THE HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN AWARDS 2020

Dossier on illustrator Sylvia Weve

Candidate for the 2020 Illustrator’s Award

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 2020.

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In compiling this dossier, references to sources of descriptions, reviews or other secondary texts about the illustrator and/or her 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 Sylvia Weve: A Short Biography

Sylvia Weve was born on May 28, 1954, in Utrecht (the Netherlands) and grew up in Roosendaal. She already loved to draw when she was only a little girl. After her secondary education in Roosendaal and Apeldoorn, she studied graphic design at the Art Academy in Arnhem. In 1976, she successfully completed her studies, and since 1978 she lives and works as an independent illustrator in Amsterdam.

After working for several newspapers and magazines, Sylvia Weve illustrated her first children’s book in 1980: Een gnom op school [A Gnome at School]. By now, she has illustrated over one hundred and fifty books, mostly for children. Additionally, she has made countless drawings for, among others, de Volkskrant, Playboy, Opzij, Vrij Nederland, Holland Festival, Milieudefensie. From 1986 until 1993, she also taught illustrative design at the Art Academy in Arnhem.

Early on in her career, Sylvia Weve mostly drew with a blunted pen and ink, showing her great capability to express emotions, movement, mood and personality with just a few lines. For colour, initially mainly used in cover illustrations, the felt tip pen was her main material, but she was mostly known for her expressive black-and-white line drawings with which she enriched the works of countless children’s book authors. Among them were Veronica Hazelhoff, Anke de Vries, Dolf Verroen, and Hans Dorrestijn. She illustrated several books of songs and poems by Karel Eykman, and developed a strong working relationship with Rindert Kromhout, illustrating many of his children’s books from the 1980s onward.

Her approach changed when digital possibilities opened up. Since then, she constructs her illustrations by combining digital and traditional techniques. Slowly but surely her illustrations were also given more space which allowed her to combine her illustrative talents with her graphic design qualities. In working together with author Bette Westera, starting in 1999, she found a partnership that led to masterful and daring award-winning books in which author and illustrator are on entirely equal footing in the creative process. Sylvia Weve also published two books that she not only illustrated, but also wrote: Kip en ei [Chicken and Egg] (2006) and Logboek van tot nu toe onbekende dieren [Log of Thusfar Unknown Animals] (2018).

On a national level, Sylvia Weve has been awarded the Vlag en Wimpel [Flag and Streamer] three times, the Zilveren Penseel [Silver Paintbrush] three times and a Gouden Penseel [Golden Paintbrush]. The Amsterdam Foundation for the Arts awarded her the Prof. Pi Award for her entire oeuvre in illustration. In 2015, together with author Bette Westera, she received the Woutertje Pieterse Award for Doogewoon [Dead Normal]. Internationally, Sylvia Weve was greatly appreciated for her illustrations in Ik leer je liedjes van verlangen, en aan je aapstaartje hangen [I’ll Teach You Songs of Longing, and Swinging by Your Monkeytail], written by Bette Westera. She received the IBBY Honour List Certificate for Illustration in 2012. For her contribution to children’s literature Weve has been nominated for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award of 2018 and 2019.
Sylvia Weve’s Contribution to Literature for Young People

What makes Sylvia Weve’s illustrations so interesting? Possibly it is because she did not start out as a children’s book illustrator. In fact, she did not start out as an illustrator at all. Although Sylvia Weve has been drawing ever since she was a little girl, she studied graphic design—not illustration—at the art academy in Arnhem. After finishing her studies, mid-1970s, she tried to find work as a graphic designer. When that did not happen, she looked for assignments in illustration. Not for children’s books, but for magazines, newspapers, and advertising agencies.

It was not until she was asked to illustrate for the children’s section of *Vrij Nederland*, ‘De Blauw Geruite Kiel’, that her career really took flight. ‘From that moment on, I’ve never had to beg for work ever again. It was the early 1980s, everybody read *Vrij Nederland*, clients came to me,’ Weve said in an interview with Joukje Akveld (2010). Commercial and journalistic assignments flooded in. Newspapers loved Weve’s dynamic line-work. Her expressive, journalistic style of drawing was awarded in 1996 with the Prof. Pi-Award for Illustration. This award from the Amsterdam Foundation for the Arts placed Weve on equal levels with famous cartoonists/political illustrators like Peter van Straaten and Frits Müller. At the same time, her work for the children’s section of *Vrij Nederland* also opened the door to Weve’s career as a children’s book illustrator. With her unique style of illustration, she set a true trend in the 1980s and changed the face of Dutch children’s literature. Her discovery of digital illustration software in later years, however, truly allowed her to combine her illustrative and graphic qualities and opened up endless possibilities for experimentation which has produced several award-winning books.

Changing the Face of Dutch Children’s Literature

In the 1980s, children’s book writers such as Rindert Kromhout, Karel Eykman and Veronica Hazelhoff were on the rise. Sylvia Weve was asked to illustrate their stories and poems with her dynamic black-and-white pen drawings.

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Weve especially enjoys drawing emotions and movements. To capture a human or animal in its essence with as few resources as possible, that is the art, Weve thinks (2010). She does not like endless fussing over a drawing. According to her, fiddling is a sign of weakness, erasing senseless. When she herself taught at the Art Academy in Arnhem for a few years, her students got an erasing prohibition. Once they would start erasing, they would forever lose their guts, she believed.

Angry old birds with faces full of wrinkles are dearest to her. With a few powerful lines she puts them on paper: their speed and expression jump right at you. With a few dynamic swipes of a blunted dipping pen a malicious spider appears, a young girl’s emerging femininity, a dog helplessly dangling over a tree branch. One of her favorite books to illustrate in those early years was De bloeddorstige badmeester en andere griezels voor kinderen [The Blood Thirsty Swimming Instructor and Other Creeps for Children] (1983) by Hans Dorrestijn. This book, with the most gruesome songs since Struwwelpeter, suited her perfectly. She is not one for capturing reality as it is; Weve is drawn to the macabre, and loves humorous exaggeration.

Nonchalant looking drawings with a lot of humor they are, but also: energetic, wayward, of a conscious sloppiness and made with a genius sort of carelessness. ‘It is just like with Duke Ellington, Matisse or Remco Campert,’ Karel Eykman once wrote about Sylvia Weve’s work: ‘it is not as simple as it looks.’

