

## HANNA BERVOETS



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## Biography

Hanna Bervoets (1984, Amsterdam) is one of the most acclaimed Dutch authors of her generation. After earning her Bachelors degree in Cultural Studies and a Masters in Journalism & Research she published seven novels, screenplays, plays, short stories and essays.

Bervoets won the 2009 Debutant of the Year Award for her first novel *If How Why*. Its follow-up, *Dear Céline*, was awarded the Opzij Literature Prize 2012 for best book by a female Dutch author. It has since been adapted for the big screen. After *Dear Céline* Bervoets made her definitive breakthrough as a novelist with the acclaimed bestseller *Everything There Was*, which has been published in English with Canelo and pre-published in The Guardian. Her next novel *Efter* was nominated for the BNG New Literature Prize and reached the long list of the Golden Book Owl and the Libris Literature Prize. The film rights of *Efter* have been sold to prominent Dutch producer NL Film. Bervoets' fifth novel *Ivanov* won the BNG Literature Prize, was nominated for the ECI Literature Prize and will be translated in French and Turkish. *Fuzzie* was nominated for the ECI Literature Prize 2017 and will be translated in German.

In the spring of 2018 Bervoets was a resident at Writers Omi at Ledig House, New York. Here she worked on her latest novel, *Welcome to the Kingdom of the Sick*: an adventure story on chronic illness. *Welcome to the Kingdom of the Sick* became an instant bestseller when it was published in 2019 and was nominated for several awards.

Between 2009 and 2014 Bervoets worked as a columnist De Volkskrant. For this Dutch newspaper she currently writes reviews and essays on (digital) media and (queer) representation.

Recently Bervoets was granted the prestigious Frans Kellendonk Prize for her entire body of works.

In 2021 Bervoets was the author of the prestigious 'Boekenweekgeschenk' ('gift for Books Week'). This novella, *We had to remove this post*, centers around a group of content moderators for social media. The book is distributed in an edition of 650.000 copies during Book Week, a campaign to promote literature in The Netherlands. Simultaneously, her short story collection *A modern Desire* is published, which won the J.M.A. Biesheuvel Award for short stories in 2022.

Hanna Bervoets works and lives in Amsterdam, with her girlfriend and two guinea pigs.

## Publications and honors

### Publications

#### Fiction

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 2021 | <i>Een modern verlangen (A modern Desire)</i> , short stories, Uitgeverij Pluim.                                |
| 2021 | <i>Wat wij zagen, (The things we saw/ We had to remove this post)</i> , novella for Book Week, Uitgeverij Pluim |
| 2019 | <i>Welkom in het Rijk der zieken (Welcome to the Kingdom of the Sick)</i> , Uitgeverij Pluim                    |

2017 *Fuzzie (Fuzzie)*, Atlas Contact  
 2016 *Ivanov (Ivanov)*, Atlas Contact  
 2014 *Efter (Efter)*, Atlas Contact  
 2013 *Alles wat er was (Everything there was)*, Atlas Contact  
 2011 *Lieve Céline (Dear Céline)*, L.J. Veen  
 2009 *Of hoe waarom (Or how why)*, L.J. Veen

### Non Fiction

2015 *En alweer bleven we ongedeerd (And again we stayed unharmed)*, columns and essays, Atlas Contact  
 2013 *Opstaan, aankleden, niet doodgaan (Get up, get dressed, don't die)*, columns and essays, Atlas Contact  
 2011 *Leuk zeg doe (Nice say bye)*, columns and essays, Atlas Contact

### Short Stories - selection recent publications in English

2018 [\*A modern desire\*](#), 2.3.74 (literary magazine, online available), Lebowski (NL/US)  
*Tower*, Amsterdam Noir (short story collection), Akashic Books (US)  
 2017 [\*Day 1851\*](#), Five Dials (literary magazine, online available), Hamish Hamilton (UK)

