fiep Westendorp (Uit: Jip en Janneke, Floddertje en Pluk van de Petteflet), Max Velthuis, Sieb Posthuma, Hans & Monique Hagen, Erik van Os, Elle van Lieshout, Marije Tolman, Imme Dros, Harrie Geelen, Sylvia Van den Heede, Charlotte Dematons, Hans de Beer, Wim Hofman, Marit Törnqvist, Joke van Leeuwen, Philip Hopman, Bette Westera, Sylvia Weve, Paul van Loon, Hugo van Look, Toon Tellegen, Mance Post, Joukje Akveld, Jacques Vriens and Annet Schaap. Published with support from the Nederlands Letterenfonds.

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Franck, Ed. [*Panda & Eekhoorn*]. Arabic / transl. from Dutch by Ahmed Gad Elrab. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Cairo: Al Turjman, 2022 (Dragoman). Children's Books, geniet. Original title: Panda & Eekhoorn. Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2020. Published with support from the Nederlands Letterenfonds.

Chinese

Akveld, Joukje. [*Van wie is die hoed?*]. Chinese / transl. from Dutch by n.n.. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Petroleum Industry Press, 2018. Children's Books; Picturebook, gebonden. Original title: Van wie is die hoed?. Haarlem: Gottmer, 2015. Chinese en Engelse tekst.

Schmidt, Annie M.G.. [*Ai bei er de fei xing dian ti*]. Chinese / transl. from Dutch by Jiahui Jiang (Jacklyn). Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Shanghai: Shanghai 99 Readers' Culture Co. Ltd., 2018. Children's Books, paperback. Original title: Abeltje. Amsterdam, etc.: De Arbeiderspers, 1953. Published with support from the Nederlands Letterenfonds.

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Vanden Heede, Sylvia. [*Linju Aoli*]. Chinese / transl. from Dutch by Guangrui Zhang. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Beijing: Beijing Yuanliu Classic Culture, 2011 (Huli Fusi he tuzi Hasi). Children's Books, paperback. Original title: Vos en Haas. Tiel: Lannoo, 1998. Published with support from the Vlaams Fonds voor de Letteren.

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Westera, Bette. [*Held op sokken*]. Chinese / transl. from Dutch by Yuan Sun. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Beijing: Duku Cultural Exchange, 2016. Children's Books; Picturebook, gebonden. Original title: Held op sokken. Haarlem: Gottmer, 2013.

Danish

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Van Daele, Henri. *Maruffelen, eller dyret som ikke vil være med.* Norwegian / transl. from Dutch by Eve-Marie Lund. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Oslo: Damm, 1998 (Leseløve). Children's Books, gebonden. Original title: De Maroefel, of Het beest dat niet meewou. Averbode: Altiora, 1996.

Papiamentu

Pelgrom, Els. *Bombai!.* Papiamentu / transl. from Dutch by Henry Habibe. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Amsterdam: N.A.N.A., 1995. Children's Books, paperback. Original title: Bombaaj!. Amsterdam: CPNB, 1995. Boekenweekgeschenk.

Polish

Vanden Heede, Sylvia. *Felek i Tola na wyspie.* Polish / transl. from Dutch by Jadwiga Jędryas, Jadwiga Jędryas. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Warszawa: Dwie Siostry, 2014. Children's Books, gebonden. Original title: Vos en Haas op het eiland. Tielt: Lannoo, 2001. Published with support from the Nederlands Letterenfonds; Vlaams Fonds voor de Letteren.

Vanden Heede, Sylvia. *Felek i Tola i porywacze.* Polish / transl. from Dutch by Jadwiga Jędryas. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Warszawa: Dwie Siostry, 2016. Children's Books, gebonden. Original title: Vos en Haas en de dief van lek. Tielt: Lannoo, 2005. Published with support from the Nederlands Letterenfonds; Vlaams Fonds voor de Letteren.

Vanden Heede, Sylvia. *Do zobaczenia, Felku i Tolu.* Polish / transl. from Dutch by Jadwiga Jędryas. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Warszawa: Dwie Siostry, 2013. Children's Books, gebonden. Original title: Tot kijk, Vos en Haas. Tielt: Lannoo, 1999. Ook met subsidie van het VFL. Published with support from the Nederlands Letterenfonds.

Vanden Heede, Sylvia. *Felek i Tola.* Polish / transl. from Dutch by Jadwiga Jędryas. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Warszawa: Dwie Siostry, 2011. Children's Books, gebonden. Original title: Vos en Haas. Tielt: Lannoo, 1998. Published with support from the Nederlands Letterenfonds.

Portuguese

Pelgrom, Els. *A pequena Sofia*. Portuguese / transl. from Dutch by Sílvia Reichmann. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1992 (Série infanto-juvenil). Children's Books, paperback. Original title: Kleine Sofie en Lange Wapper. Amsterdam: Querido, 1984.

Russian

Vanden Heede, Sylvia. [*Lis i zajka*]. Russian / transl. from Dutch by Irina Leek (Trofimova). Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Moskva: Samokat, 2017. Children's Books, gebonden. Original title: Vos en Haas. Tielt: Lannoo, 1998. Published with support from the Nederlands Letterenfonds; Vlaams Fonds voor de Letteren.

Vanden Heede, Sylvia. [*Lis izajka na ostrove*]. Russian / transl. from Dutch by Irina Leek (Trofimova). Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Moskva: Samokat, 2017. Children's Books, gebonden. Original title: Vos en Haas op het eiland. Tielt: Lannoo, 2001. Published with support from the Nederlands Letterenfonds; Vlaams Fonds voor de Letteren.

Vanden Heede, Sylvia. [*Do vstreči disi i zajka!*]. Russian / transl. from Dutch by Irina Leek (Trofimova). Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Moskva: Samokat, 2017. Children's Books, gebonden. Original title: Tot kijk, Vos en Haas. Tielt: Lannoo, 1999. Published with support from the Nederlands Letterenfonds; Vlaams Fonds voor de Letteren.

Woltz, Anna. [*Noč' v kukol'nom domike*]. Russian / transl. from Dutch by D.G. Ardina. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Moskva: Strekosa, 2019. Children's Books; Picturebook, gebonden. Original title: Nacht in het poppenhuis. Amsterdam: Leopold, 2018.

Spanish

Diekmann, Miep. *Corre, corre, patinete*. Spanish / transl. from Dutch by Alberto Villalba. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1987 (Austral infantil; 11). Children's Books, paperback. Original title: Stappe stappe step. Amsterdam: Querido, 1979.

Diekmann, Miep. *Pasito a pasito*. Spanish / transl. from Dutch by Pilar Rodríguez. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1988 (Austral infantil; 36). Children's Books, paperback. Original title: Viele viele stap. Amsterdam: Querido, 1977. bew. Mario Merlini.

Diekmann, Miep. *¿Jugamos?*. Spanish / transl. from Dutch by Laurence Schröder. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1989 (Austral infantil; 45). Children's Books, paperback. Original title: Ik en jij spelen wij. Amsterdam: Querido, 1982. bew. Mario Merlini.

Pelgrom, Els. *La pequeña Sofía y el Larguirucho Wapper*. Spanish / transl. from Dutch by Alberto Villalba. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Madrid: Alfaguara, 1988 (Juvenil Alfaguara; 311). Children's Books, paperback. Original title: Kleine Sofie en Lange Wapper. Amsterdam: Querido, 1984.