The sketch as ready-made illustration, is how Ted van Lieshout once characterized her work, but this is not quite correct, writes Joukje Akveld (2010): ‘Weve does not sketch, rather her drawings are unfinished in a daring way. She plays with the mysterious effect of the incomplete, the looseness and vitality of her work are expressly informal. With her drawings Weve invokes the suggestion that they have been put on paper in one flowing line.’ Weve herself was greatly inspired by the work of Tomi Ungerer, especially his drawings for adults: ‘Those have that viciousness, I love that, I’m not one for sweetness myself. Ungerer’s work has a roughness, a casualness that you cannot possibly accomplish with sketching. I’ve never seen him at work, but I just know, you can see it in his drawings. I’ve learned a lot from it […]’. (in Akveld, 2010)
The way in which Weve illustrated children’s books, with her characteristic dynamic black-an-white line-drawings that were closer to journalistic illustration than children’s book illustration at the time, was a sensation in the 1980s. And with that a trend was set. Other illustrators were sometimes even asked specifically to make Sylvia Weve-style illustrations. Weve is seen as one of the illustrators who changed the face of Dutch children’s literature and greatly contributed to the development of children’s literature as an artform.

The Digital Revolution in Weve’s Work

Although she was hesitant at first, Sylvia Weve discovered the many feats of digital illustration software after a friend had shown her the possibilities. She has completely embraced this ‘other paintbox’ by now:

‘It is a fantastic medium, you can do completely different things with it than with a paintbrush. And it enlarges your freedom, you can try all sorts of things without having to start all over. My compositions tend to be fuller now, which is easier on the computer.’ (in Akveld, 2010)

According to Joukje Akveld (2010), the medium has changed Weve’s signature.

The minimalistic illustrations from the 1980s, built up out of a few lines, spots and blotches, gave way to more graphic work (Hans en Grietje in Jimmy Jammie Bobbyland, 2002), stylized illustrations with more color (Peer Gynt, 2007).
In twenty years, Weve’s style seems to have undergone a metamorphosis; when you compare the pastel colored _Saartje en Sikje_ [Sara and Goatee] (2007) to the expressive faces in _Liefdesverdriet_ [Love Sickness] (1983), you can hardly believe that these books are by the same illustrator.

And yet, on closer inspection _Saartje en Sikje_ is a real Weve; you only need to look at the expressive line-work to recognize Weve’s characteristic style.

This ‘digital revolution’ in Weve’s work did not go unnoticed. The 1980s may have been a high point in terms of income and publicity, when it comes to creativity and experimentation her heydays came in the 21st century. By 2006, she had finally found the time and the space to make her first own picture book, _Kip en ei_ [Chicken and Egg] (2006), which was awarded with a Vlag en Wimpel [Flag and Streamer] from the Paintbrush jury in 2007.

Weve’s need to experiment increased and so did her possibilities to try different styles and combine different materials. In _Kip en ei_, the colorful acrylic-painted prints with fierce spots and nonchalant black pen strokes are brimming with liveliness and expression. The drawings in Karel Eykman’s adaptation of _Reinaert de Vos_ [Reynard the Fox] (2008), in turn, are reminiscent of old woodcuttings, while in reality they come from the computer.

Weve likes to combine different materials and different styles in her illustrations, when it suits the text. In _Ober! Er zweet een kwal door mijn soep_ [Waiter! There is a Jellyfish in My Soup] (2009) by Bette Westera, she tried to integrate different styles, just like Saul Steinberg used to do in his cover illustrations for _The New Yorker_. ‘As a student I got to know his work, he strongly influenced my way of drawing. Steinberg shows how you can work in different manners, even within one drawing. Bette Westera’s texts lend themselves for such an approach very well. She has a great sense of humor; I can really go all the way with that,’ Weve says (Akveld, 2010). In one illustration of the book, she may use drawing in different styles, images that are ‘pasted’ in across the illustration, as well as signs and symbols.

Weve’s collaborations with Bette Westera have been very succesfull. In 2012, Weve received the IBBY Honour List certificate for Illustration for _Ik leer je liedjes van verlangen, en aan je openstaartje hangen_ [I’ll Teach You Songs of Longing, and Swinging by Your Monkeytail] (2010, Bette Westera). In this book with rhymes about animals, Weve showcases different styles in different illustrations, some in flowing watercolor, some more cartoonish handdrawn figures with digital colouring. In 2013, she was awarded a Golden
Paintbrush for her illustrations in *Aan de kant, ik ben je oma niet! [Step Aside, I’m Not Your Grandmother]* (2012, written by Bette Westera). In this book, which portrays several elderly people in rhyming stories and illustrations, Weve has really outdone herself and was clearly motivated by a desire to experiment. The resulting illustrations reveal her background in graphic design. Using bold shapes and thirty different colours of ink, Weve has created artistic fold-out pictures that feature complete life stories in beautifully designed compositions and colour combinations. Humour is always present throughout this book too, as Weve employs her trademark over-the-top style\(^2\). In 2015, Weve received a Flag and Streamer (Vlag en Wimpel) from the Paintbrush Jury for the book *Doodgewoon [Dead Normal]*\(^3\) (2014), and she and Bette Westera got the Woutertje Pieterse Award for the same book that year.

In 2014, the collected poems and songs by Karel Eykman were published in *Was ik zee [Was I Sea]*. Through the years, Weve has illustrated many of his books of poetry and songs for young readers, starting with *Wie verliefd is gaat voor [Who Is in Love Comes First]* (1982). Comparing the cover of this first book with the cover of *Was ik zee* shows how Weve has gained an ocean of new possibilities and uses this freedom to employ different styles. The emphasis no longer needs to be on her expressive line-drawn figures, although she can still draw them like no other.

While she continues to illustrate the work of (other) writers, Weve found the time to make her second individual book, *Logboek van tot nu toe onbekende dieren [Log of Thusfar Unknown Animals]* (2018), which shows her love of fantasy and humor, her want for exaggeration and her need for experimenting and using a variety of techniques and materials.

With her striking black-and-white pen drawings, Sylvia Weve caused a stir in Dutch children’s literature and changed the face of children’s book illustration in the 1980s. This does not mean, however, that she leaned back and stuck to what she already knew. Digital technology opened up endless possibilities and allowed her to combine her illustrative and graphic qualities. As the jury that awarded her with a Golden Paintbrush in 2013 said: ‘Sylvia Weve has renewed herself as a visual artist: she exchanged the fierce, cartoonish brushstrokes for spectacular graphic constellations that do not know their equal in the nevertheless versatile landscape of Dutch illustrative art.’ Sylvia Weve uses her freedom to experiment and aims to make illustrations that add something to the text. Resulting in a series of awards for illustration, Sylvia Weve’s illustrations never cease to impress and amaze, and show how children’s book illustration is an artform that deserves as much attention and appreciation as writing is and does.

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\(^2\) Description of Weve’s illustrations in *Step Aside, I’m Not Your Grandmother!* as presented on the website of the Dutch Foundation for Literature: [http://www.letterenfonds.nl/nl/boek/897/aan-de-kant-ik-ben-je-oma-niet](http://www.letterenfonds.nl/nl/boek/897/aan-de-kant-ik-ben-je-oma-niet)

\(^3\) The award-winning titles are all presented in more detail in the section ‘Ten of the Most Important Titles’ elsewhere in this dossier.
Because they color the world a bit sweeter. Because they give stories a golden lining. Because the drawings are fairy tales in themselves. That's why every month we offer a podium to illustrators.

