

**GRASSES AND TREES**

GRASSEN EN BOMEN



## **GRASSES AND TREES**

*Very short stories by A.L. Sniijders, chosen and translated  
by Lydia Davis*

## **GRASSEN EN BOMEN**

*Zeer korte verhalen van A.L. Sniijders, gekozen en vertaald  
door Lydia Davis*

First edition, September 2016

*Eerste druk, september 2016*

ISBN 978 90 72603 58 6

© *Grasses and Trees/Grassen en bomen*, AFDH Publishers,  
Enschede/Doetinchem, the Netherlands, 2016

© zkv's—A.L. Snijders, Klein Dochteren, the Netherlands, 2016

© Introduction, 72 zkv's and Notes—Lydia Davis, New York, USA, 2016

© Preface A.L. Snijders—L.H. Wiener, Haarlem, the Netherlands, 2016

© Notes from the Netherlands—Florian Duijsens, Berlin, Germany, 2016

© Illustrations—the Rinus van den Bosch' Heirs, The Hague,  
the Netherlands, 2016

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.

*Niets uit deze uitgave mag worden vermenigvuldigd en/of openbaar gemaakt door middel van druk, fotokopie, microfilm of op welke andere wijze ook, zonder voorafgaande schriftelijke toestemming van de uitgever.*

## CONTENT *Inhoud*

Preface—A.L. SNIJDERS 9 Introduction—LYDIA DAVIS 11

Notes from The Netherlands—FLORIAN DUIJSENS 13

*Grassen en bomen* 22 Grasses and Trees 23 Because  
His Wife 24 *Want zijn vrouw* 25 *Vos* 26 Fox 27 Seagulls 28  
*Meeuwen* 29 *Plezier* 30 Pleasure 31 Resentment 32 *Wrok* 33  
*Kleinzoon* 34 Grandson 35 Summer 36 *Zomer* 37 *Ulk* 38  
*Ulk* 39 Ox 40 *Os* 43 *Baalbek* 44 Baalbek 45 Years 46  
*Jaartallen* 47 *Zak* 48 Old Prick 49 *Passie* 52 Passion 53  
Shoe 54 *Schoen* 55 Jealousy 58 *Jaloezie* 59 *Rozenstraat* 62  
*Rozenstraat* 63 Hurt to the Bone 66 *Gekrenkt tot op*  
*het bot* 67 At the Intratuin Garden Center 70 *Intratuin* 73  
*Aantekening* 74 Note 75 *Buizerds* 78 Buzzards 79 Mice 80  
*Muizen* 81 *Mol* 82 Mole 83 Box 84 *Kist* 85 *Wilde kat* 86  
Feral Cat 87 Helpless Because of Respect 88 *Weerloos door*  
*respect* 89 Bat 92 *Vleermuis* 93 Minor Characters 96  
*Bijfiguren* 97 *Baldur* 98 Baldur 101 Luck 102 *Geluk* 103  
Seventeenth Century 106 *Zeventiende eeuw* 107 Jesus 110  
*Jezus* 111 *Wollen muts* 112 Wool Cap 113 *Boodschap* 116  
Message 117 Six Words 118 *Zes woorden* 119 Carbide 122  
*Carbid* 123 Saturday Evening 126 *Zaterdagavond* 127  
*Ukiyo-e* 130 Ukiyo-e 131 *Generatieve grammatica* 132  
Generative Grammar 133 *Gekraagde roodstaart* 136  
Common Redstart 137 *Eieren* 140 Eggs 143 Forty  
Centimeters 144 *Veertig centimeter* 145 The Past 148  
*Het verleden* 149 Flapsour 152 *Flapsour* 153 Synagogue 156  
*Synagogue* 157 On the Rebound 160 *Van de weeromstuit* 161  
Soup Bowl 164 *Soepkom* 165 Story 168 *Verhaal* 169 *Doosje* 170

