

Rink van der Velde

The Trap

A powerful and realistic drama in the style of Hemingway

The central characters in the popular novels of Rink van der Velde are often men who keep as great a distance as possible between themselves and the authorities. The eel fisherman in *The Trap* is no exception. When questioned at the local police station during the Nazi occupation, he has to put up with faked friendliness and gross humiliations to avoid getting his son into difficulties. This is a story with no way of escape.

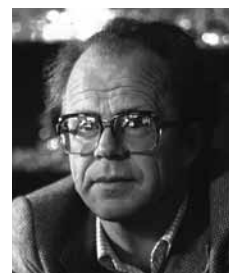
Before he became a fisherman, he got on the wrong side of the police and other authority figures more than once. A couple of times he landed in jail, but since those days he has been forced to marry, moved to an isolated spot by a lake with his wife and child, and started a business there. For his only son's sake he wants to change course. He leads a solitary life, to prevent his smouldering rage against everyone in a position of authority from erupting. His goodwill is being tested now that his son is suspected of involvement in a weapons drop. At the police station they know more

about his son than he does, and they use that advantage to put pressure on him.

The power of this novella lies in the way it links the slumbering conflict between the eel fisherman and authority, the fisherman's instinctive love for his son and the circumstances of the German occupation. It is a combination that produces an unusual wartime novel, a drama in which there is no place for the usual division of roles between good people and bad. The eel fisherman is no resistance hero and certainly no angel, and to him the stuck-up resistance man, with his fine words, is just as distasteful a person as the Dutch civil servant or the German officer who humiliates him.

In the English-language press, Van der Velde's style – intense and realistic but tightly controlled – prompted comparisons with Hemingway. The most striking things about this short novel are indeed the firm hand with which the story is set down, the portrait it paints of the fisherman and the mounting inner tension.

Rink van der Velde (1932-2001) worked as a journalist for a number of newspapers as well as writing a large number of stories and several novels. The characters in his work are generally described with such empathy and humour that they go on to lead a life of their own. Van der Velde is probably the most read and appreciated writer in Friesland. In 1975 he was awarded Friesland's foremost literary prize for his oeuvre as a whole. Many more novels and stories followed. After he died, a literary prize was established in his name, and the houseboat where he often wrote has been made available to writers as a place to work. Since it was first published in 1966, *The Trap* has been reprinted ten times, translated into Dutch three times and made into a film (in 2000). In 1995 an English translation was published that won high praise, and a second English translation appeared in 1997.



Publishing Details

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Translations

The Trap (Redux Publications, 1995;
Sag Harbor: Permanent Press
1997). Also in Ukrainian translation
(*Vsesvit*, 1983) and Dutch
(Wereldbibliotheek, 1970).



**'This is a gem of a novel
with universal appeal'
– *Publisher's Weekly***