

Edward van de Vendel

**Nominee for the Hans Chr. Andersen
Award 2018**

IBBY-The Netherlands

Biography

Edward van de Vendel was born in Leerdam on August 1, 1964. He grew up in Beesd, a small village in the Betuwe. Education would play an important role in his life; his father was principal of a primary school and his mother was a kindergarten teacher. He went to the pedagogical academy and was principal of a primary school himself for four years, which he founded together with some colleagues. Music was an important subject at this school. He was also a teacher at a small school in the Dutch province of Drenthe.

Van de Vendel started writing songs and school cabaret in secondary school. Since 2001 he became a fulltime writer. He usually writes in a café. Nowadays, he lives and works in Rotterdam.

Portrait



Contribution to children's and young adult's literature



Edward van de Vendel is a literary jack-of-all trades. Van de Vendel's oeuvre is rich and varied: he writes picture books, poetry for children and (young) adults, songs, novels and non-fiction books about various topics, such as soccer – his favorite sports. Next to this, he is also the initiator of numerous literary projects for young adults. Finally, he also translates children's books from English into Dutch.

Characteristics of Van de Vendel's work: style and topics

In addition to the different genres Van de Vendel easily switches to, his style and the topics he discusses in his work are equally diverse.

Van de Vendel's work can in general be characterized both by its sparkling cheerfulness and at the same time by its capability to discuss serious topics in an appealing way. Examples of these distinct characteristics can be found in his happy and playful poetry for small children about Superguppie on the one hand, in which Van de Vendel plays with rhyme and syntax. On the other hand, Van de Vendel writes about concealing a homosexual relationship in a soccer team in *The days of bluegrass love* (*De dagen van de bluegrassliefde*) by structuring the book itself as a soccer match (first half, halftime, second half). In this book he also uses flashbacks to reflect on what happens.

Another example of Van de Vendel's versatile work can be found in the existing (fairy) tales he adapted in a captivating way. He adapted Vondel's famous play *Ghijsbrecht van Aemstel* to a children's book (*Gijsbrecht*) in 1998. In this book he tells the raw story of the battle about Amsterdam in 1302 in a lightly rhyming manner with a lot of speed.

Another unusual adaptation is *Rood rood Roodkapje* (2004, ill. of Isabelle Vandenabeele) of the fairytale of Little Red Riding Hood. Although the story starts with the phrase "Once upon a time..." the book cannot be seen as a classical retelling of the fairytale, but is unusually

He translated for example the series about the treehouse from Andy Griffiths and Terry Denton, for example *The 52-storey treehouse* (2014); Van de Vendel's translation from English into Dutch came out in 2015. But he also translated the picture book *Quel oeuf!* from Sally Grindley and Pascal Lemaitre from French into Dutch in 2016.

Prizes

Van de Vendel has won a lot of (international) prizes, which award the versatility of his work. Most recently, in 2016, he won the Golden Frame (Gouden Lijst) for his young adult novel *Oliver*, the Woutertje Pieterse Prize and a Zilveren Griffel for his non-fiction novel *Vote for the okapi (Stem op de Okapi)* and the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis for his picture book *The dog that Nino didn't have (Het hondje dat Nino niet had)*.

Van de Vendel about his work:

“I try to write poetry with a first sentence as a strong threshold and a new insight at the end, captured in a new and clear image.”

Interviews

Five Questions for Edward van de Vendel

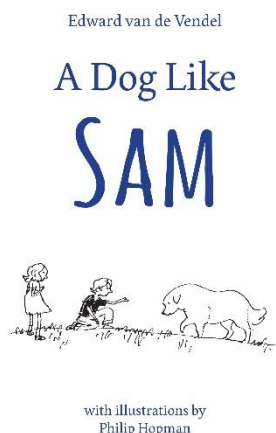
Posted by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. on November 16, 2016

*Our guest today is **Edward van de Vendel**, author of the newly-released book *A Dog Like Sam* and also author of *The Dog That Nino Didn't Have*.*

1. *What's the story behind A Dog Like Sam?*

I was writing and writing—but it was a stupid book I was writing. It was supposed to be a “funny” novel, about a cowboy who was not so good with horses, but pretty good at baking cupcakes. And the manuscript was a failure: it wasn't funny, there was no “truth” in the story.

I was a bit fed up with the whole idea of writing, and because summer was on its way, I booked a flight to Calgary to visit my brother and his family. And there it was: a wonderful white dog, showing up just like that—and a wonderful story, showing up just like that. It was as if life itself said: “Look, *this* is what you should write about.” So I did.



2. *What are your thoughts on Philip Hopman's illustrations for the book?*

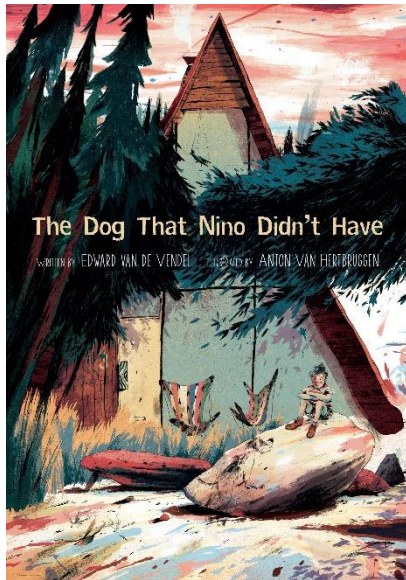
Philip Hopman is one of the best illustrators we have. There is no doubt about that. But when it comes to black-and-white illustrations in a book about animals and people, or in a book that has landscapes and a non-Dutch background, he is simply the one and only master. I can't say how happy I still am that he found the time to do my two Sam books. We didn't even talk much about it—I just sent him some photographs, but they weren't many and they weren't very good. After a while he just showed me his artwork. Which was stunning.