What motivates them, what are they proud of, what inspires them? Today Sylvia Weve. "Drawing is in my genes, it runs in my family. I got a lot of stimulation and lots of materials from a young age to express myself on paper. As a child I already knew: I will become an
illustrator when I’m older."

Weve was born in Utrecht but grew up in Roosendaal. After the art academy in Arnhem (graphic design department) she moved to Amsterdam. After working for several newspapers, her first book, *Een noom op school* [A Gnome at School] was published in 1980. By now, she has illustrated more than a hundred books. Weve draws expressively, with a lot of speed and movement, and with few lines. She works in colors a lot and draws with a blunted pen and ink, pencil, chalk, or with the computer (paintbox). In 2006, she wrote her own text with her illustrations for the first time, in *Kip en ei* [Chicken and Egg], a picture book with colorful illustrations.

The work of Sylvia Weve has been awarded often. Twice she won a Silver Paintbrush and in 1996 her expressive drawing style was awarded with the Prof. Pi prize for illustration. In 2013 she received the Golden Paintbrush for her illustrations in *Aan de kant, ik ben je oma niet!* [Step aside, I am not your grandmother!] (Gottmer), which she made together with Bette Westera. For publisher Gottmer, Sylvia Weve also provides illustrations for the publications in the Ted van Lieshout-library.

**Who are you?**
I was born in Utrecht and then lived in Roosendaal, Apeldoorn and Arnhem, where I went to study at the art academy. Then I moved to Amsterdam, where I started drawing for newspapers, magazines, publishers, television and theater and also started to illustrate children's books.

**Which illustrations (books) are you most proud of and why?**
I am very proud of the book *Doodgewoon* [Dead Normal]. It is a difficult subject: death, both to write about and to create images of it. Yet that has succeeded. I am also proud of *Kip and Ei* because I wrote it too.

**By what or whom are you inspired?**
That is often a fragment, a glimpse of something and I regularly do not even know exactly what it is. This is converted in my head into a usable form or an idea for a drawing. Text is of course also an inspiration.

**Which illustrator may answer these questions next time and why?**
Ingrid Godon, because her drawings go straight to my heart.
DutchHeights - Hall of Fame of Dutch Culture

Golden Paintbrush 2013

Sylvia Weve

© Sylvia Weve 2012; Illustrations from Aan de kant, ik ben je oma niet! (Haarlem, Gottmer).
'In this book, illustrator Sylvia Weve has worked with author Bette Westera with obvious pleasure. Step Aside, I Am Not Your Grandmother! testifies to the brilliant unity and the wonderful balance of their cooperation: text, illustrations, form and book design cannot be seen separately. (...) Sylvia Weve has renewed herself as a visual artist: she exchanged the fierce, cartoonish brushstrokes for spectacular graphic constellations that do not know their equal in the nevertheless versatile landscape of Dutch illustrative art. (..) Weve's forms are both clear and mysterious, both attractive and alienating, both recognizable and ambiguous. Tight are the contours of her figures, but sometimes they suddenly have eight arms - and seen from a distance they can turn out to be completely different than the first glimpse betrayed. A pram is cradle and bathtub in one, noses are also dripping taps. That humorous eye for detail is playful and inventive: the old Mrs. Verweerd, who is sitting with two toddlers on her lap, we see telling stories about fairies, witches and elves in a speech bubble, without a word involved. (...) It is a many-sided and versatile book, illustrated in a way that the jury never saw before. ' (excerpts jury report)

[...]

**Jury:** Annemies Broekgaarden, Jolanda Klaassen, Erica Ringelberg, Ron van Roon, Thomas de Veen

Jury Report of the Woutertje Pieterse Award 2015 (excerpts)
Awarded to: Doodgewoon [Dead Normal], by Bette Westera & Sylvia Weve

“Grasping a big theme in poetry and image is the assignment Bette Westera and Sylvia Weve gave themselves and the result is Doodgewoon [Dead Normal]. Death is central to the book. And that life-size theme is not just treated, Westera and Weve attack death, embrace it, keep it at a safe distance, give it value, and make it their own, also for the readers. All that at once in one great book. The language is steady in its poetic form, the illustrations diverse and very fitting, colorful and rich in visual power, the combination of text and image is masterful. Doodgewoon is a themed book that has touched us deeply.

[...]
In the end the jury chose a book that is clearly the work of not one, but two designers. In that book one big literary and human theme is discussed. It firmly stands within a centuries-long literary tradition. It is known to us and yet it is not, because this book shows that within the boundaries of a familiar house there are nevertheless many unknown and surprising places. The echoes of the past and the tradition bring new sounds, familiar contours lead to surprising and distant insights, feelings and thoughts. The writer of this literary work does so accurately and challengingly, softly musing or edgy, but always in a light tone and with depth.

But the writer alone could never have made this book. An illustrator was also needed who, in the same natural way, combines humor with seriousness, and whose palette is sufficiently rich to forcefully capture and visualize the diverse aspects of this theme. Anecdotal, edgy, reflective and aesthetic are the key words for text and image in this book.

Finally, this book would not be complete without the refined input of the designers. In the extraordinary cohesion of text, illustration and design this book shows its quality to the full.

The winners of the Woutertje Pieterse Award of 2015 are Bette Westera and Sylvia Weve with Doodgewoon.’ (Amsterdam, 11 April 2015)

NOTE: The full jury report extensively discusses all books that were considered for the Award. In this excerpt, only fragments about the winning book, Doodgewoon, are presented (in translation). The full report can be found here: http://www.woutertjepieterseprijs.nl/WPP/2015/Juryrapport_15.asp.html
List of Awards and Other Distinctions

Sylvia Weve has received a number of nominations and awards for her outstanding work:

- 1984: Silver Paintbrush (Zilveren Penseel) for Oma, waar blijft de taart? (Veronica Hazelhoff).
- 1991: Silver Paintbrush (Zilveren Penseel) for Het bad van de zandloper (Rindert Kromhout).
- 1996: Prof. Pi Award, oeuvre award for illustration from the Amsterdam Foundation for the Arts.
- 2007: Flag and Streamer (Vlag en Wimpel) from the Paintbrush Jury for Kip en ei (Sylvia Weve).
- 2012: IBBY Honour List certificate for Illustration for Ik leer je liedjes van verlangen (Bette Westera).
- 2013: Golden Paintbrush (Gouden Penseel) for Aan de kant, ik ben je oma niet! (Bette Westera).
- 2015: Flag and Streamer (Vlag en Wimpel) from the Paintbrush Jury for Doodgewoon (Bette Westera).
- 2015: Woutertje Pieterse Award, together with Bette Westera, for Doodgewoon.
- 2018: Nominated for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award.
- 2019: Nominated for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award.