### Plays and screenplays

2017 *CarryMe (CarryMe)*, theatre play, FirmaMES  
 2013 *Sputen en Slikken (Stick and Swallow)*, theatre play, co-author, Rick Engelkes Productions  
 2012 *Bowy is binnen (Bowy is inside)*, screenplay, KeyFilm  
 2010 *Roes (Whirl)*, theatre play, FirmaMES

### Contributing author

2017 *Mathilda*, Mary Shelley, preface, L.J. Veen klassiek  
 2015 *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley, preface, L.J. Veen klassiek

### Columns and essays

2014 – 2017 Several articles and essays on (digital) media and (queer) representation for Dutch newspapers De Volkskrant and NRC Handelsblad, Belgium newspapers De Morgen and De Standaard and digital platform De Correspondent  
 2010 – 2015 Weekly column for Volkskrant Magazine (Dutch newspaper)

## **Awards and nominations**

2022	J.M.A. Biesheuvel Award ( <b>won</b> , <i>A modern desire, 14 stories</i> )
2020	Libris Literature Award (long list, <i>Welcome to the Kingdom of the Sick</i> )
2019	Bookspot Literature Award (long list, <i>Welcome to the Kingdom of the Sick</i> ) NRC Boekenwedstrijd (short list, <i>Welcome to the Kingdom of the Sick</i> )
2017	Frans Kellendonk Award ( <b>won</b> , oeuvre/ entire works) BNG Bank Literature Award ( <b>won</b> , <i>Ivanov</i> ) Diorapthe Literatour Award (short list, <i>Ivanov</i> ) Bookstores Prize (short list, <i>Ivanov</i> ) ECI Literature Award (long list, <i>Fuzzie</i> ) Libris Literature Award (long list, <i>Ivanov</i> )
2016	ECI Literature Award (long list, <i>Ivanov</i> )
2015	BNG Bank Literature Award (short list, <i>Efter</i> ) Libris Literature Award (long list, <i>Efter</i> ) Golden Owl Award (long list, <i>Efter</i> ) Opzij Literature Award (long list, <i>Efter</i> )
2014	Opzij Literature Award (short list, <i>Everything there was</i> )
2012	Opzij Literature Award ( <b>won</b> , <i>Dear Céline</i> )
2010	HvA Debutant of the Year Award ( <b>won</b> , <i>If How Why</i> )

## **Works and Themes**

After her award-winning debut *If How Why* (2009) Bervoets wrote seven novels, that often combine literary narratives with science fiction themes and fantasy tropes, always with strong queer overtones. Dutch critics have referred to Bervoets' earlier work as 'lab literature', because her stories often have an academic setting, but also because they explore human behavior in more or less artificial circumstances.

Bervoets third novel, *Everything there was* (2013) is an apocalypse tale with a philosophical undertone: how do we define ourselves when the world as we know it gets destroyed? *Efter* (2015) is set in a near future in which our thinking about mental health has so radically changed that society has come to believe that being in love is a mental disorder, that can, and should, be treated in special clinics. 'Love rehab' is a common retreat for the rich, and

Big Pharma is working on a new medicine to go with it: 'Efter'

The title of Bervoets fifth novel *Ivanov* (2016) refers to the true story of Russian scientist Ilya Ivanov, who tried to cross-breed humans with apes in the 1920s. The award winning novel, however, is set in 90s New York, during the AIDS epidemic. In this modern day Frankenstein tale, female scientist Helena Frank tries to repeat Ivanov's experiments in order to find a cure for HIV – but when things get fractious, ethical questions are put aside.

In *Fuzzie* (2017) Bervoets explores the mechanisms behind our need for affection. Four lonely people each encounter a fluffy little ball, Fuzzie, that talks to them, soothes them, lets them pet him - or is Fuzzie female? Can a fluffy little ball really be a substitute for love, and if so, what does that tell us?