Quintana, Anton. *El rey de los babuinos.* Spanish / transl. from Dutch by Alberto Villalba. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Madrid: Altea, 1987 (Juvenil Alfaguara; 298). Children's Books, paperback. Original title: De bavianenkoning. Amsterdam: Van Goor, 1982.

Schmidt, Annie M.G.. *Abel, el ascensorista.* Spanish / transl. from Dutch by Marc Lepêtre. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Barcelona; Madrid: Noguer, 1989 (Mundo Mágico; 99). Children's Books, paperback. Original title: Abeltje. Amsterdam, etc.: De Arbeiderspers, 1953.

Westera, Bette. *Un caballero en calcetines.* Spanish / transl. from Dutch by Cisca Corduwener. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Envigado: Silaba Editores, 2016. Children's Books; Picturebook, paperback. Original title: Held op sokken. Haarlem: Gottmer, 2013. Published with support from the Nederlands Letterenfonds.

Swedish

Diekmann, Miep. *Skroten och Katja.* Swedish / transl. from Dutch by Mikael Mörling. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Stockholm: Prisma, 1979. Children's Books, gebonden. Original title: Total loss, weetjewel. Amsterdam: Querido, 1973.

Vanden Heede, Sylvia. *Räv och Hare.* Swedish / transl. from Dutch by Paul Wouters. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Stockholm: Bonnier Carlsen, 2000. Children's Books, Original title: Vos en Haas. Tielt: Lannoo, 1998.

Vanden Heede, Sylvia. *Räv och Hare på den öde ön.* Swedish / transl. from Dutch by Olov Hyllienmark. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Stockholm: Bonnier Carlsen, 2002. Children's Books, Original title: Vos en Haas op het eiland. Tielt: Lannoo, 2001.

Vanden Heede, Sylvia. *Räv och Hare sitter äggvakt.* Swedish / transl. from Dutch by Paul Wouters. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Stockholm: Bonnier Carlsen, 2001. Children's Books, Original title: Tot kijk, Vos en Haas. Tielt: Lannoo, 1999.

Pelgrom, Els. *Lilla Sofies märklige resa.* Swedish / transl. from Dutch by Sonja Berg Pleijel. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Stockholm: Berghs, 1987. Children's Books, gebonden. Original title: Kleine Sofie en Lange Wapper. Amsterdam: Querido, 1984.

Ukrainian

Schmidt, Annie M.G.. *[(De A van Abeltje)].* Ukrainian / transl. from Dutch by Galyna Kyyashko. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Kyiv: Tempora, since november 2013, expected 2015. Children's Books, Original title: De A van Abeltje. Amsterdam, etc.: De Arbeiderspers, 1955.

Schmidt, Annie M.G.. *[(Abeltje)].* Ukrainian / transl. from Dutch by Galyna Kyyashko. Ill. Thé Tjong-Khing. Kyiv: Tempora, since 2012 Children's Books, Original title: Abeltje. Amsterdam, etc.: De Arbeiderspers, 1953.

Ten of the Most Important Titles

WIELE WIELE STAP (1977)



WHEEL WHEEL STEP

Written by Miep Diekmann

“Small verses and pictures for very young children about daily toddler experiences. The toddlers depicted and their experiences are real and therefore very recognizable (...) This booklet (may) rightly be called unique” (from the Golden Slate Pencil jury report).

For this book, Thé Tjong-Khing was awarded his first Golden Paintbrush.

“A very special book for the little ones (...). built from extremely simple means around daily toddler experiences. (...) Khing’s pictures play the game completely. (...) Playing with language is an art that did not come early enough can be learned. Highly recommended”

Leeuwarden Courant

“It is a first introduction to life, a journey of discovery, worth recording, never to be forgotten, not now, not later. While toddlers are unable to do this themselves, Miep Diekmann and Thé Tjong-Khing did it for them in a unique collaboration. Playful, touching, real.”

Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad

Age: 2+

Translated to French, German and Spanish

KLEINE SOFIE EN LANGE WAPPER (1984, 2023)



LITTLE SOPHIE AND LANKY FLOP

Written by Els Pelgrom

Little Sophie and Lanky Flop is about a little girl who is terminally ill. Sophie experiences a thrilling adventure in her feverish dreams when her dolls and stuffed toys come to life at night. The tomcat, Terror, has written a play in the style of the Commedia dell'Arte about What Life Has to Offer. Teddy, Sophie and her cuddly friend, Lanky Flop, take part in the play in Sophie's cardboard toy theatre. Terror also takes a role and directs the play. Sophie travels from her room into another world, a harsh world, in which, in the space of one night, she becomes acquainted with life, complete with poverty and wealth, injustice,

lies and hypocrisy.

Sophie tumbles from one adventure to another: from the boggy marshland to the year market, from the 'Home for Unfortunate Children' to Teddy's luxurious villa, from the King's palace to a prison cell, finally ending up in a raging storm at sea. Pelgrom describes all this with great imagery, at a high tempo and with sensitivity and precision. At the end, Sophie whispers, laughing: 'What Life Has to Offer! That's what I wanted to know. So much! So much!' Then the play is ended and Sophie dies contentedly. The family and neighbours pay their last respects and, the next morning, Sophie is travelling with her friends in a beautiful deep blue car through green hills and blue skies. 'An endless journey had begun'.

The book has justifiably been highly praised as a literary masterpiece and a rich, comforting children's book about dying. When it was first published, in 1984, however, it was the subject of some controversy, due to its stratified, multi-interpretable text, full of symbolism and references to literature and theatre and because, at the time, death was still rather a taboo in children's books. It soon became clear, however, that this was an undeniably magisterial children's novel, a modern classic of substance.

(Written by Lieke van Duin)

I wish I were a child and got this book as a gift. I wish I didn't know what it was about and could start reading it from the beginning. I know I would have had a wonderful day.

Vrij Nederland

Little Sophie and Lanky Flop is the product of an outstanding collaboration between author and illustrator, who deliver top quality in language, imagination and design.
Haarlems Dagblad

The jury for the Golden Slate Pencil and the critics are unanimous: this is a first-rate book.
PZC

Age: 10+

Translated to Danish, German, English, French, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish.

The book will be republished in 2023.

(Retrieved from: <https://www.letterenfonds.nl/en/book/286/little-sophie-and-lanky-flop>)

HET WOORDENBOEK VAN VOS EN HAAS (2002)



FOX AND HARE'S DICTIONARY

Written by **Sylvia Vanden Heede**

Fox and Hare live together, in a hole. Hare is calm and smart. Fox likes food, Haas likes books. They experience everyday things and often bicker, even though they love each other. After three story books, a cookbook and an ABC book, a dictionary with the two characters was published. Intended for primary school children, it contains an ideal mix between original, clear texts and well-found drawings.

The dictionary contains around 1000 words and as many drawings. Thé Tjong-Khing was awarded his third Golden Paintbrush for the book.

From the jury report: “For the stories for beginning readers about Fox and Hare by Sylvia Vanden Heede, Thé

created a forest full of endearing animal figures. And he surpassed himself in

characterization, expressiveness and witty details. The book, now awarded with Gold, is the sixth in a series and thus retroactively makes all the characters prize figures. In the forest of Fox and Hare, everything and everyone looks equally comical, endearing and sometimes slightly crazy. In this Dictionary, however, there is one aspect that deserves special mention. Thé is not making a story visible here, but the language itself.