3. *Which book has done the most to make you who you are today?*

It's a triangle of books. First of all it's *The Lionheart Brothers* by Astrid Lindgren. This book showed me the importance of being courageous at the points in your life when it really matters—even though you don't think you have the courage to do what you're supposed to do. The main character in the book is struggling with this, but he knows that if he doesn't act when it's really, really necessary, he would be nothing more than a rag.

What Is the What? by Dave Eggers taught me what writers can do when it comes to solidarity. This story, which he wrote after meeting the Sudanese “lost boy” Valentino Achak Deng,

inspired me to start a young-adult series based on a similar principle, and it led me to write two books about the extraordinary lives of very important young people I met, *The Boy Who Found Happiness*, about Anoush Elman, who was born in Afghanistan and now lives in The Netherlands, and *The Cancer Championship for Juniors*, with Roy Looman, about the mental effects of (surviving) cancer.



The last book that will stay with me forever, I'm sure, is *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara. I read it six weeks ago, and since then not a day has passed without thoughts being spent on Jude, Willem, Malcolm, and JB. It's about having friends as "self-chosen" family members, how to help people who suffer, and how that maybe isn't possible at all, but still we have to try. And it's about the importance of being friendly.

4. *What are you doing when you're not writing, reading, or answering questions for Eerdlings?*

Maintaining friendships, I would say, which comes down to: talking, having dinner, going to a movie, and then talking again. I would like to say there's the occasional visit to the gym as well, but it's actually too occasional to mention (and mostly untrue).

5. *What's next for you?*

I'm working on a new 10+ book, which I would say is perfect for the readers of the Sam series. It's going to be out next spring (2017) and will bear the title *The Forbidden Attic*. There will be a lot of cliff-hangers, as well as an eerie girl, a boy that is intrigued by the eerie girl, and I guess even some ghosts.

Awards, nominations and other distinctions

- 1999 Gouden Zoen for *Gijsbrecht: naar Vondels Ghysbrecht van Aemstel*
- 2000 Gouden Zoen for *De dagen van de bluegrass liefde*
- 2001 Zilveren Griffel for *Dom konijn*
- 2004 Woutertje Pieterse Prijs for *Superguppie*
- 2004 Vlag en Wimpel (griffeljury) for *Rood Rood Roodkapje*
- 2005 Zilveren Griffel for *Superguppie*
- 2006 Annie M.G. Schmidt lecture *Over adem*
- 2007 Gouden Zoen for *Ons derde lichaam*
- 2008 Vlag en Wimpel (griffeljury) for *Kleinvader*
- 2008 Zilveren Griffel for *Eén miljoen vlinders*
- 2009 Zilveren Griffel for *Opa laat zijn tenen zien*
- 2009 Glazen Globe for *De gelukvinder*
- 2010 Jenny Smelik-IBBY prijs for *De gelukvinder*
- 2010 Zilveren Griffel for *Fluit zoals je bent*
- 2010 Vlag en Wimpel (griffeljury) for *Ajax wint altijd*
- 2011 Valg en Wimpel for *Draken met stekkers: en andere stripgedichten*
- 2011 Pluim van de Senaat van de Nederlandse Kinderjury 6-9 years for *Sofie en de pinguïns*
- 2011 Zilveren griffel for *Hoera voor Superguppie!*
- 2012 Kinder- en Jeugdjury Vlaanderen for *Sofie en de pinguïns*
- 2012 Zilveren Griffel for *Toen kwam Sam*
- 2012 Woutertje Pieterse lecture *Is er hier iemand bi?*
- 2014 Vlag en Wimpel for *Ik juich voor jou*
- 2014 Kinderpoëzieprijs en Vlag en Wimpel (Griffeljury) for *Ik juich voor jou*
- 2014 Zilveren Penseel for *Het hondje dat Nino niet had*
- 2015 KIDDO-Leespluim for *Doei!*
- 2016 Gouden Lijst for *Oliver*
- 2016 Zilveren Griffel for *Stem op de okapi*
- 2016 Woutertje Pieterse Prijs for *Stem op de okapi*
- 2016 Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis for *Der Hund, den Nino nicht hatte*, translation from Rolf Erdorf of *Het hondje dat Nino niet had*



The 'Griffels' (slate pencils); annual awards for writing

In 1955 a regular award for writing was established by the CPNB (Collective Propaganda for the Dutch Book). This proved to be inadequate for the growing number of likely candidates. Since 1971, the CPNB has awarded a Gouden Griffel (Golden Slate Pencil) for the best Dutch children's book and a Zilveren Griffel (Silver Slate Pencil) for the next. The 'vlag en wimpel' is a honorable mention for this award.

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 attended for children's books of Dutch origin with literary merit. This annual award is for a maximum of 15.000 euro. The goal of the Woutertje Pieterse Prize is to improve the quality of children's writing by means of this 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. This Award is seen as the most important award for authors of children's literature.

Jenny Smelik IBBY prijs

A prize given to authors and illustrators of books for children and young adults which contribute to a better understanding of ethnic minority groups.