Brief explanation of some of the awards

**Golden and Silver Paintbrush & Flag and Streamer Awards**
Annual awards for illustration in children’s literature, established by the CPNB (Collective Propaganda for the Dutch Book). An independent jury can award two books in four different categories (three age-categories and one for non-fiction) with a Silver Paintbrush. From the awarded books, one is then selected as winner of the Golden Paintbrush. These awards were introduced in 1981 and 1973 respectively. The ‘Vlag en Wimpel’ (Flag and Streamer) is an honourable 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 intended 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.

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4 Awards for the text of books have not been listed here since they are, strictly speaking, not for the illustrator.
Bibliography of Books for Young Readers Illustrated by Sylvia Weve

- **En Peter was de vlieg** / [And Peter Was the Fly] Rindert Kromhout; Illustrated by Sylvia Weve. First edition: 1981, Utrecht, Bruna.
- **Zullen we deze dan maar houden** / [Shall We Keep This One] Rindert Kromhout; Illustrated by Sylvia Weve. First edition: 1982, Utrecht, Sjaloom.

Books for which Sylvia Weve only did the cover illustration are not mentioned here.


En de winnaar is ... / [And the Winner Is ...] Bies van Ede; Illustrated by Sylvia Weve. First edition: 1997, Tilburg, Zwijsen.


o Mijn zusje is een monster / [My Sister is a Monster] Martha Heesen; Illustrated by Sylvia Weve. First edition: 2000, Amsterdam, Querido.


o Ik kom nooit meer terug! / [I’m Never Coming Back!] Rindert Kromhout; Illustrated by Sylvia Weve. First edition: 2001, Rotterdam, ILCO.


○ Hij is weg! / [He is Gone!] Henk van Kerkwijk; Illustrated by Sylvia Weve. First edition: 2002, Tilburg, Zwijsen.


- **Waar is Sim?** / [*Where Is Sim?] by Isabel Versteeg; Illustrated by Sylvia Weve. First edition: 2013, Tilburg, Zwijsen.
- **Haasje Repje** / [*Hurry Hare*] by Bette Westera; Illustrated by Sylvia Weve. First edition: 2015, Haarlem, Gottmer.
- **Was de aarde vroeger plat?** / [Was the Earth Flat?] by Bette Westera; Illustrated by Sylvia Weve. First edition: 2017, Haarlem, Gottmer.
- **Ben ik dan een vogel?** / [Am I a Bird?] by Vera Marynissen; Illustrated by Sylvia Weve. First edition: 2018, Amsterdam, Querido.

Books with the works of various illustrators, including Sylvia Weve:

- **Aan tafel met Leopold** / *At the Table with Leopold*. First edition: 2002, Amsterdam, Leopold.
- **100x Annie: gedichten en verhalen voor kinderen van Annie M.G. Schmidt** / *100x Annie: Poems and Stories for Children by Annie M.G. Schmidt*. First edition: 2011, Amsterdam, Querido.
Translations of Books for Young Readers Illustrated by Sylvia Weve


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6 Source: the translation database of the Dutch Foundation for Literature, available through the following link: Vertalingendatabase Nederlands Letterenfonds


Translated editions published within The Netherlands:


Ten of the Most Important Titles Illustrated by Sylvia Weve
In order of appearance

**Oma, waar blijft de taart? [Grandma, Where’s the Cake?] (1984)**
Sylvia Weve started illustrating children’s books in 1980 and already received her first award, a Silver Paintbrush, in 1985 for *Oma, waar blijft de taart?*, written by Veronica Hazelhoff. Sylvia Weve’s dynamic line-drawings, full of movement and emotional expression, were trend-setting in this period and this book really showcases her early style of illustration.

**Het bad van de zandloper [The Bath of the Sand Walker] (1990)**
A second Silver Paintbrush was awarded to Sylvia Weve in 1991 for her illustrations in *Het bad van de zandloper*, written by Rindert Kromhout. By then, Weve had already illustrated nine other books by Kromhout and many, including the highly popular series of books about Merel, would follow. Many of the books by Kromhout were published by Zwijsen, a publisher of educational reading materials. These books were widely used in schools and have introduced many Dutch children to Sylvia Weve’s expressive illustrations.

**Kip en ei [Chicken and Egg] (2006)**
The first book that Sylvia Weve wrote as well as illustrated: a book that she is especially proud of and was awarded a Flag and Streamer by the Paintbrush Jury in 2007. In their jury report, they say: ‘Beautiful and quirky in image and language is the picture book by Sylvia Weve about Chicken and Egg. In her excitement, an uncomfortable chicken leaves her first laid egg with a babysitter-mom. That is only the beginning of the adventures. The Chick that comes out of the egg turns out to be a pathetic miniature chicken, a black-edged figure wrapped in a white feather laze, complete with a crimson comb on its head. The creature is sober and brave, something you notice in all of its behaviors, and energetically goes looking for his mother. The tight organization of the square illustrations offers the images a nice frame and contrasts with the elegant drawing style. In addition, the coloring of the figures in opaque

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7 Published by Sjaloom, latest (2nd) edition published in 1984.
8 Published by Querido (1 edition, 1990), re-published in the ‘Leesleeuw’ series by Zwijsen in 2000.
9 Published by Hillen, latest (1st) edition published in 2006.
paint that spills over the lines also provides vitality and speed. The Paintbrush jury awards *Chicken and Egg* with a Flag & Streamer.’

**Ik leer je liedjes van verlangen, en aan je apenstaartje hangen**  
(I’ll Teach You Songs of Longing, and Swinging by Your Monkee-Tail) [2010]10  
Sylvia Weve had illustrated books by Bette Westera since 1999. Quite a remarkable partnership between author and illustrator developed. Weve has great appreciation for Westera’s sense of humor that is always present in her work, even when writing about serious subject matter. In *Ik leer je liedjes van verlangen*, Westera has written a series of rhyming verses about different animals. Publisher Gottmer pulled out all the stops in the design of the book - large size, high quality – which was awarded with a prize for Best Book Design. About Sylvia Weve’s illustrations, reviewer Pjotr van Lenteren wrote in *de Volkskrant*: ‘A feast for the eyes are the illustrations by Sylvia Weve, who after years of predominantly working without color has switched to a warm collage technique with watercolor. Her new style is really an asset.’ This book received great international attention and was on the IBBY Honour List for Illustration in 2012.