Clearly and cleverly, the author explains the meaning of words. In addition, the illustrator has his animals represent the language, as if they tirelessly perform tiny plays. He even manages to get them to make the abstract concrete.”

Fox and Hare always accompany the lemma they illustrate and are close to its meaning. Usually they tell a nice story on their own that fits the meaning of the word. Hare, wearing fishnet stockings, catches butterflies with a net. The parodies on famous paintings are also funny: The lemma 'Outing' includes Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) – with a naked Hare –, and with the lemma 'flood' Théodore Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1816). Larger drawings illustrate the 'linguistic' dialogues between Fox and Hare, which briefly interrupt the dictionary, but still refer to discussed words.

Sylvia Vanden Heede on Thé Tjong-Khing's drawings: “He surprises me every time and always draws something different than I expected. Look at the drawing with the word *Aai* ('stroke'), where Vos has petted a hedgehog. Or at the drawing to the lemma *Museum*. He drew a Mona 'Hara', for example, and a Van Gogh, a Picasso. Beautiful, isn't it?”

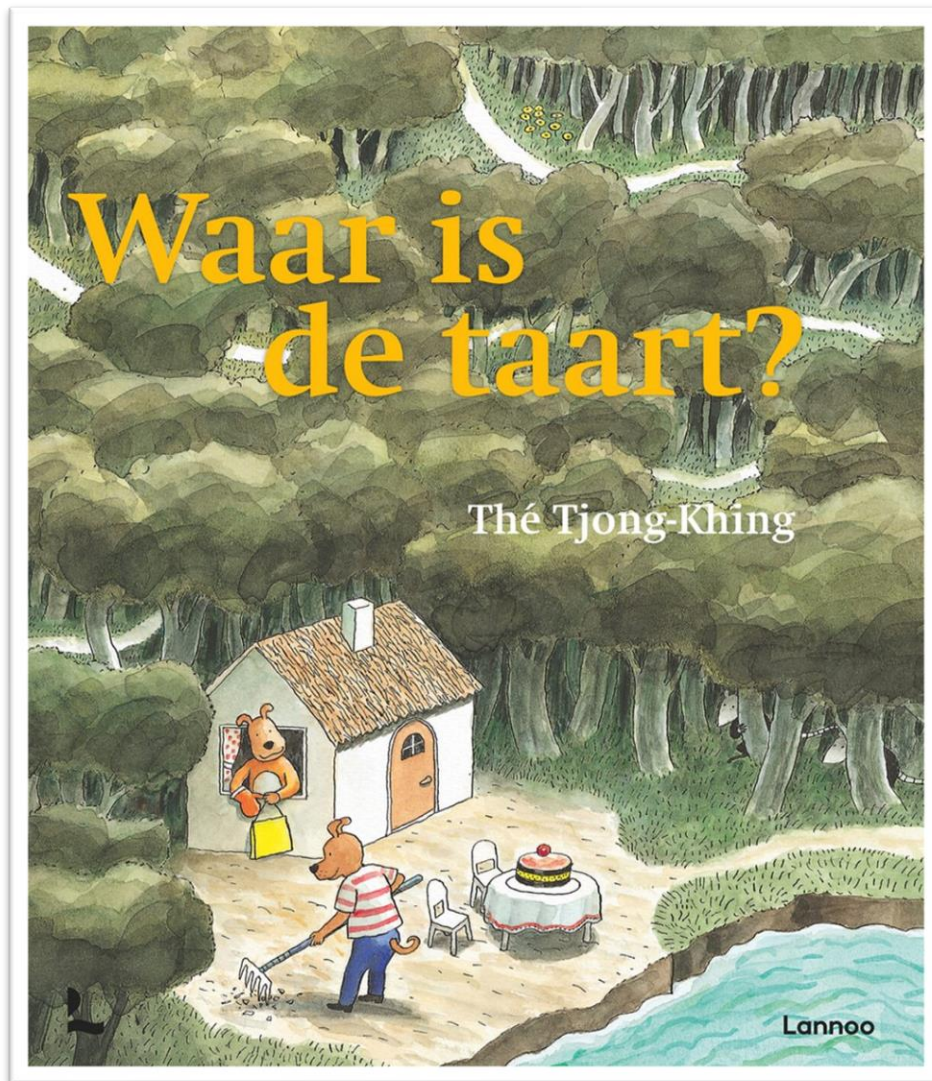
The beautiful illustrations by Thé Tjong-Khing not only support the statements, but also clarify them. It is no coincidence that this book was awarded the Golden Brush in 2003. *Pluizer.be*

Age: 8+

WAAR IS DE TAART? (2004)

WHERE IS THE CAKE?

The first picture book that Khing not only illustrated, but also wrote the story himself. However, the book has no text. It is a silent book that tells an exciting story.



Where did the cake go? And where is the eleventh duckling? And why is baby Rabbit crying like that?

Where is the cake? is highly unique search-and-find book.

It was awarded with the Woutertje Pieterse Prize 2005 and also received a Silver Paintbrush.

A selection of the reviews:

A great book in which the virtuoso illustrator Thé not only appears to have an enormously long artistic breath (...) but also a crazy fantasy that he lives out in the smallest details. Each spread provides great viewing pleasure and is so incredibly beautiful in color and wonderfully drawn that it will make you really happy from the age of four. Tribute to maestro Khing!

Leesgoed

It is a search-and-find book in which you have to find your way through full-page prints and distill the story yourself. (...) A very beautiful (...) book for all ages and for many moments of reading pleasure.

De Morgen

Thé Tjong-Khing (...) shows that humour can also be done without words. (...) A hilarious quest to bring all stories to a successful conclusion. (...) Things are going fast. Thé turns

out (...) to like mean humour.

De Volkskrant

The full-page illustrations are a true viewing pleasure (...). With a great eye for detail, the illustrator “tells” other stories in the prints than the hunt for the cake and the rats (...).

The book provides the young viewer with a lot of viewing and searching pleasure.

Pluizuit.be

In this wordless picture book, panoramic spread each time provide a situational overview of what happens to about twenty animals. (...) The large, clear watercolor drawings are

puzzle pictures, each with twenty or more animals, each of which has its own activities.

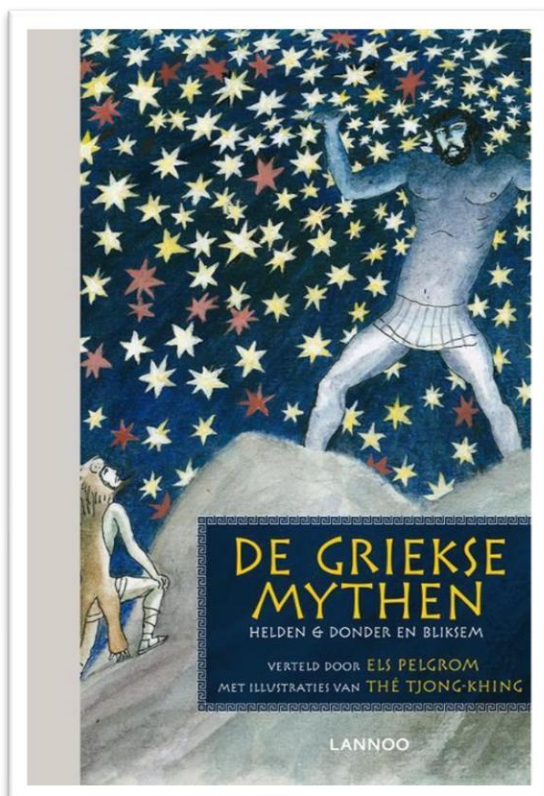
(...) A funny look-and-search book from the top shelf, for toddlers from the age of five.