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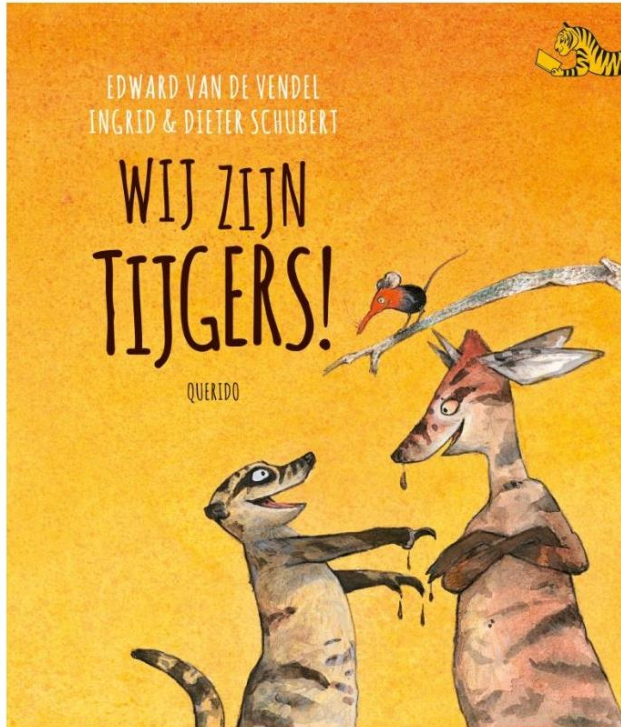
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The most important titles



The days of bluegrass love, *Our Third body* and *Oliver* are three important books by Edward van de Vendel,

The main characters are Tycho Zeling, an 18-year old Dutch boy and Oliver Kjelsberg, an 18-year-old Norwegian boy (and 16 in *Oliver*).

The books were first published in 1999 (*The days of Bluegrass Love*, updated version in 2015) and in 2006 (*Our third body*), and in 2015 a third book came out: *Oliver*.

The first two books were well spread and read in Holland, became kind of ‘gay classics’ and were both awarded with the Golden Kiss Prize, the prize for the best literary youth novel of the year, chosen from the entire Dutch production (so not just ‘gay’ books).

The days of Bluegrass Love:

Tycho is newly graduated, doesn’t have a clue what to do with his life, sees this ad for being an assistant-leader in an international children’s camp in the U.S., and decides to apply.

Right before leaving he has this half-hearted love affair with Nina, but he breaks up with her as soon as it gets too physical.

In the camp he meets Oliver, another assistant-leader. They fall in love, which is both a surprise to Tycho, as well a happy discovery of a truth: he is gay.

Afterwards the leaders of the camp seem to be supportive, but still the couple gets sent away. They leave the U.S. for Norway, where they can be all alone for at least a week, since Oliver’s mother is still on a holidaytrip. They have some wonderful, love-filled days, until Oliver admits he would like to go and play in this tournament with his football league. Without taking Tycho with him, coming out to his friends is (yet) too difficult for him.

Tycho tries to visit him during the tournament, but understand that at this point being who he was and being who he is, is too hard to combine for Oliver. Tycho decides to go home, and the book ends with a scene at the airport, where Oliver says goodbye to Tycho. Are things over now? Maybe. Maybe not: the love might be too strong.

Our third body:

Half a year later. Tycho starts in a writing school, and also moves out to live in a student's place with his new best friend, Vonda. She is a talented young singer, starting her career. Their friendship heads off wonderfully, and as soon as a young dancer, Moritz, starts living with them, the 'friendship-triangle' is perfect. Moritz is gay as well, but he likes older guys, so he is not Tycho's new lover.

Tycho hasn't been in contact with Oliver for over half a year. He writes emails to him, but doesn't send them: maybe that's too painful.

Then two things start to happen: Tycho discovers things in Vonda's past that she lied about and Vonda is asked to participate in the Eurovision Song Contest. She summons Tycho and Moritz to join her, not as singers, but as 'assistants'. Tycho isn't very keen on this, but their life is overruled by new plans, by new projects and by new successes.

Tycho is offered to write song lyrics and a blog about his week in Riga, Latvia (where the Eurovision takes place), and this week, and this writing, becomes the background for both the inevitable breakdown of the friendship with Vonda and the chance to take up contact with Oliver again...

Oliver:

A novel about the sixteen-year old Norwegian boy Oliver Kjelsberg, two years before he will meet the Dutch Tycho Zeling - so, two years before the events described in my novel *The days of Bluegrass Love*. Oliver has great parents, it's summer holiday, he is progressing in his biggest hobby: playing football (he's a goalkeeper), and he has a best friend, Bendik, who is also his cousin. Oliver is not a talker, but does he need to be? Well, in this book, all of a sudden his parent's marriage collapses, and within a day some more things happen that make the world seem a whole lot different than Oliver and Bendik always had believed. How do these two boys cope with the scope of events that they are forced to face?

About the books

Where the first book is written in a poetic, but accessible tone, concentrating solely on the big, burning, happy first love between two boys, (120 pages) the second book is a mixture of e-mails, song lyrics and a story at high pace, written like a movie (300 pages), concentrating on daily gay life (going out, meeting other guys, online-dating etc.) and especially on the rise and fall of this grand friendship. After the first two books, that focused on love and friendship, *Oliver* is mainly about family. It takes place before *The days of Bluegrass Love*. The books are equally read by young people and grown-ups.



The dog that Nino didn't have

By Edward van de Vendel, illustrated by Anton Van Hertbruggen

This fever dream of the 1970s may not induce nostalgia in today's kids, but it might in their parents. All the elements that might spark fond memories, or dread, are here: butterfly chairs, an A-frame house, a wood-paneled station wagon, an absentee dad, a half-feral child, and a palette — earthy browns and greens, with flashes of red and orange — that you might have seen in a rendering of the wilderness on the side of a van.

The images themselves, though, are beyond the auto body league. The deftly painted illustrations of a lonely boy, his imaginary canine pal, and their rural, unsupervised life, alive with the textures of the woods, are melancholy and mysterious. Which suits the narrative just fine: Nino has invented the dog — cleverly depicted in black outline — to cope with an apparent dearth of playmates and an absent (airplane pilot?) father. “The dog he didn't have heard whatever Nino heard. On the phone. With dad. Who was calling from a country far, far away.” Together Nino and the dog he didn't have stalk wildlife, go fishing, and dig holes. The imaginary dog jumps into the lap of Nino's great-grandma and licks Nino's tears, “It loved the taste of salty water.”

