

CV

David McKay
Open Book Translation
Literary translator, Dutch to English

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David McKay was born and raised in the United States, holds degrees in philosophy (B.A., Swarthmore, High Honors), linguistics (M.Sc., MIT), and international relations (M.A., Webster, Honors), and has lived in The Hague since 1997.

He translates a **wide range of books** and shorter works, including fiction, literary and popular non-fiction, poetry, and theater. His work has been described as “**dazzlingly lyrical**” (Neel Mukherjee, *The Guardian*).

His **other professional activities** include *evaluating* translation quality for various organizations and *mentoring* emerging translators. He is the ALTA Dutch-English Mentor for the second time in 2023 and is proud to have mentored Eileen Stevens, Kristen Gehrman, Sarah Timmer Harvey, Lucy Scott, Scott Emblen-Jarrett, and most recently Bo-Elise Brummelkamp. Lucy Scott’s translation of Astrid Roemer’s *On a Woman’s Madness*, with David as mentor, was a finalist for the National Book Award 2023.

He was **awarded the Vondel Prize** for his translation of the historical novel *War and Turpentine* by Stefan Hertmans (Harvill Secker/Pantheon), which was **longlisted for the Man Booker Prize International, shortlisted for the Best Translated Book Award**, and featured on top ten lists by major American and British newspapers. His English edition of Hertmans’s novel *The Convert* was a **finalist for the 2020 National Jewish Book Awards**. His recent translation of Hertmans’s *The Ascent* has garnered excellent reviews in the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States. David has also served as a **judge** for a variety of translation prizes.

He co-translated, with Ina Rilke, the new English edition (NYRB Classics, 2019) of Multatuli’s **classic critique of colonialism, *Max Havelaar***, the most influential work in the history of Dutch literature, which was **shortlisted for the Oxford Weidenfeld Prize in 2020**. His translation of *Adrift in the Middle Kingdom*, a classic existential adventure novel by J. Slauerhoff, was the **runner-up for the Vondel Prize 2022**.

His recent work includes the **long-awaited English translation of Anton de Kom's anti-colonial manifesto *We Slaves of Suriname*** (Polity Books), for which he received an **ICM Global South Translation Fellowship 2021** from Cornell University. Renowned author China Miéville chose *We Slaves of Suriname* as his book of the year for 2022: "An astounding work of lyrical fury ... De Kom is a towering radical and anticolonial figure, and this book a painful masterpiece." A room in the renovated Translator's House in Amsterdam has been named after Anton de Kom. See also David's blog about the book here: <https://www.letterenfonds.nl/en/entry/2998/blog-david-mckay>.

He is enthusiastic about creative collaboration, and two of his **co-translations** will be published in 2024: *Revolusi*, a groundbreaking history of the Indonesian Revolution and its worldwide impact, with award-winning translator David Colmer, for Bodley Head, and *Off White* by the acclaimed author Astrid Roemer, a novel about three generations of a Surinamese family that explores the links between national, individual, and family trauma, for Two Lines Press, with National Book Award finalist Lucy Scott.

He is looking into the impact of generative AI models such as ChatGPT on literary translation and is the co-organizer of a round table on the subject for the 2023 ALTA conference.

Selected Recent Publications

For a more comprehensive (but infrequently updated) list, see https://literairvertalen.org/vertalersbestand/david_mckay

Fiction

The Ascent by Stefan Hertmans. Harvill Secker (UK) and Pantheon (US), 2022/2023.

The Aunts by Cyriel Buysse. Snuggly Books (US), 2020.

Adrift in the Middle Kingdom by J. Slauerhoff. Handheld Press, 2019.

Max Havelaar by Multatuli (with Ina Rilke). NYRB Classics, 2019.

Non-fiction

Bold Ventures: Thirteen Tales of Architectural Tragedy by Charlotte van den Broeck. Chatto & Windus, 2022.

Reappraising the History of the Jews in the Netherlands, various authors. Littman Library, 2021.

The Just by Jan Brokken. Scribe, 2021.

Planes by Jan van der Veken (richly illustrated non-fiction for young adults). Prestel Publishing, 2021.

How to Find a Higgs Boson by Ivo van Vulpen. Yale University Press, 2020.

Poetry

Poems by M. Vasalis in various online and print journals, including *Modern Poetry in Translation* and *The Enchanting Verses Literary Review*. 2018. See, for example: https://www.poetryinternational.com/en/poets-poems/poems/poem/103-30161_TIJD

Poems by the Frisian poet Elske Kampen, on the Poetry International website. See also here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuE37RSSfJA>.

Theater

The Wetsuitman by Freek Mariën, produced by Foreign Affairs (London, UK, 2022/2023) and The Cherry Arts (Ithaca, NY, USA, 2022). Published in *The Mercurian* in the autumn of 2021. A **Eurodram selection for 2023**.

HIDE by Anna Carlier; excerpt published in *Asymptote* in the autumn of 2021: <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/drama/hide-anna-carlier/>

The Polish Bride by Jibbe Willems; excerpt published in *Asymptote* in the spring of 2023: <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/drama/the-polish-bride-jibbe-willems/>

Online readings

David can be found reading on the Translators Aloud YouTube channel (and elsewhere on the internet). See, for example, <https://youtu.be/2IBR91Mh9yw> and <https://youtu.be/5Xk65yJ5DOA>.