Bol.com

Age: 3+

Translated to Afrikaans, Danish, German, English, French, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish

GRIEKSE MYTHEN (2011)



GREEK MYTHS

Written by Els Pelgrom

The Greek Myths collects two previously published collections by Els Pelgrom and Thé Tjong-Khing. The book opens with 'Heroes' (2006), about four important men from Greek mythology: Bellerophon, who stormed Olympus with the winged horse Pegasus; Jason, who went with the Argonauts to get the Golden Fleece at Colchis; Theseus, who crushed the Minotaur and Achilles, who played a crucial role in the Trojan War. After 'Heroes' follows 'Thunder and Lightning' (2007). This part tells the creation myth of Mother Earth (Gaia), her sons Uranus and Pontos (the sky and the water) and their progeny, the Titans. During the Battle of the

Titans, the old gods lost out and their offspring, the 'new' gods on Olympus, took over.

The common thread in this part is the supreme god Zeus, who has love or blood ties with almost all gods. Both parts open with an introduction. A timeline, and in the case of 'Heroes' also a map of the Mediterranean, help the reader to put the stories in context.

The colourful, accessible drawings by Thé Tjong-Khing fit in perfectly with the smooth writing style. They appropriately fill in what has not been put into words, express emotions in facial expressions and posture.

Leeswelp

Age: 12+

HET GROTE VOORLEESBOEK VAN VOS EN HAAS (2013)



**THE BIG READ
ALoud BOOK OF
FOX AND HARE**
Written by Sylvia
Vanden Heede

Fox and Hare live together in the wood, next door to Owl. They love each other and they tease each other and, as befits an inseparable duo, they're complete opposites.

Together, they have small, everyday adventures. Sylvia Vanden Heede uses short and easy words, which the youngest readers can read for themselves.

In spite of this simplicity, Vanden Heede succeeds in creating unforgettable characters in a fresh and funny style. The story's so much fun that the readers barely notice the words and sentences are getting longer and longer.

Thé Tjong-Khing's sparkling colour illustrations add to the humour. There are now more than twenty books in the series. With translations in nearly fifteen countries, the happy twosome are well on their way to becoming a classic couple.

This big cardboard reading aloud book collects four previously published picture books of Fox and Hare. In 'A neighbour for Fox and Hare' Fox and Hare meet their new neighbour Owl. Together, they unpack Owls moving boxes and have a fun evening together. In 'Looking for cookies' Fox has a big appetite for cookies. He doesn't want rice or raisins, or apple or nuts, and even less cheese or meat. Owl and Hare surprise him with cookies when he returns home hungry from a long search. In 'The party of Owl' Owl learns that candles belong on a birthday cake and in 'Blue is boring' Fox doesn't like the colour of his sweater anymore. But during a picnic, Fox's sweater gets all kinds of stains and in the end, it's perfectly colourful!

Through funny stories, the simple words and short sentences the books of Fox and Hare are festive reads for beginning readers. Some words and sentences are in bold, and that makes it easy for them to make the (often funny) emphases in the story. There is also a lot of humour in the big, beautiful illustrations by Thé Tjong-King. A very clever (reading aloud) book!

Fox and Hare are the cream of the crop of books for children learning to read.

Pluizer.be

Age: 4+

The books about Fox and Hare are translated to Afrikaans, Chinese, Danish, German, Finnish, French, Icelandic, Italian, Japanese, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, Swedish

KUNST MET TAART (2015)



ART WITH CAKE

Deciding to create picture books by himself, without any intervention from a narrator, is perhaps the best decision Thé Tjong-Khing has made in his long career. This artist, whose every line speaks volumes, does not need any words at all.

Art with Cake, his ode to the artistic imagination, is a witty parody of his own art and the work of great artists from history. Mrs Dog is dreaming about an exhibition of world-famous paintings. But the work of art that she painted for the exhibition gets stolen! What comes next is a wild chase through famous landscapes by Van Gogh, Braque, Hokusai and Dali.

An ode to art for pre-schoolers.

Trouw

As always, Thé leaves room to add to the story itself, so the reader can think of what Mr. Pig explains to the angry-looking rabbit mother and why Mrs. Pig needs bandages. Just like its predecessors, *Art with Cake* is an attractive look book that only reveals all its surprises after much leafing back and forth and looking carefully.

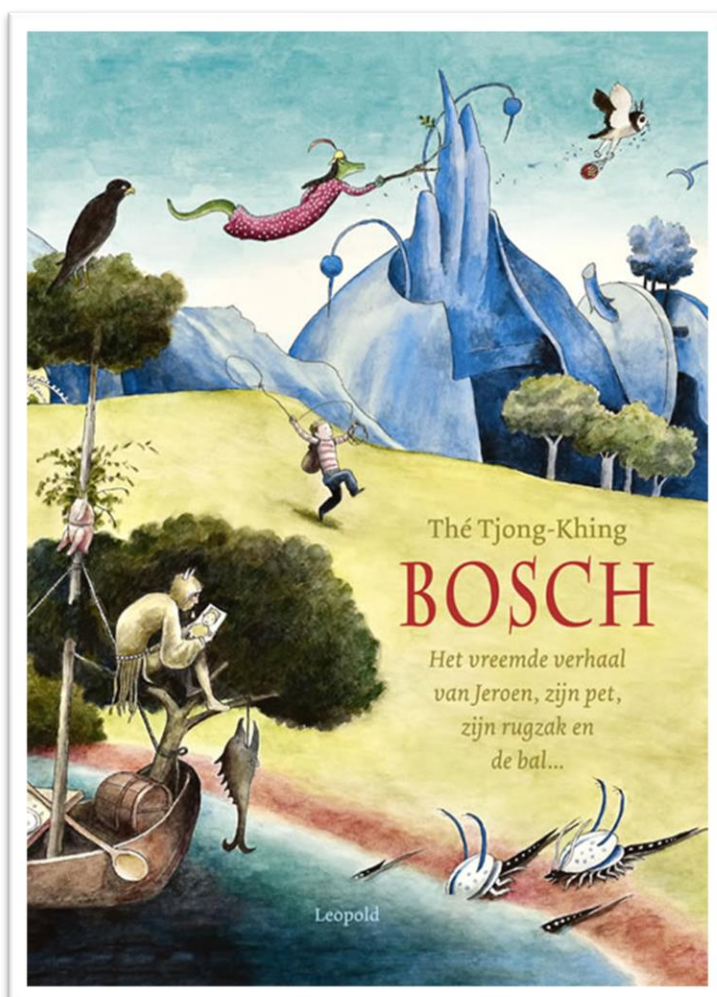
Kinderboekenpraatjes

Age: 4+

Translated to Catalan, German, English, Italian, Korean, Spanish, Chinese

(Retrieved from <https://www.letterenfonds.nl/en/book/1071/art-with-cake.>)

BOSCH (2015)



HIERONYMUS

Jeroen goes out to play. But on this day everything is different than usual. Jeroen falls into a ravine and ends up in a fantastical world full of strange creatures. They not only take his ball, but also his cap and backpack. Jeroen goes after it fearlessly. He is smart, helps where he can and makes new friends. But not everyone is what they seem...