Little Box 173 The Main Dish 174 *De hoofdschotel* 175  
Story (3) 178 *Verhaal (3)* 179 In Louth 182 *In Louth* 183  
*Een beest, een schatje* 184 A Brute, a Little Treasure 185  
Container 186 *Container* 187 Eva 190 *Eva* 191  
*Gemeentegrens* 192 Town Line 193 *Kurkeik* 196 Cork  
Oak 197 Accountant 200 *Accountant* 201 Africa 202  
*Afrika* 205 *Een vrouw* 206 A Woman 207 The Baker's  
Wife 208 *De vrouw van de bakker* 209 No Smoking 212  
*Niet roken* 213 *Begin & einde* 214 Beginning & End 215  
Oh My Bride 216 *Oh, bruid van mij* 217 Frisians 220  
*Friezen* 221 Christmas Present 224 *Kerstgeschenk* 225  
Christmas 13 228 *Kerst* 13 229 The Sheep 232  
*De schapen* 233 The Swans 236 *De zwanen* 237  
Crime Passionel 240 *Crime passionel* 241 Owl 244  
*Uil* 247 *Speenvarken* 248 Suckling Pig 249

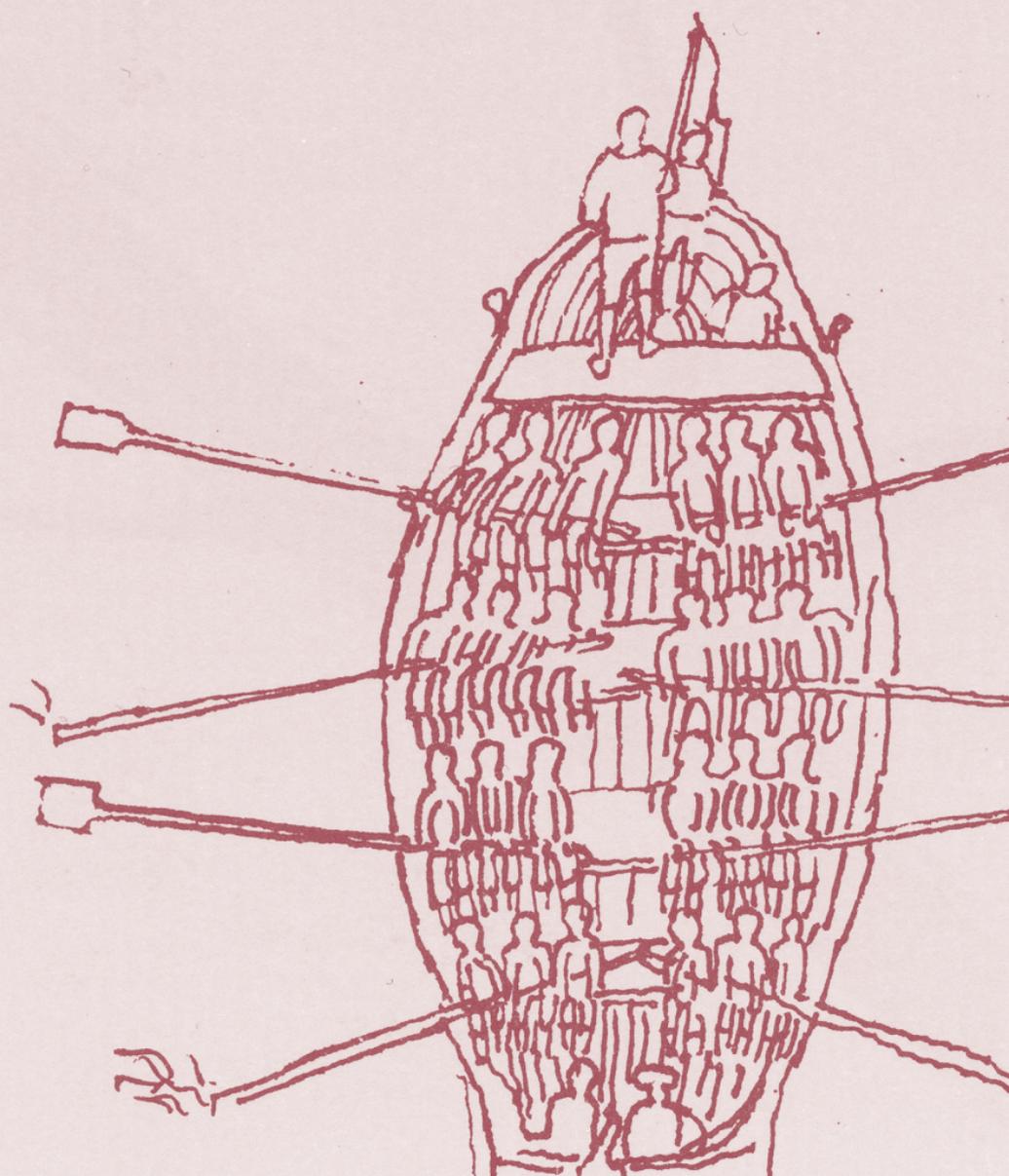
Notes 253 Acknowledgements 258 References 259  
About the authors 261 Publisher's note 262  
Colophon 264