It may sound like a bummer, but here's the thing: “The Dog That Nino Didn't Have” is moving and unexpectedly beautiful. First there's the voice, full of negatives, which hews pretty closely, though not cloyingly, to the rhythms of child-speak. And then there's the mood, which lifts or shifts when Nino gets a real dog for his birthday. That dog doesn't like the water and is afraid of Nino's great-grandma: “The dog that Nino has now is soft. And sweet and obedient. And naughty and small. And everyone can see it.”

But this is not a story about the triumph of the real over the imagined. Nino's dream life of animals swells in the final turn, cracking open his world and remaining true to the book's fantastic heart.

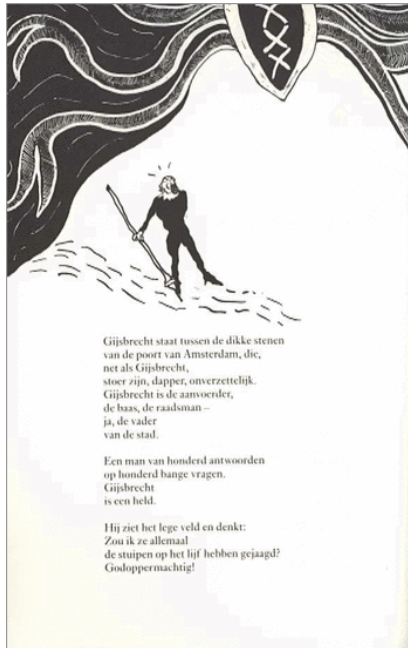


Jaap deelt klappen uit / Jaap Hits Out

By Edward van de Vendel, illustrated by Jan Jutte

The barrage of aggressive exclamations this picture book opens with - 'Biff!', 'Bam!', 'Wham!', 'Thwack!', 'Smack!' - appears to be appealing to toddlers' liking for noise and violence. The aggressiveness, however, ebbs away entirely in the following passage: 'The blows rain thick and fast. The walls hit back - but only gently'. Only the reason why Jaap is angry is not explained. Van de Vendel prefers to steal into the hand and foot that are

perpetrating the mischief or into the objects that are the victims of Jaap's fury. Even more important is the progress of Jaap's anger and his attempts to restore some degree of harmony. Van de Vendel's expressive use of language, combined with Jan Jutte's poignant, but never too heavy illustrations make Jaap a convincing and amiable toddler. All the more so when the object of his fury, an uncle whom his mother has called 'dear', turns out to be a real rotter. When, on the last page, the uncle gets his just deserts, it is a relief for all injured children's souls. The language and illustrations have the same rhythm and are forged from great solidarity with the experiences and feelings of a child as yet unable to put everything into words.



Gijsbrecht

‘Gijsbrecht is a hero.’ That is the first line of *Gijsbrecht*. Heroes fight, as we all know. Heroes enter bravely into the fray, heroes give their lives for their cities, heroes don’t run away. But that’s not always pleasant for a hero’s wife. Gijsbrecht’s wife, Badeloch, would rather have Gijsbrecht home more often, rather than off performing heroic deeds. She finds it hard to be a hero’s wife: ‘I saw it coming – at our wedding the storm swelled and has never died down again.’ A beautiful sentence, notes a character who hears her lament. And he’s right – Edward van de Vendel does put beautiful sentences in his characters’ mouths.

This story deals with the siege of Amsterdam, which bears a striking resemblance to the siege of Troy, just as Gijsbrecht bears a striking resemblance to Virgil’s Trojan hero, Aeneas. One morning, the enemy has simply disappeared from

outside the city walls. The Amsterdammers find one abandoned enemy, crying in a ditch, who tells them he no longer wishes to work for his lords and is therefore prepared to reveal that the ship moored over there, ‘The Seahorse’, is full of wood his former masters meant to use in conquering the town. And behold, the wooden-horse ship is towed into the city, the soldiers hiding in it come out in the middle of the night, the enemy returns and a terrible massacre takes place in the defenseless city.

Edward van de Vendel based his book *Gijsbrecht* on a play by the great seventeenth-century Dutch poet Joost van den Vondel. As we’ve seen, he could just as easily have based it on the *Aeneid*, the difference being that Gijsbrecht, Lord of Amsterdam, lived in the thirteenth century rather than in 800 B.C. Like Aeneas, Gijsbrecht finally does flee at the end, along with his wife and children. The story doesn’t tell us what becomes of them.

Admittedly, it doesn’t sound like a pleasant story for children. But the *Iliad*, the Crusades and the Old Testament all can provide subject matter for children’s books – it simply depends on how the writer tells his story. Van de Vendel does so sublimely, in rich language – muted when necessary, clear when it can be no other way – which carries the power of myth.



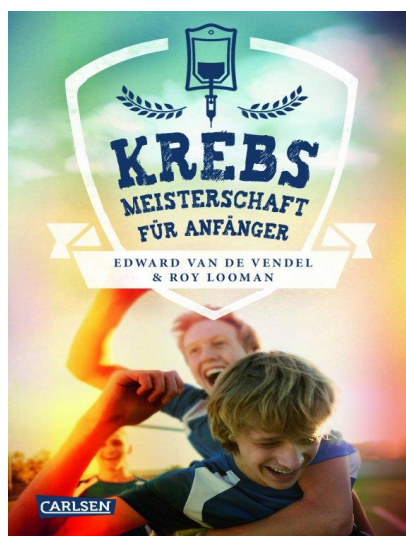
Stem op de okapi.