A picture book without words, in which the magical world of Hieronymus Bosch becomes the scene of an exciting adventure.

Follow the cap, the backpack and the ball...

This beautiful search book without words not only lets the reader/viewer search for the cap, the backpack and the ball, but also guides him through the fantastic world of Hieronymus Bosch. Thé Tjong-Khing must have studied and dissected this master's paintings for hours. His interpretations and references to the paintings, or fragments from them, are subtly woven into the story.

You meet all the figures in Hieronymus Bosch's world, but Thé has placed them in his own mysterious world. So there are plenty of details to search for in these fantastic illustrations.

Kidsweek

Thé and Bosch share a sense of absurd humour, a keen eye for detail and a sardonically grim side.

NRC

Age: 5+

Translated to Chinese, German, English, Italian, Spanish

SPROOKJES VAN ANDERSEN (2016)



FAIRY TALES BY ANDERSEN

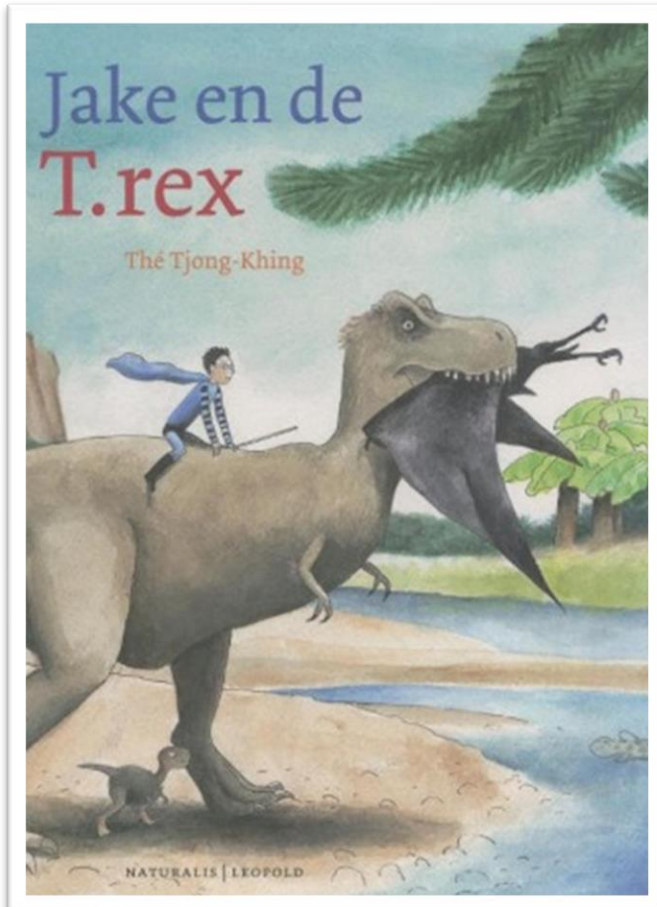
In the books of the Fairy tale Storyteller, Thé Tjong-Khing has collected the most beautiful fairy tales and rewritten them in such a way that even young children can enjoy them. The beautiful books are now a household name - more than 65,000 copies have already been sold.

With *Fairy tales by Andersen*, which contains no less than 13 well-known fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen, another beautiful volume is added to the series. Like all the other books by the Fairy tale teller, it is a richly illustrated, bound edition with

reading ribbon: a classic fairy tale book to cherish for years to come.

Age: 5+

JAKE & DE T.REX (2016)



JAKE & THE T-REX

Large picture book with an exciting story about dinosaurs. Jake lives on a ranch in Montana (USA). His father finds a dinosaur bone on land. Archaeologists then excavate an entire skeleton. In bed at night, Jake transforms into Magic Man in his dream and ends up in prehistoric times among many types of dinosaurs. He saves the life of a young Tyrannosaurus three times. When danger suddenly threatens all the animals, Magic Man is just Jake back at the ranch.

The well-known illustrator was inspired for this story by an excavation of a Tyrannosaurus by

Museum Naturalis in Leiden, which had this book published on the occasion of a T.rex exhibition. Beautiful large watercolors on double pages form great decors with figures outlined in pen. On the inside of the front flap, 24 details from the illustrations are highlighted, with a description of the dinosaurs. On the inside back cover, Jake is pictured next to the skeleton on display. Beautiful story with just enough text for all dinosaur lovers.

Age: 4+

Translated to German, French

Books Sent to the Jury



Kleine Sofie en Lange Wapper (1984, new edition 2023)
(Text by Els Pelgrom)

- + Full PDF of the English edition *Little Sophie and Lanky Flop* (1987)
- + Full PDF of the German edition *Die wundersame Reise der kleinen Sofie* (1985)



De Griekse mythen (2011)
(Text by Els Pelgrom)



Kunst met taart (2015)
(Silent book)

- + Book covers in German, English, Spanish, Chinese, Italian and Catalan



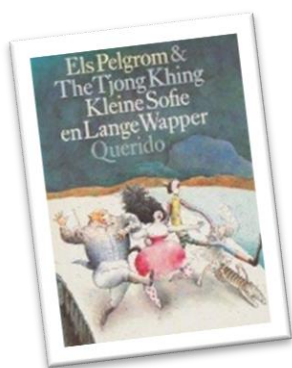
Bosch (2015)
(Silent book)

- + Book covers in Chinese, German, English, Spanish



Sprookjes van Andersen (2016)

Selection of Reviews of the Books Sent to the Jury



KLEINE SOPIE EN LANGE WAPPER

DOUBLE GOLD FOR LITTLE SOPHIE

By Margot Klompmaker

28 September 1985 in *Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant*

Originally published as Klompmaker, Margot (28 September 1985). 'Dubbel goud voor Kleine Sofie' in *Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant*.

Rarely will the choice for the winner of the Golden Slate Pencil have been as clear to the jury as this year. Already when *Little Sophie and Lanky Flop* was published, the critics were unanimous: this was a book of rare class. With this book, writer Els Pelgrom and artist Thé Tjong-Khing have delivered a top performance, which stands head and shoulders above anything that has appeared in children's books in recent months. The highest awards, a Golden Slate Pencil for the story and a Golden Paintbrush for the drawings, were obvious. Let it be said right away: the book is about death. But the fact that it is anything but a sad reading experience is due to the thoughtful way in which Els Pelgrom has given shape to the theme of death. The main character is Little Sophie, a seriously ill, bedridden girl. One night, all her toy animals come to life. Under the leadership of the cat Terror, it is decided to perform the game "What can be bought in life". The curious Sophie also applies for a place on stage and the game begins. A game taken from life, because that's what it's all about. Sophie ends up in a world that seems real. The girl experiences beautiful moments, but also experiences what cold, hunger, betrayal, arbitrariness and misery mean. At a frantic pace she learns what life has on offer. And as her life comes to an end, she exclaims overwhelmed: "So much, so much!". Els Pelgrom could have ended here, with Sophie's death. Fortunately, she did not leave the reader empty-handed. "'Come,' said Lanky Flop. He took her hand and pulled her to the window... Lanky Flop went first, then Sophie and finally Terror. They climbed out the window... Sophie laughed. An endless journey had begun." For example, Sophie's dying is softened by the thought that there need not be a definitive end after death. 'What