**The ‘Ted van Lieshout-Library’ (2011-...)**11

Although, sadly, it is often difficult for an illustrator to get proper attention in reviews of children’s books, what is remarkable in the reception of Sylvia Weve’s illustrations is that – apart from the awards- many writers and other illustrators have expressed their appreciation of her work. In 2011, Dutch publishing house Gottmer started re-publishing books by greatly acclaimed author Ted van Lieshout. Starting with *Ik ben een held* [I Am a Hero], these books were re-published as part of the ‘Ted van Lieshout-Library’. Instead of the original illustrations by Van Lieshout himself, who is a multi-talent, Sylvia Weve was asked to make new illustrations for these books. On his weblog, Van Lieshout writes (23 October, 2011): “These books do not […] contain my illustrations, but Sylvia Weve’s. I am truly lyrical and enthusiastic about that. – But why not my own illustrations? Because we wanted to create a uniform series and I dreaded illustrating all books.

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10 Published by Gottmer, latest (11th) edition in 2010.
11 Series published by Gottmer from 2011 onwards.
in the same style. Those of you who know my work, know that I am not good at that. I like trying new things and that is simply not possible in this series. Sylvia also tries new things, but does so within the characteristics that are so unique to her style and approach. I simply think that she is a much better illustrator than I am. Soon *Ik ben een goochelaar* [I am a Magician] will come out, also containing Sylvia’s magnificent illustrations.”

*Aan de kant, ik ben je oma niet! [Step Aside, I Am Not Your Grandmother!] (2012)***

“A visual spectacle of colour and ingenuity.” *(Trouw)*

Awarded with a Golden Paintbrush for illustrations. Children’s author Bette Westera and illustrator Sylvia Weve have taken a unique and gently anarchic approach in these vibrant and powerful portraits of twelve old people, with their snappy rhymes and eloquent images. *Step Aside, I’m Not Your Grandmother!* demonstrates how craftsmanship and artistry can come together to produce an imaginative children’s book that playfully combines ethics and aesthetics, emotion and humour. Sylvia Weve first received a Silver Paintbrush (2013) for her illustrations. According to the jury: ‘Sylvia Weve has renewed herself as a visual artist: she exchanged the fierce, cartoonish brushstrokes for spectacular graphic constellations that do not know their equal in the nevertheless versatile landscape of Dutch illustrative art. [...] Her color combinations are spherical and daring - and, thanks to the printer, they come out beautifully on the thick paper: light blue, neon green, red, yellow and brown fit together unexpectedly well. This in combination with the format and the double folding pages makes the book exceptional. And exceptionally successful.’ From the Silver Paintbrush winners, Sylvia Weve was selected as winner of the Golden Paintbrush later that year.

**Doodgewoon [Dead Normal] (2014)**

Winner of both the Gouden Griffel (Golden Slate Pencil) and the Woutertje Pieterse Prize 2015, this book is highly appreciated for its approach to its central theme: death. The jury of the Woutertje Pieterse Prize writes in their jury report: “The monumental subject of the book isn’t just dealt with, Westera and Weve tackle death, embrace it, keep it at a safe distance, give it value, take it to heart, to their readers’ hearts. The illustrations are so diverse and suitable, colourful and rich in visual impact, the fusion of text and image is brilliant. *Dead Normal* has touched us very deeply.” Unique, unorthodox and unflinching: this describes children’s writer Bette Westera and illustrator Sylvia Weve’s approach to death in all its aspects. These poems range from

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12 Published by Gottmer, latest (3rd) edition in 2013.
13 Published by Gottmer, latest (4th) edition in 2015.
poignant to light-hearted in tone and invite the reader to recite them out loud. Weve’s outstanding, evocative illustrations are marked by their diversity of style, composition and atmosphere, beautifully complementing the poems and completing the collection. The notion behind Dead Normal is that the only certainty in our lives is death – and that we’d better get used to that idea. Writing about such a theme without resorting to clichés or pretension is no easy task, but Westera does a magnificent job. Illustrator Sylvia Weve, too, calls on all kinds of registers, making inventive use of the varying page widths within the book. Cartoonish pictures – such as the family portrait with the skulls of distant ancestors in the foreground – alternate with more abstract images. Where the subject is too vast to be neatly depicted, such as the elusive nature of time, she paints rounded shapes and rough brushstrokes in earthy colours to suggest the circle of life. Dead Normal – this wonderful collection of poetry and illustrations is anything but14.

Op een ochtend vroeg in de morgen [One Morning in Early Summer] (2016)15

While 2010s are a very productive period in the collaboration between Sylvia Weve and author Bette Westera, Weve’s illustrations also keep attracting the attention of other publishers and other authors. In 2016, she was asked to illustrate the new collection of animal stories by Toon Tellegen, one of the Netherlands’ most acclaimed writers. The style Weve uses in One Morning in Early Summer is comparable to that in Haasje Repje [Hurry Hare] (2015), a book of animal stories by Bette Westera, although Tellegen’s absurdist tendencies have clearly inspired Weve in their own way. Reviewer Jürgen Peeters wrote: ‘The surreal prints by Sylvia Weve have a strong symbiosis with Tellegen’s narrative style, which unmistakably contributes to the expressiveness of this collection of stories. Although the swirling prints clearly reflect Weve’s signature, the illustrator uses a less exuberant color palette. The strange atmosphere of the narratives remains just as good in pastel shades, which also draw attention to the events. The interferences between the animal figures and prominent objects are indicated by arrows. A nice extra, although this was not necessary, because the coherence is also evident from the expressive prints.’ According to him, Weve would have deserved an award for her illustrations of this collection of stories.

Arme Rijk [Poor Rich] (2016)16

With its sober cover, this book does not immediately reveal the incredibly rich world that it holds inside. Another collaboration with author Bette Westera, Poor Rich shows how Sylvia Weve’s illustrations have developed over the years. Her dynamic and expressive line drawings are still there, in the way she draws the characters, the animals, but the large two-page spreads also showcase the many possibilities she gained by combining her hand-drawings with digital techniques. Moreover, Weve’s eye for composition and colour makes each spread an artwork in itself. Some reviewers even say that in this book, Weve’s

15 Published by Querido, latest (2nd) edition 2016.
16 Published by Gottmer, latest (1st) edition 2016.
illustrations are stronger than the text, although her illustrations clearly show her appreciation of Bette Westera’s linguistic humor. Reviewer Pjotr van Lenteren wrote: ‘As far as execution of the book is concerned, Arme Rijk is the superlative of the happy collaboration with Sylvia Weve. Sometimes it is as though her exuberant illustrations take over the story and that is a good thing [...]’

**Jawlensky – Haar ogen [Jawlensky – Her Eyes] (2018)**

Every year, an ‘art picture book’ about the life and work of a famous artist appears alongside an art exhibition: a unique collaboration between the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag and publisher Leopold. For each art picture book, a renowned children’s book writer and illustrator are selected. In 2018, Bette Westera and Sylvia Weve were invited to create a book about expressionist painter Alexej von Jawlensky. It is at once a confirmation of the quality and acclaim of their work and yet another opportunity for this award-winning duo to show their creativity.