Als ik 's morgens door de verlaten  
natuur fiets, merk ik dat ook de  
faal me verlaten heeft. Ik heb  
geen woorden tot mijn beschikking,  
ik heb ze niet nodig. Later, als ik  
allten op mijn kamer zit, zijn de  
woorden terug, maar ik gebruik ze  
niet om te praten, want ik ben  
allten. Ik gebruik ze pas als ik  
ze ga schrijven en li'zen. Soms  
worden ze verfaald en kom ik in  
ten vreemde die rufim. Een zif  
wordt ten zebra, ten muis wordt  
ten vlees muis, ten pad wordt ten  
paddestoeel, ten vink wordt ten sla-  
vink, ten olie man ten olifant, ten  
olifant ten nyl paard. Ik ben in ten  
wereld gekomen nie ik heken, maar  
die niet de mijne is. Ik ben rijk ge-  
worden, maar mijn buurman merkt  
het niet.

**A.L. SNIJDERS** (Translation L.H. Wiener)

When in the morning I cycle through the lonely countryside, I notice that language too has left me. I have no command of words, I don't need them. Later, alone in my room, words have come back to me, but I don't use them in speech, for I am alone. I only use them when I write them down and read them. Sometimes they are translated and I enter a weird animal park. A donkey turns into a zebra, a rat becomes a bat, a toad becomes a toadstool, a rabbit turns into a rarebit and an elephant becomes a hippo. I have stepped into a world I recognize, but which is not mine. I have become rich, but my neighbour doesn't notice.



**LYDIA DAVIS**

For most of my life, I have worked as a translator from the French, but I have also translated from other languages, including some I hardly knew—a linguistic adventure. Then, about five years ago, I visited Amsterdam to celebrate the publication in Dutch of a book of my own stories. It was a good visit. When I returned home, I thought I would like to offer something in return by attempting to translate a work from Dutch. I asked a friend to recommend a writer of *very* short stories that would not be too difficult for me, and he sent me ‘Years’ by A.L. Snijders. I did my best to read it, and I liked it very much. Stylistically, Snijders’s concrete narration and short sentences were just right for me. With the help of a dictionary, my acquaintance with German, and the close relationship between many Dutch and English words, I was able to produce a translation of it. This was just the beginning. I soon found myself on Snijders’s email list, receiving a newly composed *zkv* every week or so. Early in the morning, with or without my first cup of coffee, I would read the latest *zkv*, and, often, immediately attempt a rough translation. It was enjoyable. I appreciated the freshness of each piece, the good humor, the references to Dutch culture and history, Snijders’s wit, thoughtfulness, and often surprising conclusions. Later, I would return to a story, work more on it, and then show it to a Dutch friend in order to catch any blunders. Translating Snijders’s *zkv*’s became a regular part of my life. They appeared in magazines in

**12** the U.S. and U.K., and they were received most enthusiastically. Now it is a pleasure to see them gathered into one volume.