actually happens to you when you are dead?' Sophie asks on the first page of the story. No one can give a satisfactory answer to that. Not even this book. It can only offer comfort to those left behind. And it does, and in a grand way. With this ending many a reader is spared a hangover. This book has also been criticized. According to adults who have read the book with children, children do not understand that Sophie dies. And how can Sophie suddenly become so small that she fits in the puppet theatre? Some also find the drawings too childish. Everything cannot be denied, but I would like to put this against it. Many fairy tales, and I include Sophie's history, I have never fully understood. And what happened in them did not correspond exactly with reality either (but that's why they're fairy tales!). I couldn't care less. Fairy tales were one of my favourite readings. Enjoyment in reading a book does not only depend on a good understanding of the story. The way in which Els Pelgrom depicts Sophie's life lessons and death make *Little Sophie and Lanky Flop* a timeless story, in which an irritating narrative tone is missing. The language is very neat. Illustrator Thé Tjong-Khing is also entitled to the same amount of praise. His illustrations were created in close consultation with the author. In fact, they built Sophie's history together. The result is of unprecedented quality. This book is not only a feast for the eyes because of Khing's drawings (on almost every page!). The publisher has also done its best: the book is generous in size and printed on beautiful paper.

TWO SPECIAL CHILDREN'S BOOKS BY ELS PELGROM AND GUUS KUIJER

By Joke Linders-Nouwens

29 May 1984

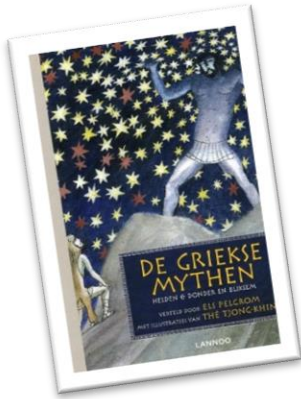
Originally published as Linders-Nouwens, Joke (29 May 1984). 'Twee bijzondere jeugdboeken van Els Pelgrom en Guus Kuijer' in *Haarlems Dagblad*.

Ten years ago, the project group 'The children's book from a different angle' signalled that death in children's books was a taboo, that children were apparently not allowed to know that dying is part of life and that adults still wanted to keep children in a walled, protected world. This has long since changed, certainly also thanks to the activities of socially critical groups. Children's book authors discovered that, if you have enough imagination, you can also address the sad sides of life in a very pure way. I think of such gems as *When grandfather journeys into Winter* by Craig Strete and *Where are you going* by Philippe Dumas. Two special books by Dutch authors have now been added, both for young children from ± 8 years and for teenagers: *Kleine Sofie en Lange Wapper* by Els Pelgrom and *De Zwarte Stenen* by Guus Kuijer. Both books were illustrated by Thé Tjong-Khing, have characteristics of a heroic saga, while death is incorporated in a subtle interplay of fantasy and reality. Enough reason to put those two books side by side. Little

Sophie is a curious girl who has been seriously ill for a long time and always has to stay in bed. However, she insists on knowing “what is for sale” in the world and beyond. Els Pelgrom has found an excellent solution for this curiosity, which also makes it possible to accept the girl's death. One night, when Sophie can't sleep, she hears and sees all her dolls and stuffed animals come together for the puppet show “The world is a vale of tears”. Because the puppets think an ordinary puppet show is old hat – “We want something difficult” – Terror the cat organizes a play about “What Is For Sale In Life”. Sophie also plays a role in this and learns while playing that there are all kinds of people: fat, rich, selfish people and poor people who can only be grumpy from hunger. At the annual fair she sees the wonders of the world and discovers to her shame that happiness is always paid for with misfortune. In *The Home for Failed Children*, Sophie can catch her breath, because she is not laughed at for her bald head. That paradise state, in which one accepts each other's flaws, is not the real one. Terror soon comes to get her because her friend Lanky Flop is in prison. The attempts to get him out of it keep Sophie in situations where she has to choose between fair and unfair, between dreaming away in a temporary happiness or fighting a bitter battle. Els Pelgrom has developed an excellent storyline for this that is logical, exciting and contains subtle references to real life with its hardships. In the course of the play it becomes clear that Sophie is dangerously ill and she experiences this firsthand after a last act of heroism. But then Sophie also knows that life is very beautiful and she knows the value of true friendship. The end of the play is also the end of Sophie's life. "There were many visitors and they laid flowers for her." Her father and mother stayed with her, but “grief makes you tired” and when their eyes close, the story can go on. The friends from the play come to pick up Sophie and together they then set off “through green hills and blue skies”, having fun. “Sophie laughed. An endless journey had begun.” We also know that continuation of life after death from *The brothers Lionheart* by Astrid Lindgren. It's a good way to make the inevitable livable, it's very comforting.

Thé Tjong-Khing has richly illustrated this special story. His drawings add a lot to the story and are almost never repetitions. Thé Tjong-Khing tells that he'd asked Els Pelgrom to write a book especially for him. Then she had made this story, in which a lot happens, so that there was also a lot to draw. In his drawings, Thé shows another side of the story: the time and place in which Sophie and the others live. The Middle Ages? No, because cars pass by, and you see posh ladies from the last century. Is it about people? But what are those winding keys for in some backs? Thé Tjong-Khing drew figures from the time and land of fairy tales and all that is very different from ordinary time with ordinary people.

I wish I was a kid and got this book. I wish I didn't already know it and could start reading it. Because I know that I would have a wonderful day.



GRIEKSE MYTHEN

GREEK MYTHS

By Kyra Fastenau

15 April 2012

Originally published as Fastenau, Kyra (15 April 2012). 'Griekse mythen' in *Leeswelp*.

The Greek Myths collects two previously published collections by Els Pelgrom and Th  Tjong-Khing. The book opens with 'Heroes' (2006), about four important men from Greek mythology: Bellerophon, who stormed Olympus with the winged horse Pegasus; Jason, who went with the Argonauts to get the Golden Fleece at Colchis; Theseus, who crushed the Minotaur and Achilles, who played a crucial role in the Trojan War. After 'Heroes' follows 'Thunder and Lightning' (2007). This part tells the creation myth of Mother Earth (Gaia), her sons Uranus and Pontos (the sky and the water) and their progeny, the Titans. During the Battle of the Titans, the old gods lost out and their offspring, the 'new' gods on Olympus, took over. The common thread in this part is the supreme god Zeus, who has love or blood ties with almost all gods.

Both parts open with an introduction. A timeline, and in the case of 'Heroes' also a map of the Mediterranean, help the reader to put the stories in context. Pelgrom also explains the origin of the myths. She characterizes them as the answer to inexplicable matters and unsaid things. Myths never straightforwardly tell what happened, but rather serve as a mirror to humanity. They are stories of great deeds, which are at the same time full of self-interest, deceit, lust, hatred, senseless violence, adultery, rape, incest, intrigue, jealousy, resentment, vengeance and cruelty – qualities of both men and gods. They want people to understand that every action has a cause and effect. Furthermore, they advise taking an example from the heroes and avoiding their mistakes.

(...)