Bervoets latest theater play *CarryMe* (2018) examines the implications of our gig economy. *CarryMe* is set in a speculative future where couples can hire a surrogate mom through an app. Young, mostly low educated women end up in the homes of the rich to carry their children: does that stimulate inequality, or is it empowering for all women involved? Like in most of Bervoets stories, the answer isn't unequivocal.

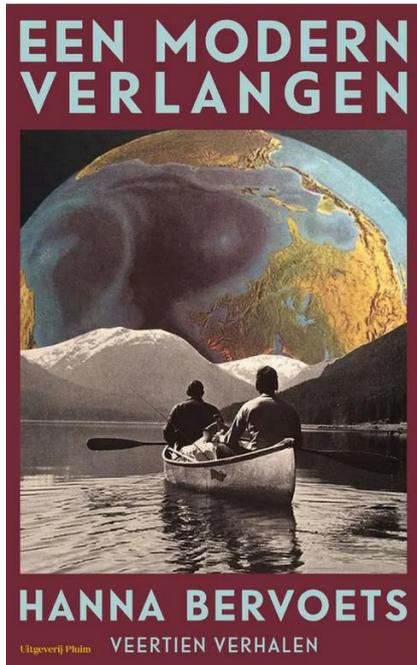
One of the recurring themes in Bervoets work is the way (scientific) change and new technologies reshape human relationships and behavior. But her novels also focus on our thinking about society: who or what decides what is normal?

The bestselling novel *Welcome in the Kingdom of the Sick* (2019) investigates the way we tend to think about illness, and how society treats the sick. With *Welcome in the Kingdom of the Sick* Bervoets combines fantasy genre conventions with hard-boiled philosophy in an adventure novel on chronic illness.

*The Things we saw* (2021) is one of Bervoets most grounded works. The novella revolves around the question of who or what determines our worldview, examining the modern day world of commercial content moderators. Like all Bervoets former novels, *The Things we saw* explores morality and how our morals are fluid, constantly changing depending on where and with whom we are.

In the short story collection *A modern Desire* (2021) Bervoets combines all her major themes – our longing to belong, the way culture shapes morality, the mechanisms of affection – while focusing on the complexity of relationships: romantic relationships, friendships, but also the bonds between human and animal, parent and child, human and machine.

## Bibliography and Reviews



### A MODERN DESIRE

*Uitgeverij Pluim, short stories, 240 pages, 2021*  
*Winner J.M.A. Biesheuvel Award for short stories*

*A Modern Desire* revolves around human relationships: between lovers, friends, but also between man and animal, parent and child, man and machine. The characters in these fourteen stories sometimes have to twist themselves into difficult turns to plod through misunderstanding and distance, to bridge chasms. Every time the question arises: how do we relate to each other in a sometimes dark, labyrinthine world? And what does that tell us about ourselves, and our place in that world?

### Press on *A Modern Desire*:

'Bervoets writes accessible prose and shows herself to be a flexible thinker who plays with perspectives and exciting twists and turns' – \* \* \* \* , *De Standaard*

'Bervoets always makes clever use of reality here, as in a playful story with a beautiful conclusion about the dynamics on a guinea pig forum' – \* \* \* \* , *NRC Handelsblad*

“Where our mother used to live” is beautiful, about the girl Sally who visits a hospitable Islamic family every day. [...] The unambiguity with which Bervoets allows relationships to be what they are is pleasantly natural. ’ – \* \* \* \* , *de Volkskrant*



## **THE THINGS WE SAW (WE HAD TO REMOVE THIS POST)**

*Uitgeverij Pluim, novella 96 pages, 2021*

*Sold to HMH/ Mariner Books (USA), Picador (UK), Carl Hanser Verlag (Duitsland), Le Bruit du monde (France), Mondadori (Italy), Strawberry (Norway), Gummerus (Finland)*

*TV rights sold to Quay Street*

When Kayleigh finds herself struggling financially, she applies for a job as a 'content moderator' for an online platform whose name she isn't allowed to mention. Her responsibility: reviewing which offensive videos, pictures and rants need to be removed. It's grueling work. Kayleigh and her colleagues see the most horrifying things on their screens every day, and the platform's guidelines are a

minefield. And yet Kayleigh feels like she's in the right place. She finds kinship with the team of moderators and, when she falls in love with her colleague Sigrid, the future seems bright. Or does it?