Edward van de Vendel: for years it has been my favourite animal: the okapi. This animal that is shy and majestic at the same time, that was discovered only 100 years ago (in Congo), and that bears zebra stripes as well as horns - since it's the only actual family member of the giraffe.

In this fullcolour book, that illustrator Martijn van der Linden and me have been working on for years, we present 88 reasons to take the okapi as your new preferred animal. The book has nine chapters, and each chapter is different. In the first one we describe the okapi from head to toe, in another one we follow an okapi-zookeeper for some (dramatic) years, there are chapters with just okapi-illustrations, there is one with 4 okapi-poems, there is the okapi museum, in which we

collect okapi-pictures (made by many leading illustrators, especially for this book).

It's a book full of passion, it's a book that provides you with everything that there is to know about the okapi, it's funny and light, it's serious and informative, we hope we have convinced you at the end to keep an eye on the shy and majestic animals and people around us...



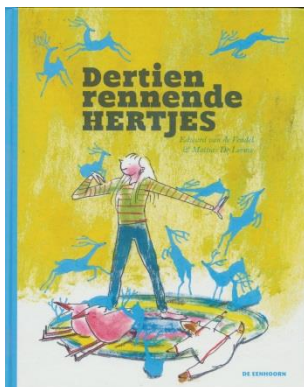
Edward van de Vendel: This direct and moving book was written in close cooperation with Roy Looman (20). In over forty sessions he told me his life-story. He got cancer when he was 15 years old, at a time where he was mainly playing soccer with his friends, working in a supermarket, going to school, having fun, trying to kiss as many girls as he could. The impact it had on his life and on his mind is in the book - and the story is told in a very direct, strong way. It moves from heartfelt to extremely funny (Roy has a great sense of humour), from the start of the disease to the end, and even after that - and we get to know everything, including pretty private episodes. It's amazing what Roy dared to tell, but it's part of his mission: make people aware of what cancer can do to a young mind, in a negative and in a positive way. I'm very proud that Roy let me use his voice for this swinging, fast-paced, but yet elaborate novel. It's certainly not a sad book, and this is proven by the first line: 'This must be the sickest game I have ever played. But I can't stand losing, so let me tell you upfront: I'm not going to die.'

Books submitted to the jury

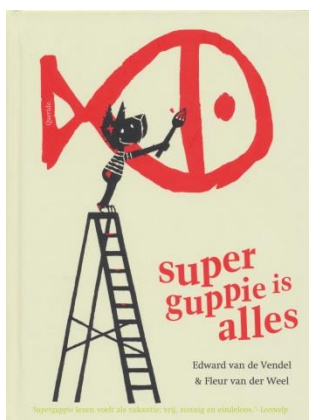
1. Edward van de Vendel and Anoush Elman (author). *De gelukvinder*. [*The finder of happiness*]. 2008. Amsterdam: Querido.



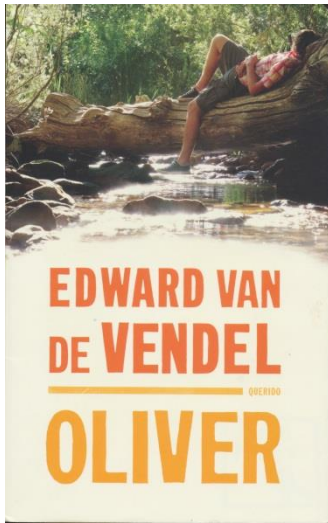
2. Edward van de Vendel and Mattias De Leeuw (illustrator). *Dertien rennende hertjes*. [*Thirteen running deers*]. 2012. Wielsbeke: De Eenhoorn.



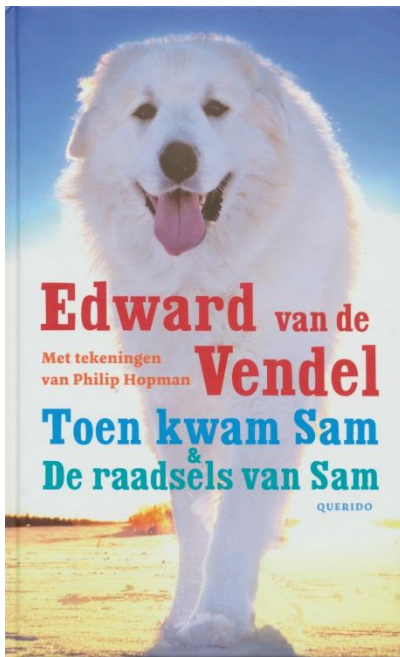
3. Edward van de Vendel and Fleur van der Weel (illustrator). *Superguppie is alles*. [*Superguppy is everything*]. 2014. Amsterdam: Querido.



4. Edward van de Vendel. *Oliver*. [*Oliver*]. 2015. Amsterdam: Querido.

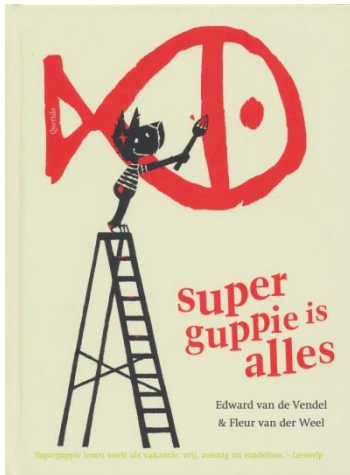


5. Edward van de Vendel and Philip Hopman (illustrator). *Toen kwam Sam & De raadsels van Sam*. [*Then came Sam & The riddles of Sam*]. 2016. Amsterdam: Querido.