The marginal notes to the stories prove that Pelgrom does not just talk about the Greek heroes and gods, but wants to show that contemporary culture is still full of references to the old stories. She provides etymological and semantic explanations of modern

words, names and expressions, and draws parallels between Greek myths and other folk tales, fairy tales and the Bible and Quran. This brings the stories closer to the reader. Pelgrom also explains that there is a connection between myths and reality: the search for the Golden Fleece, for example, is an epic translation of the trade expeditions of the Greeks, and economic interests also played a role in the battle for Troy. Pelgrom's stories do not walk on literary stilts. They read fluently, the style does not want to imitate the Homeric verses, the language sounds contemporary and young and occasionally puts things into perspective, with a critical note and a touch of humour. However, there is no clear storyline or characters that the reader can empathize with.

The colourful, accessible drawings by Thé Tjong-Khing fit in perfectly with the smooth writing style. They appropriately fill in what has not been put into words, express emotions in facial expressions and posture. The prints contain artistic jokes: for example, the dinner where Achilles listens to King Priam's plea is a clear reference to Da Vinci's *Last Supper*. The book has been published with great care, with clear printing on a beautifully varied page layout. A minor flaw is the inconsistency in the spelling of Greek classical names. Nevertheless, it is a beautiful, fascinating and instructive book.

GREEK MYTHS

NBD Biblion

Reviews for libraries

The combination of the writer Els Pelgrom and the illustrator Thé Tjong-Khing is a guarantee for a quality children's book. And this omnibus with two previously separately published books about Greek myths certainly has quality. The often complicated stories about the Greek gods, goddesses and heroes are clearly retold. The author manages to avoid the problem that the Greek myths are intended for adults and not for children. The sexual elements in the myths are not concealed, but not given too much emphasis. The choice of myths is very extensive. Practical and useful is the additional information provided in the margin. It does not interfere with reading the story thanks to a very successful layout. The many pen drawings coloured with water color fit well with the atmosphere of the book. Certainly not sweet or funny. Horrific stories are given a gruesome drawing, such as the one about the death of Pentheus, who is torn apart by women.



KUNST MET TAART

A CHASE PAST FAMOUS WORKS OF ART

By Jaap Friso at review website www.jaappleest.nl.

On the opening spread, Mama Bear dreams in her armchair about the design of an exhibition. There, the painting of the dog with the cake is stolen. All the animals rush outside to catch up with the crook (in his striped suit). The next spread shows that they are in the recognizable Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and they walk into Van Gogh's *Wheat Field with Crows*. It will be a pursuit through famous paintings by great artists, through George Braque, through the work of Rousseau and Gauguin to end up with the famous wave of Kanagawa by the Japanese artist Hokusai. In the meantime, the animals are fighting with each other, which benefits the crook, but in the end they catch him and the painting of the dog with the cake can be hung. In the dream that is, because in real life things are going a bit different.

It is the third cake book by Thé Tjong-Khing, in a steady rhythm of 5 years. After *Where is the cake?* from 2005 and *Birthday with cake* (2010). *Art with cake* is the best of the three (and that says a lot) because Thé Tjong-Khing gives it great added value with all those art references. The previous textless books were already surprising and witty, but this book can be viewed on even more different levels. As an exciting chase story, as an art look book, as a search book and a mixture of all those genres. The artworks are implicitly and explicitly woven into the story. Readers don't have to do anything with the art, but they get it anyway. On one spread the animals run past Dalí, Mondriaan in a Keith Haring curtain and Edward Hopper. Great artists but relatively recent, so no Rembrandt and Vermeer. It is ironic that it is all about a painting of a dog with a cake, which apparently is more important than all those famous works of art.

This book is a feast for the eyes. It doesn't belong to an exhibition like so many art picture books in recent years, but is perhaps a nod to those museum series: this is how you make a book about art. Tjong-Khing is in top form here and it would be great for the

reader, and the artist himself of course (he will be 82 in August), if a new edition could appear in 2020.

(Retrieved from: [https://jaapleest.nl/een-achtervolging-langs-beroemde-kunstwerken/.](https://jaapleest.nl/een-achtervolging-langs-beroemde-kunstwerken/))

RUNNING THROUGH A PAINTING THÉ TJONG-KHING SHINES IN ODE TO ART FOR TODDLERS

By Bas Maliepaard

6 June 2015

Originally published as Maliepaard, Bas (6 June 2015). 'Rennen door een schilderij. Thé Tjong-Khing schittert in ode aan de kunst voor kleuters' in *Trouw*.

Two layers of chocolate cake with yellow pudding in between, pink icing and a cherry on top. That is the cake about which artist Thé Tjong-Khing already made three wordless picture books. For the first book, *Where's the cake?* (2004), he received both the Woutertje Pieterse Prize and a Silver Paintbrush.

In that book and the sequels *Picnic with cake* (2005) and *Birthday with cake* (2010), the same humorous animal characters and story ingredients return: usually something is stolen, there is a chase and you see everything go wrong in a slapstick way. At the end, the bad guys are caught and there is a piece of cake for everyone.

You would think we would know it by now with this concept, but with the new part, *Art with cake*, Thé surpasses himself. It is an inventive visual spectacle, a wonderful ode to art and at the same time a wonderful children's book.

After reading a stack of art books, Mrs. Hond dreams that a painting of her husband with the cake in his hands is stolen from a museum. She and her friends immediately give chase, across landscapes that Thé composed from famous works of art. The result is a stunning mix of Thé's style and that of the artists.

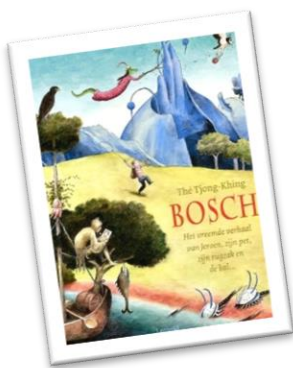
This is how they pass Vincent van Gogh's *Wheat Field with Crows*. On the next page, in a landscape by Georges Braque, one of those crows is caught by a cat, but fortunately rescued. In that way, Thé gives the bird that ends up in a cat's mouth in a painting by Picasso a second chance.

The animals run across a candy-colored Kandinsky street and a surreal beach copied from Dalí's "The Persistence of Memory" (you know, his painting of that clock hanging limply over a tree branch).

Most of the art comes together in the drawing of a house through which the animals run: you see wallpaper by Matisse, curtains by Keith Haring, the Mae West lip sofa by Dalí and outside the swirling air of *The Scream* by Munch.

For young children, *Art with cake* is a wonderful, casual introduction to great art, but also 'just' a colourful picture book full of exciting and funny events. The book also challenges adults: how many works of art do you recognize?

(Retrieved from <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/rennen-door-een-schilderij-the-tjong-khing-schittert-in-ode-aan-de-kunst-voor-kleuters~b9815c82/>.)



HIERONYMUS. AN ADVENTURE IN THE WORLD OF HIERONYMUS BOSCH

YOU GET HIERONYMUS BOSCH'S ART FOR FREE

By Thomas de Veen

11 February 2016

Originally published as Veen, Thomas de (11 February 2016). 'Bosch kunst krijg je er gratis bij' in *NRC Handelsblad*.

On the opening page of *Hieronymus*, young Jeroen fools around with his ball and then stumbles into the abyss. With ball and all, and with cap and backpack. In Thé Tjong-Khing's textless picture book, he goes on a quest for those objects, because little monsters have run off with them. Jeroen ends up in a typical Thé Tjong-Khing world, with vast grassy plains and dark forests, which is now populated by the diabolical creatures

from the work of Hieronymus Bosch.