In his review of the exposition of Alexej von Jawlensky’s work in Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, art critic Frans van Hilten makes special mention of the art picture book created by Bette Westera and Sylvia Weve. Pointing to the difficult challenge it is to create a good children’s book about an artist without ending up with a simplified biography or an all too literal imitation of the artworks, he remarks about Weve’s illustrations: “Without actually copying Jawlensky, Weve has managed to capture the atmosphere of his work: the colors, the eyes, the shapes, and most of all the world that can be discovered behind those.” Although Weve is reluctant to call herself an artist, this book (once again) gives plenty of reason to say that she is.

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17 Published by Leopold and Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, latest (1st) edition 2018.
Books Sent to the Jury


4. **Op een ochtend vroeg in de zomer** (written by Toon Tellegen). Amsterdam, Querido, 2016, 2nd ed.

Selection of Reviews of the Books Sent to the Jury

*Trouw Boeken, 29 November 2014 [Dutch review – Dead Normal]*

Bette Westera Writes Magnificent Poetry About Sensitive Theme

Bas Maliepaard

In the magnificent book 'Dead Normal' Bette Westera writes about death. For children, because death is unfortunately also part of their lives, when pets, friends or (grand)parents die. But her lyrics are just as poignant for adults. They are about the 'use' of death, the existence of a heaven, about funeral rites, grief and loss. Like this poem, in which the well-known store names make the sadness about a deceased mother painfully tangible and 'of every day': "I miss you on the bike,/ I miss you on the train./ I miss you at the H&M/ and at the Albert Heijn."

Westera also dares to deal with complicated issues. About suicide she writes: "The days hurt./ Life was too heavy./ She just could not go on." About a miscarriage: "You just should have waited a bit./ Then one day you could have come into my lap./ Then I could see how much you laughed at me and looked at me. Then you would not be dead." They hit home, those sensitive poems, by their direct tone.

That it has not become a heavy book, is due to lighthearted rhymes, including witty epitaphs: "Here I lie,/ buried in a grassy patch of green,/ and think what I thought before:/ death is easy enough." Or the brilliant 'Hein', in which life is a game: "Not far from our block lives Grim Reaper,/ who loves to play tag,/ Heintje wants to be 'it' always and forever, as if it never gets boring."

Once again, Westera proves that of all poets who followed in the footsteps of Annie M.G. Schmidt, she is the most convincing successor. Her steady verses read unbelievably fluently, she is not or barely caught on forced 'Sinterklaas-rhymes', the lyrics are socially aware, quirky, moving and witty and regularly even more linguistically sensitive than Schmidt's.

But also because of the beautiful design this book is a highlight: linen back, three (!) reading ribbons, pages varying in width, tasteful layout. And, most importantly: gorgeous illustrations by Sylvia Weve, who won a Golden Paintbrush for 'Scram, I’m Not Your Gran!', her previous book with Westera, but surpasses herself yet again. She varies in style, works inventively with the different page widths and gives the book a warm cohesive atmosphere, which never gets tacky.

For 9 years and up.

Update: awarded with the Woutertje Pieterse Award 2015 (tekst and illustrations), the Golden Slate Pencil [Gouden Griffel] 2015 (text) and a Flag & Streamer [Vlag & Wimpel] from the Paintbrush jury (illustrations).
Book of the Week – Youth: An Unusual Book About Death
Dying Is a Part of It

Vanessa Joosen

Dead Normal is an illustrated collection of poems about death, in which humor and sadness go hand in hand. Bette Westera and Sylvia Weve made an extraordinary children's book.

In short
- 'Dead Normal': one of the most extraordinary children's books about death ever made
- Bette Westera and Sylvia Weve make an unusual children's book about death
- Humor and sadness in the special book 'Dead Normal' of Bette Westera and Sylvia Weve

There was a time when death was not taboo in children's literature. Dying is a part of life, and so in older children's books you regularly find poems and stories about deceased acquaintances and family members, up to and including little brothers and sisters. In the greater part of the last century, these stories were rarer, because writers and parents wanted to protect children from the painful aspects of life. In recent years, however, death has completely returned to children's literature, with the beautiful collection of poetry Dead Normal as a high point so far.

In Bette Westera’s texts, many facets of death are discussed: classical themes like a dead grandparent or pet, but also surprising subjects, such as a sailor who gets a seaman’s grave, the division of an inheritance, or a servant who must follow his pharaoh to the grave.

Equally varied are the feelings the book evokes. Missing and sadness are obvious, but there is also
a great deal of wonder and humor in it. The reader for example gets advice about things that you should not say to someone who has just lost his father, resulting in a tragicomic poem with the title 'Better Not'. The accompanying illustration by Sylvia Weve shows a boy with a green face, a zipper for a mouth and frightened eyes. Weve so aptly grasps the fear that people have to say something wrong to someone in mourning.

'Puss Minoes' starts with the cliché that a dead pet is irreplaceable: 'If you are dead, Puss Minoes, / then we will not get a kitten, / no cat eating from your bowl / and sitting in your chair'. In the end, however, that idea is reversed and the narrator can barely suppress his anticipation: 'We do not get canary, / no goldfish and no guppy ./ If you are dead, puss Minoes, then we can have a puppy!'

**Tangible Sadness**

While its dark sense of humor makes the book bearable, other poems cut straight into your soul, with striking details that make the sadness palpable. 'Nothing / is sadder / then your table / next to mine', a poem about a deceased classmate starts. Like the irreplaceable pet, the empty spot is a cliché in children's literature, but with the last sentence, Westera also gives this poem an original and very painful turn: 'With your photo / next to your notebooks, / with a candle / next to your markers, // and the teacher, / who one day / forgets / to put the candle on'. Westera does not compromise and evokes the irrevocability of death and the sadness of those who remain behind repeatedly and mercilessly.

But the first poem of the collection makes clear that death enriches life: "If you could not die, / was vacation still nice? / Would you still be looking forward to that trip by train?" Through the eyes of a critical child Westera moreover destabilizes the image of heaven as comfort. The child who just lost his grandmother asks, "What is she supposed to do? What is she doing? What does she have to look for?" The poem closes with an image of the grandfather, who will not die for a long time: "He is standing firmly on the ground with both his feet." The same applies to the child who does not simply embrace the projection of the idea of life after death.

Not all young voices who speak in this book are so skeptical. A little boy who has lost his father is sure his photo is talking to him: "He also misses me, I can hear that from his voice. / He is really there, I feel him up close. / I'm not talking to his photo but with him". The accompanying touching illustration shows the boy who is being addressed by the shadow of his father. You can only hope he is right.