Reviews of the books sent to the jurors

1. Superguppy is alles / Superguppy is everything (2014)



All guppies swim in our cat now

by Jan Smeekens

Superguppy is one big surprise with 51 poems by Edward van de Vendel and illustrations by Fleur van der Weel. ‘Gup’ is the verse called on which the title of the collection of poems is based: ‘All guppies which I had / swim now / in our cat - / well, probably they are dead. / He fished like this, / like this, / with his paw. / There is only one he missed. / Oh – because he was mistaken? / Cat stupid and couldn’t count? / Or did that one swim too fast? / Never mind, / I don’t care: / rather than this whole gang / I have this one on its own./ Super guppy in my bowl./ To be still - / that’s what it is about’.

Surprisingly in every poem you think to recognize the tone of Annie M.G. Schmidt, the frivolous of Joke van Leeuwen and the cosiness of Miep Diekmann’s poetry for toddlers, but you always hear Edward van de Vendel. And it would appear that he joins himself with *Superguppy* at once among that remarkable group of poets of timeless children’s verse in which anthologists after Anne de Vries will find gold ‘soon’.

Here I sit,
At the outdoor pool.
It doesn’t spatter,
I sit still.
I think about whatever I will.
I could be anything:
a frog
or a little boy.
Because what is the difference?
The splash,
the hop.

With *Superguppy* Fleur van der Weel (Middelburg 1970) makes a much promising debut as illustrator of children's book. The publisher allowed her to – a particularity! – go her own way with the design of the collection of poetry and she took that chance with both hands. Tens of funny portraits of a frolic little dog accompany the poems about apparently insignificant things out of the ordinary life of young children. And how refined is the tight rhythm of light green and tinted pages, with which she gave the book such a remarkable and enthralling character!

Classy kids' poetry!

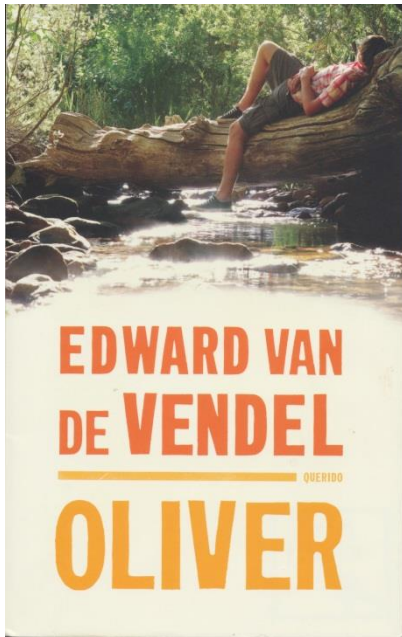
By Peter de Boer

Super Guppy is a collection of fifty-one wonderful, multifaceted poems for children of six years and up. Van de Vendel stays close to home: splashing through puddles and getting your socks wet, being tucked in at night by Mum, and having a plaster on your knee – ow! - taken off. To these familiar things, he adds dimension, an unusual way of seeing things, to make the young reader work a little. The storm lashes at the windows, but it breathes too, just like the child, for instance. Or a dead blackbird lies 'folded flat / in the station on the ground' and no one notices, not even Mummy. The poet weaves these exciting extras into his stimulating, often funny verses. The newspaper becomes 'paper meals on wheels', for the 'letterbox' and a young narrator whispers to the cat on his lap, dreaming of tasty mice: 'They're biting back today!' In the title poem 'Guppy' the cat has eaten almost all the guppies in the fishbowl. Almost, but not quite all: one still swims proudly round, and that one last fish comforts the little boy for the loss of all the others. Because:

I'd rather have this single feller
Than all the others put together
Super guppy swimming round
Being there-
That's all that counts.

It's brilliant to finally link childish pride in that one surviving fish ('super guppy') with the adult statement: 'Being there- that's all that counts'. This, for instance, is where Van de Vendel's readers have to put in that extra bit of effort, but he writes in such a way that they are quite capable of doing so.

2. Oliver (2015)



There is a right shape for everybody

By Jürgen Peeters

For his young adult novel *The Days of the Bluegrass Love* from 1999, in which the love between two boys – Tycho and Oliver – is described in an unstrained manner Edward van de Vendel received a lot of appreciation. In 2006 appeared the long expected successor *Our Third Body*, accompanied by the collection of poetry *Chatbox*. Although not badly written, *Our Third Body* mainly remains feel-good fiction. Precisely sixteen years after his first novel now *Oliver* comes out, in which the author is looking for the background of the silent, somewhat tough boy.

In a story packed as a frank confession to Tycho the sixteen year old Oliver portrays himself as a successful goal keeper, member of a model family and inseparable from his nephew Bendik: '[T]heir whole lives they were just as natural to each other as seasons and oxygen.' To that carefree growing up comes abruptly and end after shocking confessions of Oliver's father.

Now his life is jeopardized, Oliver hides with Bendik: 'It are their problems,' Oliver says, 'and not mine.' His flight out of reality can't however last long. Slowly Oliver has to accept that the adults, and certainly the father figures, do no longer serve as role models: they do stupid things or are absent. The latter his nephew Bendik already experienced after the early death of his own father.

Van de Vendel relates the troubles of his characters to their coming-of-age. Both Oliver and Bendik are confronted with fierce events and their profound implications. From the very first page Van de Vendel surprises with a strong psychological portrait of both nephews, who appeal to the empathic ability of the reader as complex characters.

