

A reflection on friendship and memory

W.

TIEMEN HIEMSTRA

Olaf's world is turned upside down when his former girlfriend Hilde tells him she's seen his best friend W. in Antwerp again after an absence of three years. The news marks the start of thirteen gripping days in which Olaf goes searching for answers. Why did W. disappear and flee to a different life? How well did he actually know W.? Are his memories of their friendship real at all?

Through flashbacks we learn how the two boys, and later Hilde as well, became friends. The novel pays tribute to youth and the idealism that goes with it. All three characters long for freedom and authenticity, love to philosophize away and imagine themselves invincible. The city and the cafés are their playground. Their motto? 'Reminiscing is a waste of time, experience is everything.'

This remarkable, commanding book switches subtly between gravity and lightness.

DE MORGEN

When one day W. disappears without explanation, that romantic picture is shattered; the insecure Olaf withdraws from social life and the contact between him and Hilde peters out too. All that remains of W. is the 'fun sarcophagus', a digital databank full of memes, haikus and musings. Through the pictures and the texts, which appear in between the chapters as well, Olaf tries to fathom his friend. As the story goes on, his quest becomes increasingly obsessive.

'W.' is an addictive novel in which Hiemstra displays a great deal of literary talent, presents distinctly layered characters and plays extravagantly with language and composition. His unusual narrative tone suggests a degree of influence from the early J.D. Salinger. The result is labyrinthine prose in which it's a delight to lose your way.

Hiemstra takes different paths from those of his Flemish peers. This is a novel in literature at the moment. His sentences burn with longing for the

FLEMISH LITERATURE



AUTHOR



Tiemen Hiemstra (b. 1991) is a writer and performer. He grew up in Groningen and studied literature in Antwerp. After graduating he moved to Leipzig, where he wrote, did nothing and worked as a postman. He now lives in Antwerp again. His debut novel was published in 2023 by Das Mag. His colloquial style, rollicking plot and expressive sentences make Hiemstra's work an addictive reading experience. *Photo © Cootje Veelenturf*

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ordinary and the impalpable.

DE GROENE AMSTERDAMMER