*The Things We Saw/ We Had to Remove This Post* is a chilling, powerful and urgent story about who or what determines our worldview, examining the toxic world of content moderators. It explores morality and how our morals are fluid, constantly changing depending on where and with whom we are.

### **Dutch press on *The Things We Saw*:**

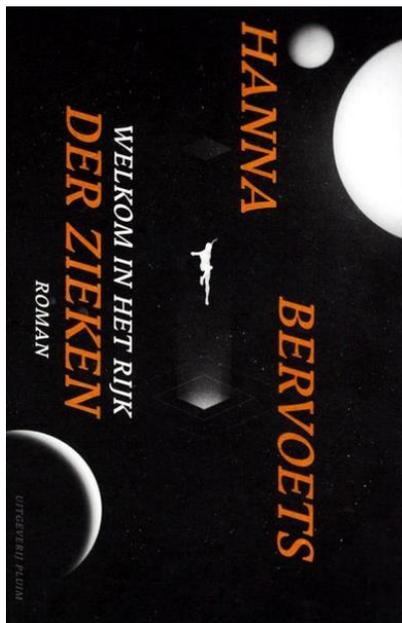
'A hauntingly beautiful novella' – *De Morgen*

'Very strong: the tension never fades' – *Het Parool*

'A must-read' – \*\*\*\*, *Dagblad van het Noorden*

'A socially engaged story that's a good way to get familiar with Bervoets oeuvre'  
– \*\*\*\*, *Boekenkrant*

'A proud manifestation of Dutch literature' – *Opium*



## WELCOME TO THE KINGDOM OF THE ILL

*Uitgeverij Pluim, novel 277 pages, 2019*

*Sold to Random House (Germany), Mondadori (Italy)*

*Nominated for the 'Bookspot Literature Award', 'NRC Boekenwedstrijd' and 'Libris Literature award'.*

When Clay gets infected during an outbreak of Q-fever, the world as he knows it gets turned upside down – quite literally.

First, he develops a fever and fights for his life. When the fever breaks, Clay is relieved. But only for a little while. He keeps feeling exhausted and is plagued by terrible pains. Q-fever fatigue syndrome, doctors tell him. A chronic condition.

Three years after Clay has been diagnosed he wakes up in the Kingdom of the Sick, an Alice in Wonderland-like fantasy world structured by new rules and inverse logic. Citizens of this kingdom wear habits and carry their own body on their back. The woman who finds Clay in the poppy field near the entrance gate turns out to be Susan Sontag: Clays tour guide. Will she show him the way out?

Welcome to the Kingdom of the Sick shifts back and forward between Clay's journey through the Kingdom of the Sick and his gritty memories of the past three years. In his futile search for a cure Clay desperately tries to reconnect with his surroundings, his girl friend Nora and his own body. Doctors tell him he has to 'learn to cope' with his condition, but what does it mean to be a patient in a world that glorifies health?

With *Welcome to the Kingdom of the Sick* Bervoets combines fantasy genre conventions with hard-boiled philosophy in what is maybe the first ever adventure novel on chronic illness.

### **Press on *Welcome to the Kingdom of the Sick***

'Hanna Bervoets perfects her literary laboratory with a story about chronic illness. [...] Full of striking thoughts and observations about the life of the sick.'