Bette Westera and Sylvia Weve formed a successful duo before with *Step Aside, I am not your grandmother!* For that book, Weve rightfully received a Golden Paintbrush. In *Dead Normal* again they both push their boundaries.

Weve illustrates less exuberantly than we are used to, but with soft colors and subtle effects she perfectly captures the atmosphere of the poems. Moreover, this book has been published with
great care, with tricolor ribbons, and beautiful flaps, which sometimes completely transform the images and show a different side of the same situation.

The theme of death may be presented in this book as 'normal', but the book itself is by no means so. On the contrary, Dead Normal is one of the most extraordinary books ever made about death.

**OUR JUDGMENT:** redefines the boundaries. ***** (5 out of 5 stars)
In a Chair on Her Balcony

Bas Maliepaard

A nursing home is a warehouse full of fascinating life stories. They are brought to life in the original narrative poems by Bette Westera. The familiar themes are present, sometimes serious, sometimes witty: loneliness, old-age woes, war, dementia, death. But because they are connected to a personal life course, their meaning really gets through to you.

Take for instance the touching diptych about Mrs. Verweerd. In the cheerful first poem you can read how two children adopt her as a surrogate gran after the death of their own grandmother. But if you read in the second poem that Ms. Verweerd is undesirably childless, it gets a completely different charge. Before she became an adoptive grandmother, she dreaded “having to talk about Freek again and again, who had not yet walked./ Or about Liselotje, who could say grandma already./ She was not a part of it, she certainly was aware./ She preferred to read in the chair on her balcony.”

The poems about the marriage between the ladies Jansen and Verbruggen are also about the late fulfillment of a ‘young girls’ dream’. We read how they fell in love during French class: “It is not possible and it is not right./ But every time I see you/ I feel butterflies in my stomach again:/ Je t’aime toi aussi!”

Westera writes admirably smooth poetry: about the elderly Turkish guest worker, the former circus artist with ‘clambering urges’ and the veteran who receives royal mail. Because the poems are more complex and more contemporary than those of Annie M.G. Schmidt it is a shame that Westera sometimes leans on her legacy: “Have you heard? Mrs. Van Veen of number nine/ gave birth to septuplets last night at a quarter to four!” That sounds a lot like [a well-known poem by Annie M.G. Schmidt].

Sylvia Weve, with whom Westera collaborated on I’ll Teach You Songs of Longing before, provides the diptych-poems with eccentric, foldable computer illustrations. They look like printed collages, almost like scrapbooks full of memories. And although the cover looks dark, the inside is a visual spectacle of color and beautiful finds. The bride and groom get a walker with cans behind it, the septuplet is one man with fourteen eyes and the ugliest resident of the house has a leaky faucet as a nose.


For 9 years and up.
Poor Rich is a Fairytale Full of Wordplay

Pjotr van Lenteren

© 2016 Sylvia Weve; Illustration from Poor Rich (Haarlem, Gottmer).

It really isn’t fair. You’re a starting children’s book writer and they publish you in those hastily made covers. Until one day you meet a publisher who decides to pull out all of the stops for you.

This is what happened to poet and writer Bette Westera (1958). In the 1990s she debuted with a children’s Bible that she wrote with her mother; followed by an extensive but unremarkable oeuvre. Only two years ago she won her first Golden Slate Pencil for the impressive collection of poems about dying, Doodgewoon [Dead Normal].

The long road leading up to that point was already taken a few years before, when suddenly remarkably strong editions - in all respects- began to appear with her name on it: cheerfully contrarian poetry bundles Ik leer je liedjes van verlangen, en aan je aapstaartje hangen [I’ll Teach You Songs of Longing, and Hanging by Your Monkeytail] and Aan de kant, ik ben je oma niet! [Step Aside, I’m Not Your Grandmother!]. Valiant publications, large format, thick cardboard, expensive paper, tasteful lettering, which no jury or reviewer could ignore.

What will be, will be, Westera seems to be conveying on every page of the reading and listening tale Arme Rijk [Poor Rich]. The poor young man Rich - yes, such a pun will be understood, just keep repeating it - is sent into the world by his dying mother to become himself. Sometimes sleeping
beside a beggar, sometimes beside a baroness. Sometimes luck laughs at him, sometimes he is fooled. After a long journey, Poor Rich ends up at home with his mother. Destitute, but as himself.

As far as execution of the book is concerned, *Arme Rijk* is the superlative of the happy collaboration with Sylvia Weve. Sometimes it is as though her exuberant illustrations take over the story and that is a good thing because here and there Westera is very busy making puns.

The book includes a CD on which the story is read in rhyme.
Becoming Who You Are

Veerle Vanden Bosch

Poet Bette Westera and illustrator Sylvia Weve: it is a golden combination. This is proven once again by their new book, *Poor Rich*.

*Poor Rich*, the new 'reading and listening tale' of the multi-award-winning duo Bette Westera - Sylvia Weve is a lot at the same time: a coming-of-stage story, a fairytale and a fable about poverty and wealth. Poor Rich lives in a dark grey past, in a house on a dike. He does what poor people do to survive, until his dying mother sends him into the wide world. It is big, she knows, but Rich is also: “He was already higher than the grass and then the grain. He only had to become who he was.”

With an apple and an egg and a knapsack full of stones, Rich sets out into the world. He does not choose familiar roads, because otherwise you will not find yourself, he reasons. In his path he finds all kinds of strange characters who test him and show him who he is - a hermit, a baroness who has lost her way, a queen who has lost her child.
Nothing is what it seems, Rich gets to know different forms of poorness and wealth, and the different treatments you get depending on whether you are regarded as rich or poor.

The story is told in sparkling, very smoothly running verses that beg to be read aloud. How well the text lends itself to that is shown by the audio CD in the back of the book.

Sylvia Weve draws that wide world in robust panoramic illustrations with solid lines. Her fields have something of patchwork patterns, the landscapes get a surreal touch here and there. Weve perfectly complements the direct, playful style and humor of Westera.

When Rich comes home after his wanderings and buries his mother, Weve again shows - in a literally animated landscape - the clothesline of the first page, but this time with colorful baby clothes hanging on it: the dark grey past has been given color.

A beautifully published reading and listening book, with which the winners of the most recent Woutertje Pieterse Prize will again be very successful.
Cooperation Sylvia Weve and Toon Tellegen is a Hit

Jaap Friso

Rating: 9.0 [out of 10]

The automatism of wanting to discuss the text first with a collection of stories like this has to be broken in this case. The animal stories of Toon Tellegen are beautiful, but *One Morning in Early Summer* distinguishes itself by the illustrations of Sylvia Weve. It is a big hit to link Weve to Tellegen.