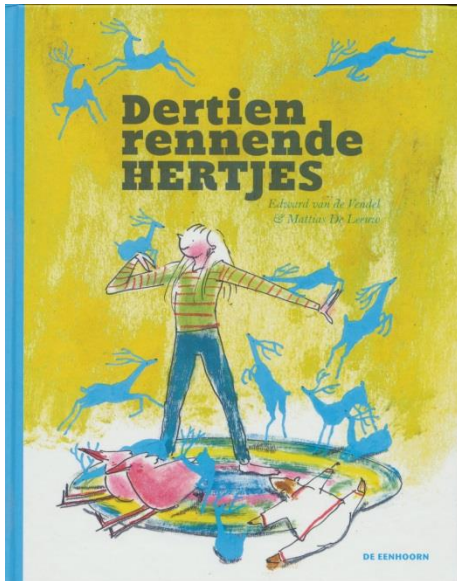
More than focussing on Oliver's coming-out, the author pictures the adolescence as a confusing period full of challenges and confrontations. He does this in innovative images in fine prose, abundant of sentences which you want to frame: 'We strive for the right shape, that is what we do. [...] We are constantly taken out of our shape. But then we look further.' In a fast changing world both boys have to revise their identities, that presents itself as amalgam of memories and experiences.

That psychological deepening manifests itself in all kinds of storylines, which are not all deepened as well. Tycho's condemnations after Oliver's story remain at the surface and would have been better left out. These are just minor remarks about an otherwise flawless young adult novel, that fits faultlessly next to *The Days of the Bluegrass Love* concerning depth and rich language.

In *Oliver* Edward van de Vendel searches and finds 'the right shape' to picture Oliver's coming-of-age. The one time in sensitive prose, the other time with a suggestive, almost poetical style the author keeps surprising until the very last page. Except for a refined, in-depth psychological portrait of two boys growing up *Oliver* is also a story about friendship and trust, family ties and love.

A range of 'the big themes of life', which are elaborated in a skilled composed novel. An absolute recommendation, both for adolescents and for adults.

3. Dertien rennende hertjes / Thirteen running deer (2012)



The most beautiful and unbelievable experience ever

By Jaap Friso

The thin line between delusion and reality is the red thread in *Thirteen running deer*. The theme is not new, in many children's books imaginary friends and figures appear which help the characters to survive in life. Most of the time this is preceded by a traumatic event or the social circumstances are the reason. In *Thirteen running deer* this is not the case and that is confusing in the beginning. Maantje leads a normal life with a normal father and mother and only a brother in whose head little bombs explode every now and then.

Immediately at the start of the book Maantje sees the deer that suddenly break loose from a vase. They climb over her and this magical experience is the most beautiful and unbelievable thing she has ever seen. Especially after they all whisper 'duchess' in her ear. Van de Vendel makes it entirely plausible and understandable how remarkable this experience is. For Maantje normal life will never be the same again, she heavily desires the deer. Totally unexpected for Maantje, and the reader, her explosive brother Raf shares the experience and he warns her to not talk about it with anyone. Brother and sister grow closer and both hope the most incredible thing out of their lives will happen again.

Van de Vendel doses well and keeps the tension intact. The sentences are short but not always as easy. Maybe sometimes the level is too high and the danger exists children will bail. But then there are the illustrations of Mattias De Leeuw who possess the same magic as the texts. There floats something unspoken in the crayons-like illustrations. De Leeuw is at his best in the bigger, dreamy images, in which some pictures are too illustrative in the literal sense of the word.

Thirteen running deer comes to a wonderful apotheosis to end quiet and pleasant. Not everything in the story is understandable but that adds to the charm and magic. A special book that keeps floating around in your head for a while.

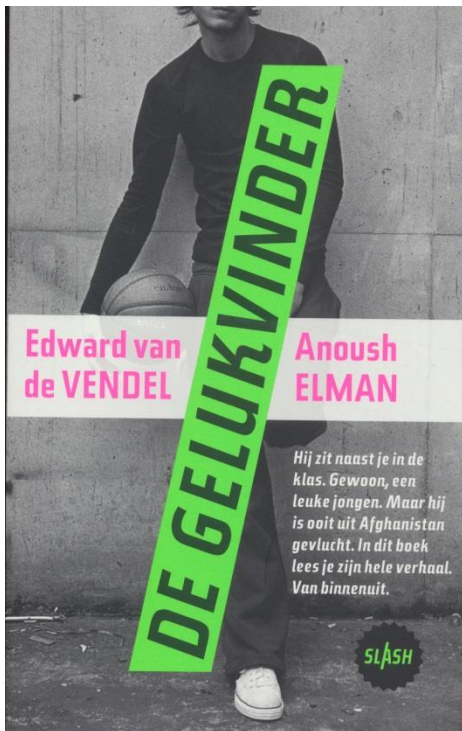
‘An ingenious book.

Thirteen running deer is a touching tale that combines a handsome piece of child-psychology with a lively imagination and an exciting story. [...] Van de Vendel succeeds marvelously in conveying Moon’s feeling of happiness onto the reader: with well chosen metaphors and an eye for detail, he describes the unique, emotional experience. Thanks to the deer, the girl feels unique and exceptional. Moon can surely use such moment of happiness, since her brother Ralf is very short tempered and terrorizes the entire family, his little sister in particular. But what turns out? Also Ralf has experienced a similar fantastic journey. He as well has seen an animal, and ever since he longs for this mystical feeling. The solidarity caused by this joint experience between brother and sister doesn’t last long however. Ralf uses the secret of Moon to blackmail her, and she waits fruitlessly until the running deer visit her again. When their mother announces that she is expecting a baby, Ralf completely flips out. It comes to a confrontation between Moon’s little deer and the secret animal of Ralf, which will change both of them forever.