– \* \* \* \* , *NRC Handelsblad*

'With *Welcome to the Kingdom of the Sick*, Hanna Bervoets proves how an accessible and recognizable story can be experimental and essayistic at the same time.' – \* \* \* \* , *De Standaard*

'*Welcome to the Kingdom of the Sick* is a novel with a serious undertone and drastic conclusions, but the amazing thing is that Bervoets' story still manages to keep fairly light, through her narrative style and her great imagination.' – *Trouw*

‘\* \* \* \* \*’ – *M’s Boekenpanel*

‘\* \* \* \* \* - *Noord Hollands Dagblad*

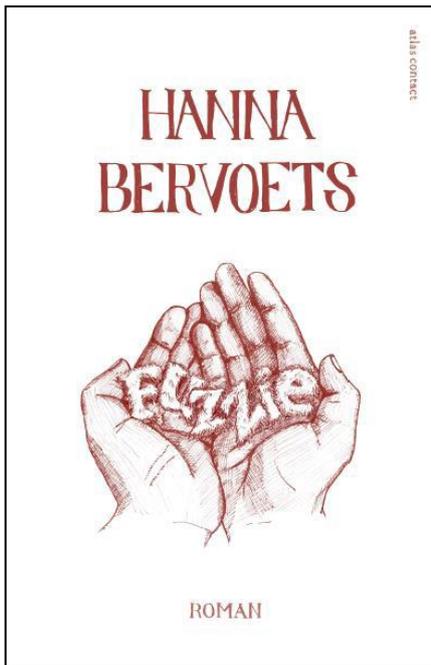
‘*An impressive statement*’ – LINDA.

### **Hanna Bervoets on *Welcome to the Kingdom of the Sick*:**

‘Stories about illness fascinate me. Most fiction (novels, films) on being Sick follows a clear course: the protagonist develops symptoms, weakens, fights for his life and eventually dies, or survives. Such stories are powerful tales on suffering and purpose, but I wondered: where’s the fiction on being *chronically* ill? Stories about patients whose illness won’t defeat them, but who will also never be cured. Stories on people with symptoms they’ll suffer from their entire lives. What kind of story can be told about that?’

*Welcome to the Kingdom of the Sick* is a novel about being ill and never recovering. Ever since I got diagnosed with a connective tissue disorder thirteen years ago I met a lot of people who suffer from chronic illness. They are trying to live their lives while dealing with rheumatism, Lyme disease, chronic pain or the implications of major surgeries or a stay at an ICU. Their diagnoses differ, but their symptoms are alike: chronic pain, chronic fatigue. They suffer from invisible illness. And now the current pandemic threatens to increase this number of chronically ill people; the striking similarities between Q-fever Fatigue Syndrome and the recently discovered Covid Fatigue Syndrome are worrisome

Clay, the protagonist in *Welcome to the Kingdom of the Sick*, is diagnosed with a Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, but his symptoms are similar to those of many different conditions. His quest is not a search for a cure, perhaps it is not even acceptance he’s looking for. Much more, it is an attempt to create a story that fits his new reality.



## FUZZIE

*Atlas Contact, novel 288 pages, 2017*

*Sold to Random House (Germany)*

*11.000 copies sold in The Netherlands*

*Nominated for the ECI Literature Award*

*(Rights handled by Chandler Crawford Agency, Inc)*

One morning in April, Maisie receives a package in the mail. A small cardboard box containing a little white fluffy ball. Maisie holds the ball to her cheek.

‘Well, hi there’ it says: ‘So you’re here at last?’

Elsewhere around the city, several other people are carrying a little ball around. A blue one for Maisie’s broken-hearted ex, Florence. A purple one for retired businessman Diek, who spends his evenings searching the internet for dates.

A pink one for the unemployed Stephan, who no longer gets any joy out of his current relationship, and doesn’t know what to do with his life.

Maisie, Florence, Diek and Stephan all let their little ball guide them. They listen to what their ball tells them, do what it asks of them. They love their fluffy company, because it knows them; yes, it seems to completely understand them – better than anything or anyone else.

Or does it just seem that way?

And where do these little balls come from, anyway?

*Fuzzie* is about four people who are each unhappy in their own way, until they find their Fuzzie. Every day, their ball tells them stories about love, loss, loneliness, relationships – things everyone can relate to. Fuzzie gives their lives a new sense of direction. But can the balls actually function as a substitute for love?