In Tellegen's short stories about animals usually little to nothing happens, it is primarily a world of thought with occasional interaction. One can depict a nice illustration of a rhinoceros, aardvark or ostrich with them, but Weve opts for an entirely different approach. In a busy and tingling style, she portrays the storylines with a lot of action, as if everything is going on. With great dynamism she brings the inner world of the animals to life. There is a lot of things happening together, sometimes in several places on the pages at the same time. The perspective changes and tilts and is sometimes almost Escherian, for example in the story about the badger who lives in a house with perhaps a hundred or a thousand rooms. It is a pleasure to figure out what is going on in the illustrations, that are colored in quiet pastels, and how that relates to the stories. With Weve, a party is truly a party, and a storm is a storm, movements are literally depicted with arrows and in frames we sometimes see the Latin name of a tree or plant.

My favorite story from the collection is the one about the Mayfly that does not understand what
the word ‘tomorrow’ exactly means. Maybe it's a dance? He has heard animals say to each other: ‘Tomorrow is difficult for me’. The story must compete with that about the centipede in an identity crisis who keeps miscounting. Sometimes he is the thousand-twelve-pede, sometimes the nine-hundred-eighty-nine-pede.

Many letters are written and parties are thrown in _One Morning in Early Summer_, and sometimes in combination like with the bear who cancels his party by letter: “I wanted to give a party. It came very close, but it will not take place. For various reasons.” Bear kept worrying that he had not divided the cakes into the right number of portions, so he ate them all himself. The opening sentences in Tellegen’s stories immediately set the mood and the pointe. Sometimes briefly: “The ant sat at his table and thought”, and sometimes more elaborate: “The bear never gave a party, but on one occasion he invited the squirrel, the ant, the cricket and the rhinoceros to a party at his home.”

It is extraordinary that the animal stories of Tellegen remain fascinating by those surprising twists. The combination with the rich illustrations by Weve pulls this book to a much higher level.

Source: [https://www.jaapleest.nl/samenwerking-sylvia-weve-en-toon-tellegen-schot-de-roos/](https://www.jaapleest.nl/samenwerking-sylvia-weve-en-toon-tellegen-schot-de-roos/)
Surreal Animal Stories in an Absurd Frame

Jürgen Peeters

With some authors you already know in advance what their new book will bring. Yet this does not necessarily have to fall under the heading of ‘more of the same’. Take the philosophical animal stories of Toon Tellegen. The charming front cover of the new collection of stories *One morning in Early Summer* already reveals a number of familiar figures, such as the elephant, the grasshopper, the centipede and the caterpillar. As is often the case in Tellegen’s texts, the animals celebrate an extensive party with cake, philosophize about concepts that are difficult to comprehend and pursue unfeasible ideals.

The new collection, for the first time with illustrations by Golden Paintbrush winner Sylvia Weve, opens with a story typical of Tellegen’s poetics. Aardvark experiences at first hand what it means to hide, without stating in advance that you also want to be found. A plausible situation, were it not that the shelter of the anxious Aardvark is indeed being traced:

*The aardvark sat there for hours. He hoped somebody was still looking for him, but he also hoped nobody would find him. By the end of the afternoon he became worried and crawled up again. He put his hands to his mouth again and shouted: “Are you still looking for me?” “Certainly,” it sounded from afar. “And do you still know who I am?” “Yes, the aardvark.”*

Exactly that unexpected, slightly absurd twist enriches the plot and takes Tellegen’s short stories to a higher level. Ironic winking, so-called paradoxical statements, unfulfilling ambitions, Tellegen continues to conjure them up almost automatically. In that respect, the story of Badger, who can no longer find his guests in his labyrinthically constructed house, is a typical example for Tellegen’s
writing. Just like the story of Bear, who has to cancel his big party 'for various reasons', since he does not know how many uninvited guests will come knocking. With few words, in a purified text, the author gives his animal figures their own character. Other forest dwellers philosophize about their identity, worry about dubious terms - the mayfly does not know the term 'tomorrow' - or decide that they will simply disregard their daily obligations for once.

The surreal prints by Sylvia Weve have a strong symbiosis with Tellegen’s narrative style, which unmistakably contributes to the expressiveness of this collection of stories. Although the swirling prints clearly reflect Weve's signature, the illustrator uses a less exuberant color palette. The strange atmosphere of the narratives remains just as good in pastel shades, which also draw attention to the events. The interferences between the animal figures and prominent objects are indicated by arrows. A nice extra, although this was not necessary, because the coherence is also evident from the expressive prints.

The illustrations of Tellegen’s delicate stories by Mance Post, Annemarie van Haeringen, Kitty Crowther and Jan Jutte have been awarded. Wondering if Sylvia Weve will receive the same honour. It would be well deserved.

Source: https://www.tzum.info/2016/03/recensie-toon-tellegen-sylvia-weve-op-een-ochtend-vroeg-in-de-zomer/
"What you cannot see does not exist," the children say to the new boy who has come to live in the village. He does not agree with that. You cannot see his mother, but he is convinced that she is there. His father told him that she lives behind the stars. The boy tries to communicate with his mother through his drawings. His approach takes on an ever bigger scale. Because you cannot see a small portrait on the bedroom wall from behind the stars, right? He shows her his new house with a mural, his new village with a large drawing on a square, he paints with manure in the fields around the village, makes a portrait of his father in the snow on the runway of the airport. But how does his mother know that he made those drawings? And does she remember what he looks like? His father advises him to use his imagination. "Look at yourself through your mother's eyes. You have her eyes."
The boy finally makes a self-portrait, the end of a journey in which he shows his mother the world through his eyes.

For the art book Jawlensky - Haar ogen [Jawlensky – Her Eyes], the award-winning duo Bette Westera and Sylvia Weve were inspired by the Russian-German artist Aleksej von Jawlensky (1864-1941), who moved to Munich in 1896 from St. Petersburg and became one of the founders of the avant-garde movement Der blaue Reiter. They did so at the request of the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, where an exhibition about Jawlensky will run until 27 January. This expressionist wanted to evoke
and express feelings with his images, to make the invisible visible. He did so with exuberant colors, which became increasingly darker towards the end of his career. His portraits with large, black-rimmed eyes and outspoken contours are related to Russian icon art. Gradually, his portraits became increasingly abstract.

It is amazing how Sylvia Weve merges her own style with that of Jawlensky: she uses his contour lines and colors, is inspired by his canvases, but at the same time the prints remain unmistakably Sylvia Weve, one of the most talented illustrators in the Netherlands. It is a beautiful symbiosis, a dialogue between two artists. And at the same time this is a beautiful book about a boy who misses his mother.

A successful episode in the increasingly impressive series of art picture books from publisher Leopold and the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague.

© 2018 Sylvia Weve; Illustration from Jawlensky - Her Eyes (Den Haag, Leopold/ Gemeentemuseum Den Haag).