This makes it an ideal introduction to Bosch's art for children: searching for the ball, cap and other storylines, you get the art for free. Thé was already familiar and unsurpassed with this procedure: he previously opened the complete history of art in the picture book *Art with cake* (2015), by having his characters stroll through Van Gogh's bedroom, Co Westerik's grass and Dalí's steppe.

With *Hieronymus* he does something similar, and maybe even better. Because Thé and Hieronymus Bosch share a sense of absurd humor, a keen eye for detail and a sardonic grim edge – their 'collaboration' makes *Hieronymus* one of the creepiest children's books in ages. But the nightmare ends gently and above all it is a great search book. Thé's images do not reveal their secrets at a glance, many storylines intertwine. The most wonderful and scary monsters – reptile-like porcupines, dragon-like birds, owls – eventually lead young Jeroen to a snake-like witch. Is it a Bosch-witch or a Thé-witch? In *Hieronymus*, their two oeuvres merge beautifully.

(Retrieved from <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2016/02/11/bosch-kunst-krijg-je-er-gratis-bij-1589114-a991015>.)

HIERONYMUS

By Frauke Pauwels
December 2015

There is no doubt that the paintings of Hieronymus, or Jeroen, Bosch are intriguing. His imaginative, almost absurd and sometimes gruesome visual language still fascinates after all these centuries. With the lessons of medieval culture by Professor Jef Janssens, twenty years ago now, that visual power only increased for me: every element also turned out to be a code, every painting became a secret language that you gradually learned to decipher.

It is precisely that feeling that Thé Tjong-Khing manages to capture in *Hieronymus*: the idea that behind every image there is a story, and another, and another... so that you want to look again and again, pluck layer after layer and dive into the new world beyond.

It seems like a gift, that visual excess and generous symbolism of Hieronymus Bosch. But to get started with Bosch's legacy without losing your own image language and style, you have to be from a good background. Thé Tjong-Khing performs this task wonderfully. Those who are familiar with his work will see how he continues the line and

manages to give a place to figures from earlier works, such as the cake and the salamander as the villain from the series of wordless picture books. Anyone familiar with the work of Hieronymus Bosch will be amazed at how wonderfully details from his world of imagination fit into Khing's universe. For example, the blue mountains with their strange pointed appendages come straight from the left panel of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, we see the house and an allusion to the figure from *The peddler*, the strange little boat and the 'boatswain' from *The Ship of Fools*... Feel free to include Bosch's work: Khing's book guarantees a wonderful game of recognition, from large 'carrying' figures to small details from various paintings – the strawberry as a seducer, the animals of all kinds (and feel free to take that literally, exuberant tails, crests and feathers are strikingly present), the mythical creatures, nature and architecture...

In *Hieronymus*, Khing strips the images of the sharpest edges and of the layer of guilt and sin from an adult world of experience (and a lesser-known iconographic culture). He charges them again with fear, sadness, deceit, quarrel, but also helpfulness, cooperation and gratitude. In this way he also makes the images readable for the viewer with less cultural (and emotional) baggage, and he fuses his own visual language with that of Bosch. To the biblical references, which are emphatically present in Bosch – or form the starting point – Khing adds fairy-like elements, so that the imprisoned children are reminiscent of 'Hansel and Gretel' and the transformation of the evil 'witch' to that of the stepmother from 'Snow White'.

As in Khing's earlier work, the slope acts as an ominous space. He puts a lot of effort into the spatial effect of the prints. Landscapes expand in height, width and depth and subtly guide the reader's direction of view.

It is also clever how Khing knows how to open up the images in which many researchers grit their teeth to a wider audience. *Hieronymus* can be read in many ways. It works as a search-and-find book, in which the search for a backpack, cap and ball leads the reading and numerous side figures can be followed. It forms an adventure story in which a boy tumbles into a ravine and in the strange world in which he ends up, he sets children free who have disappeared in the hands of a witch. The book invites you to philosophize about good and evil and forms – on top of that or above all – a wonderful introduction or renewed acquaintance with the work of Hieronymus Bosch. The painter from the fifteenth century will have died 500 years ago in 2016, and that will not go unnoticed. With *Hieronymus* it is guaranteed that Khing will lead different generations (again) to the work of Hieronymus Bosch. Fantastic and fascinating!

(Retrieved from

https://mappalibri.be/?navigatieid=62&recensieid=5347&via_navigatieid=81.)



THE FAIRY TALE TELLER. FAIRY TALES BY ANDERSEN

NBD Biblion

Review for libraries

Everyone knows that Thé Tjong-Khing is a great illustrator. It is no coincidence that, in addition to the 2010 Max Velthuijs Prize, he has also won three Golden Paintbrushes, a Silver Paintbrush and the Woutertje Pieterse Prize. That he is also a master of storytelling was less known until recently.

In the books of the Fairy tale Storyteller, Thé Tjong-Khing has collected the most beautiful fairy tales and rewritten them in such a way that even toddlers can enjoy them. The beautiful books are now a household name - more than 65,000 copies have already been sold.

With *Fairy tales by Andersen*, which contains no less than 13 well-known fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen, another beautiful volume is added to the series. Like all the other books by the Fairy tale teller, it is a richly illustrated, bound edition with reading ribbon: a classic fairy tale book to cherish for years to come.

Thé Tjong-Khing has adapted various fairy tales in the past and in this edition he focuses on thirteen well-known and less known stories by Hans Christian Andersen. The original longer fairy tales have been shortened and adapted to be read aloud in understandable language or eventually to be read by children themselves. Although certain parts of the stories have been omitted as a result, the author remains largely faithful to the original work with only minor adjustments here and there. In some stories the adjustments are larger, but only the connoisseur will notice that. Original fairy tales are often more rough in theme and plot than later adaptations, but Thé Tjong-Khing does not shy away from the originals. Occasionally the reader is addressed directly, which works comically. The illustrations are again in the characteristic style, with attractive use of colour and (just like the texts) with little frills.

FAIRY TALES BY ANDERSEN

By Eric Vanthillo on [Pluizuit.be](http://pluizuit.be)

January 2017

That Thé Tjong-Khing is not only a universally acclaimed illustrator of eye-catching prints, but also a passionate storyteller of fairy tales, has already been proven in his fairy tale books. This time he has rewritten thirteen fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen and neatly bundled them in this voluminous book (with reading ribbon!). Two of them previously appeared in his previous book.

The selection is varied: known next to unknown, simple next to something more complex, short next to long. Such as 'The ugly duckling', 'The little mermaid', 'The emperor's clothes', ... But also 'What father does is always good' or 'The travel companion'.

Tjong-Khing edited the stories with respect for the original. He makes the stories sharper and uses contemporary language. They are all perfectly readable because every word fits in your mouth like a glove.

The illustrations in the recognizable Tjong-Khing style are gems. They tell a story and are atmospheric. They stimulate your imagination and refresh the text.

A beautiful book that should not be missing in your fairy tale book collection and that will please both old and young with fascinating reading sessions time after time.

(Retrieved from <https://pluizuit.be/boek/de-sprookjesverteller-sprookjes-van-andersen/>.)

Nomination dossier by The National IBBY Section of The Netherlands