*Fuzzie* is a sharp, modern day fairytale about the mechanisms of affection and the limits of loving.

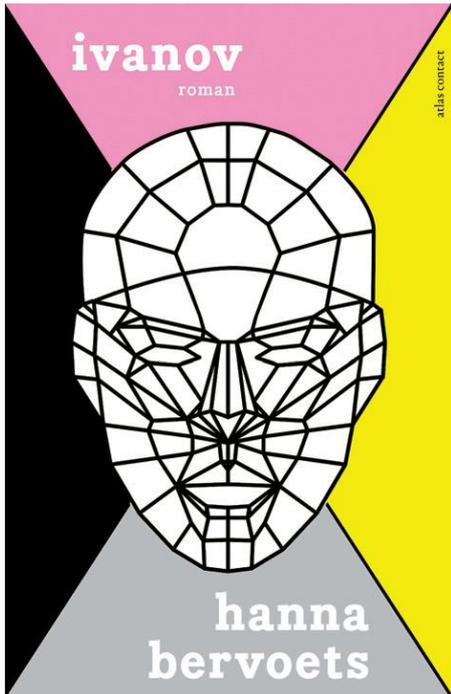
### **Press on *Fuzzie*:**

‘*Fuzzie* reclaims the way we think about affection from the lifestyle gurus. The dream next step in the oeuvre of Hanna Bervoets.’ \* \* \* \* - *NRC Handelsblad*

‘A book that screams: Come here, I’ll cherish you.’ \* \* \* \* - *De Standaard*

‘Once again, Bervoets stretches the boundaries of literature.’ – *De Groene Amsterdammer*

‘Love, but not as you’ve read it thirty times before.’ \* \* \* \* *Het Parool*



## IVANOV

*Atlas Contact 2016, novel 320 pages*  
*Righst sold to Aux Forges de Vulcain (France)*  
*Çaliadam Yayınlar (Turkey)*  
*Won BNG Literature Award.*  
*Nominated for ECI Literature Award, Libris Literature Award, Diorapthe Literatour Award and Bookstores Prize.*

Russia, 1924. Scientist Ilya Ivanov has one dream: he wants to cross human dna with that of a chimpanzee, in order to produce a completely new, hybrid being. With French funding Ivanov travels to Africa to inseminate chimpanzees with human sperm.

America, 1994. Virologist Helena Frank investigates the origins of hiv: her thesis is that aids was transferred from ape to man during Ivanov's experiments.

Felix, a young, gay journalism student, decides to write an article about Helena. As his research progresses, he forms an intense relationship with the professor, to the displeasure of Lois, Helena's younger assistant. Soon, Felix gets caught up in a complex power game with Lois and Helena.

Is Helena using Felix for her experiment or is he using her for his studies? What are the two women hiding? And what role do Ivanov's controversial ideas play in their research?

Bervoets skilfully mixes the bizarre-but-true story of Russian hero Ivanov with Felix's engrossing, poignant memoirs. This makes *Ivanov* a stunning novel about the boundaries we draw to determine who or what we are: perpetrator or victim; friend or parasite; human or animal?

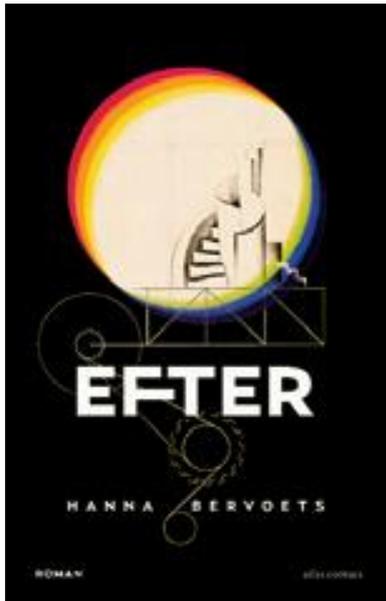
### Press on *Ivanov*:

'A well-done coming-of-age story that reads like a true psychological drama. Bervoets turns a juicy legend into a novel you can chew on for a long time.' – \*\*\*\*, *de Volkskrant*

'Increasingly, Bervoets brings relationships to a head. Never has she been as sharp as in the equally fluent and profound *Ivanov*. Bervoets at her best.' – \*\*\*\*, *NRC Handelsblad*

'This kind of Frankenstein-experiment is just up Bervoets' alley. She's a writer who in a short time has built up a very idiosyncratic body of work, composed of science fiction-like novels of ideas, which are most welcome in our literary landscape. The pleasure of this novel lies primarily in its always surprising, sharp observations, as well as the irresistible narrative skill.' – *Trouw*

'*Ivanov* is literary prize-winning material.' – \*\*\*\*, *De Telegraaf*



## **EFTER**

*Atlas Contact 2013 Fiction, 288 pages  
Movie rights sold to NL Film, currently being made into a television series.*

*Nominated for the Libris Literature Award, Golden Owl Award and Opzij Literature Award*

*Efter* is set in a near future in which doctors and scientists consider being in love to be a mental illness. The health care industry eagerly jumps on this new diagnosis.

Clinics are opened to treat love addiction, and pharmacist Fizzler wants to be the first to bring a cure for being in love on the market: *Efter*.

In *Efter*, we follow various characters involved in the introduction of the drug. The pr-guy who has to introduce *Efter* to market. A teenage girl who falls in love for the first time. A journalist who senses danger. Two young friends in a love rehab.

They all have their own agenda, they all struggle with their own problems and doubts, they all try to bring order into an increasingly chaotic reality. What they don't know is that their individual choices and decisions set a fateful chain of events in motion.

Hanna Bervoets has written a multi-layered, poignant novel about the stories we tell each other to be able to live with ourselves and each other. In *Efter*, the oldest story of all – Love – is radically rewritten.

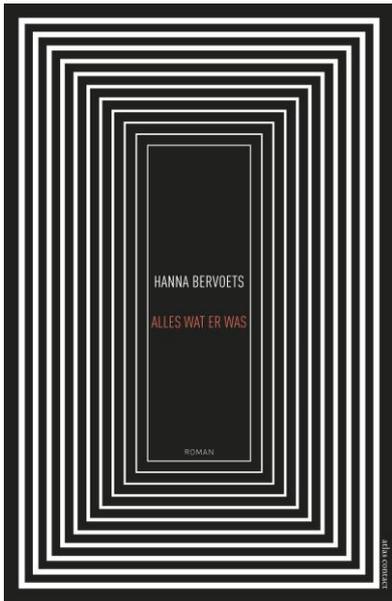
### **Press on *Efter***

'Powerful observations in a trendy narrative style.'

– *de Volkskrant*

'In its coldness a confronting novel. A warning just as actual as *The Circle* by Dave Eggers.'

\*\*\*, *Wegener Dagblad*



## EVERYTHING THERE WAS

*Atlas Contact 2013 Fiction, 288 pages*  
*English e-rights sold to Canelo, pre publication in The Guardian.*

*Nominated for Opzij Literature Award.*  
*13<sup>th</sup> print in 2019.*  
*New Edition for 2020*

One Sunday, eight people gather at a school to record a television programme. But the programme is never made. After a loud bang, the authorities order all windows, doors and curtains to be closed. And to stay closed. For days, then weeks, then months.

Through the eyes of television editor Merel we see the a group of strangers trying to survive in a new world, a world of darkness and isolation, of sleeping on gym mats and living on ten grains of rice a day. As food supplies dwindle, tensions mount.

How do we adapt to a radically new situation? What do we have to give up? And if everything that once was is no more, what do love, loyalty and friendship mean?

In the spring of 2020 Hanna Bervoets' bestseller *Everything There Was* was being hailed as a 'thrilling and soothing' novel, suit for the turbulent times we are currently facing. That is why Publishing House Pluim decided to re-release this modern classic.