In short, simple sentences *Thirteen running deer* sketches the inner world and the conversations of the two children. Moon knows she has to handle her brother carefully when he has another ‘fire-work’ tantrum. ‘Fire you have to extinguish with water,’ she learned from her father, ‘not with more fire.’ But Moon has perhaps taken this advice too literally. Her attempts to develop herself without hurting her brother, are described subtly and with lots of emotion. Also Ralf is not a caricature by the way. Van de Vendel shows the vulnerable side of a boy who doesn’t know what to do with himself and who can’t master his feelings. Edward van de Vendel is not the only one who surprises with this book. Also the very young illustrator Mattias De Leeuw, who only made his debut the beginning of this year, has delivered brilliant work. Every page is illustrated, and the pictures of De Leeuw carry the story as much as the text. He uses few background and simple lines to draw the figures, and works in an interesting and efficient way with colors. Especially the deer are marvelously drawn: they frolic and run over the pages and express feelings of playfulness, respect and fear. That they don’t have contours, adds to their mysterious character: do they only exist in the imagination of Moon, or have they entered her life from another dimension? Because of these many layers in the story, but also because of the suspense, the tenderness, and the beautiful illustrations, ***Thirteen running deer* is the most beautiful and richest children’s book of the year.**

De Standaard, November 2012

4. De gelukvinder / The finder of happiness (2008)



'Hamayun, escaped from the Taliban'

By Bas Maliepaard

Although the immigration debate has dominated the Netherlands for years now, there did not appear one proper children's book about that theme. That is characteristic, thinks Edward van de Vendel: literary children's book authors write too little about what young people really experience. To promote that, he initiated the Slash-series: a series based on true life stories of special young people. There have to appear three Slash-books a year, every time written by another author.

Van de Vendel himself starts with a startling novel about the exhausted Afghan asylum seeker Anoush Elman (17).

Zelf bijt Van de Vendel het spits af met een onthutsende roman over de Afghaanse uitgeprocedeerde asielzoeker Anoush Elman (17). At least, the life of main character Hamayun is based on his history. Just like Anoush Hamayun is at school in Amersfoort, where we want to become a filmmaker and he writes a play about his flight in Afghanistan. That forces him to play the events from his past like short films in his head.

The novel is set up as a collection of films. Every part has a genre title that fits the story. The 'documentary' is for example the report of Hamayun's childhood years in Kabul, that were overshadowed by the Taliban regime. His father is a 'free thinker' and is repeatedly arrested. When Hamayun's mother buys him freedom, there is only one solution: flying to the west (the 'roadmovie'). It means that Hamayun has to leave his best friend Faisal behind.

Substantially *The finder of happiness* equals *Fled from the Taliban* of André Boesberg. But it has more depth and it doesn't end after the flight.

Also in the Netherlands Hamayun and his family have to live in fear. They are entangled in the impossible demands of the Dutch government and they are afraid to be sent back. Hamayun misses his friend Faisal so bad that making real friends doesn't work out that well.

But the worst thing is the terrible 'being on the way'. "The feeling that the whole world has houses, and work and friends, roses in the garden and pigeons on the roof. And that we are cut out from that world, deleted."

The poet in Van de Vendel is modest in *The finder of happiness*. But if he is present, it's immediately striking. He gives, more than all newspapers together, not only a face to 'the asylum seeker', but also a heart. And that makes you quiet. Van de Vendel is right: this book had to be made.

5. **Toen kwam Sam & De raadsels van Sam / Then came Sam & The riddles of Sam (2016)**



It came as a surprise whenever you saw him, because he was always so beautiful and white, and also a little bit mysterious.’ Nine-year-old Kix and his younger sister Emilia immediately fall in love with the big Pyrenean mountain dog who walks into their lives, but sometimes suddenly disappears again. The dog is nervous, thin, has sad eyes, and tangles in his ‘warm snowy fur’. Slowly the children gain his trust. But where did he come from?

This heart-warming story is one of Edward van de Vendel’s best books so far. This is mainly a result of the tone, which flows as though the story, which is based on true events, is telling itself. With the exception of a few details, you don’t sense a writer at work here, trying to craft everything as beautifully as possible. Van de Vendel does of course do so in this book, but more subtly than in his other works. Kix’s authentic voice and his experiences really are the most important elements.

This means that, seen through adult eyes, it remains a rather small story, entirely about emotions and the problems surrounding a stray dog. But Van de Vendel skilfully makes us feel how such an event is anything but a small story in the life of a nine-year-old.

Kix and his sister want to keep the dog and they call him Sam. Their love for Sam is touchingly obvious in the way they see him as an equal and take his own wishes seriously. He’s free to go where he pleases, but happily Sam realises one morning that he knows something for certain: ‘Sam didn’t come here because they wanted to keep him. He came because he wanted to keep them.’

Then Kix’s dad discovers that the dog actually belongs to the disturbed Cracker, the son of the nasty neighbours across the road. And his name is Nanook, not Sam. But Kix is sure that whenever anyone had ever called Sam Nanook in the past he’d always thought: ‘I’m not a

Nanook. I'm a Sam.' Because that's how it works when you're a child. You're sure that no one understands your pet as well as you.

It's not long before Sam becomes the subject of a row with the neighbours. The tension really rises during a night-time mission to liberate Sam, which even involves the use of shotguns. And yet the story remains entirely believable.

Philip Hopman's outstanding pen-and-ink drawings are as lively as ever, but seem sturdier than usual because of the way he plays with large areas of black. The white Sam shines out of them, looking wonderfully lumbering and sweet.

The award-winning oeuvre of Edward van de Vendel (b. 1964) now numbers over fifty titles and is remarkably varied. He has written picture books such as *Kleinvader*, non-fiction books about the Ajax football club and bullying, YA novels like *De dagen van de bluegrassliefde* and *De gelukvinder*, poetry for young people and his *Superguppie* collections of poems for toddlers.