### **Press on *Everything There Was***

'This is one truly clever novel. A tragedy unfolds, brutal and hardhitting. Before you know it, the calm, reflective tone has made way for a hallucinatory trip. An uncompromising piece of art' – *De Groene Amsterdammer*

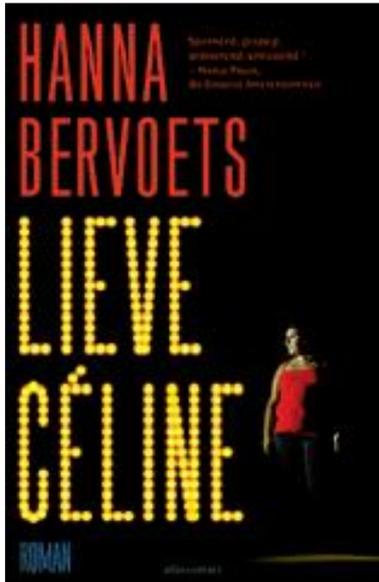
'In *Everything There Was*, Bervoets proves that she really knows what matters.'" – \*\*\*\*, *De Volkskrant*

'Insanely thrilling' – \*\*\*\*, *Metronews*

### **Press on *Everything There Was* after reprint in 2020**

'Now that there is so much attention for books such as *The Plague* of Albert Camus and *The City of the Blind* by José Saramago, it is time to once again read *Everything There Was* by Hanna Bervoets [...] It may seem strange when I say that this book is comforting. Because it is a truly clever book. But also because it makes you ask yourself in our hard times: how would I have done it and above all: how do I do it now?' – Marita Mathijssen, emeritus professor of modern Dutch literature.

'The perfect novel for quarantine!' – Kay Brugmans, *Atheneum.nl*



### DEAR CÉLINE

*Atlas Contact 2011 Fiction, 204 pages*

*Adapted to big screen bij NL film.*

*Won Opzij Literatuurprijs*

Brooke is a young woman of limited ability from Amsterdam-North with a deep passion for singer Céline Dion. After a series of dramatic events, Brooke has only one goal in life: to watch Céline Dion perform.

So she travels to Las Vegas – on her own.

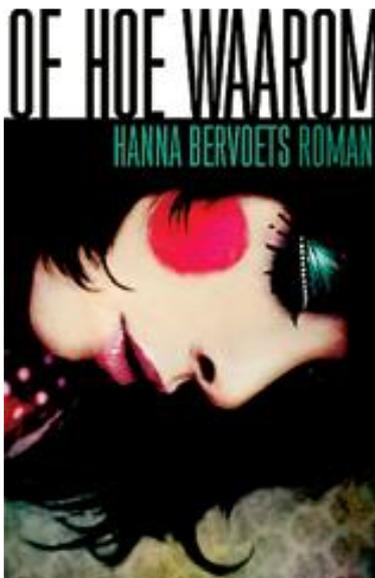
At the airport, Brooke writes eighteen letters to her idol. Brooke tells Céline about her life in Amsterdam, about her mother, her sister, her family home, about the endless stream of tiny Canta cars that drive through her

neighbourhood.

Step by step Brooke reveals her biggest secret.

#### **Press on *Dear Céline***

*'Bervoets creates a world that gradually becomes more absurd and more touching.'* – *NRC Handelsblad*



### IF HOW WHY

*Atlas Contact 2009 Fiction, 190 pages*

*Won HvA Debutant of the year award.*

Flora is a magazine journalist, obsessed by outward appearances and everyday absurdity.

The question is: where does this obsession come from?

#### **Press on *If How Why***

*'Bervoets created with cool humour a real Amsterdam Psychopath.'* – *Elle*

*'A successful debut novel (...) including a parade of amusing characters and tragicomical memories and a hair-raising climax.'* – \* \* \* \* , *Algemeen Dagblad*