MOEYAERT DOES NOT PRESENT HIS READERS WITH THE WORLD IN BITE-SIZED CHUNKS. TIME AND AGAIN, HE DEMONSTRATES HOW IMPORTANT IT IS FOR LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS TO SHOW ALL FOUR CORNERS OF THE ROOM, NOT JUST THE MIDDLE, WHERE THE KIDS’ PLAY MAT IS. ALL THE CORNERS. INCLUDING THE DARK ONES. 

LYDIA KOKKOLA, BOOKBIRD

BIOGRAPHY BART MOEYAERT

THE SHORT VERSION

Since his debut in 1983, Bart Moeyaert’s books, plays and poetry have been discovered by readers of all ages, giving him a place all of his own within Dutch literature. His best-known titles include Blote handen (Bare Hands), Het is de liefde die we niet begrijpen (It’s Love We Don’t Understand), Broere (Brothers), De Schepping (Creation) and the poetry anthology Verzamel de liefde (Collecting Love).

Bart Moeyaert was born in Bruges, where he grew up as the youngest of seven brothers. He attended the Kunsthumaniora artistic high school in Ghent, after which he went on to study Dutch, German and history in Brussels. Until 1995, Moeyaert was the editor of a magazine for young people. Then he turned to writing as a full-time career. Critics have called his work poetic, cinematic, sensual. His books have won many awards both at home and abroad, and have been translated into more than twenty languages. Bart Moeyaert has also written plays, screenplays and song lyrics, and often appears on stage himself, including as a narrator in his trilogy about life, which he created in collaboration with the Nederlands Blazers Ensemble.

In 2014, the Dutch Foundation for Literature and the Flemish Literature Fund appointed Moeyaert as the artistic director of the Frankfurt 2016 project, when Flanders and the Netherlands will be joint guests of honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair.
Bart Moeyaert’s mother was born on 18 January 1926: Henriette Smessaert, the only daughter of the gardener and the caretaker at Kasteel Gruuthuse, a castle in Oostkamp, in the Belgian province of West Flanders. Bart’s father, Omer Moeyaert, was born a stone’s throw away from the castle, on 14 January 1927, the second son of a railway construction crew foreman and the manageress of a shoe shop. On 1 August 1950, Henriette, a chambermaid, and Omer, a teacher, got married. They lived for some time at Kasteel Gruuthuse, before later moving to the house they built in Bruges.

On 9 June 1964, the seventh son of Omer Moeyaert and Henriette Smessaert was born: Bart Boudewijn Peter. It was morning, twenty to eight. He was the seventh son in a row. A gift was sent from the Royal Palace. It was delivered specially: a golden cup and a golden spoon engraved with a crown and the letter B. There was some discussion about the letter. The engraved letter was the B for King Boudewijn. But perhaps it was also B for Bart. The tradition in Belgium is that the seventh son in a row automatically has the king as his godfather.

On 1 September 1970, Bart went to school for the first time. He had a book for practising his reading. In the opening chapter of Pietertje Broms jeugdjaren (Pietertje Brom’s Childhood Years) by J.P. Baljé, he underlined every word in pencil, leaving out the words of three syllables, as they were too difficult. He knew the alphabet had power. Following the example of Pietertje Brom, Bart went out to catch frogs, armed with a bucket that was far too big. He didn’t realize that the book was from a time when streams were still teeming with frogs and sticklebacks. The ditch near his house was black and dead. His catch of zero proved it: life in books was rich and big and so much more interesting than real life.

In June 1974, Bart published his first house newspaper, seven copies, all typed out. A year later, he wrote his first long story — which he called a book. In 1978, he took two steps at once: on 18 June he read out his poem “Treurlied om de Schepping” (Elegy to Creation) on the Hartewens show on Belgian Radio 2. On 27 June, Stipkrant, the children’s section of De Standaard, published the poem “Kwaak!” (Quack!), written by Michiel Verberne. Bart was delighted, but regretted using a pseudonym, as no one believed the poem was his.
Bart’s diary had its first and only mention of “the book that’s finished” on 7 November 1980. The book in question, *Duet met valse noten* (*Off-Key Duet*), came out on 1 October 1983. Four months after publication, the book was already being reprinted. At that point, Bart Moeyaert was still at school. He left the Kunsthumaniora artistic high school in Ghent, and went on to study Dutch, German and history in Brussels. *Duet met valse noten* won awards, was translated, and was given a new life as a musical. The book became a modern classic.

After his studies, he moved from Brussels to Antwerp — to Nieuwstad 14, the address that would later become a poem. Bart’s house overlooked the theatre where his *Kus me* (*Kiss Me, 1994*), *Broere* (*Brothers, 2000*), *Bremen is niet ver* (*Bremen Isn’t Far, 2001*) and *Café Geluk* (*Café Happiness, 2007*) would later appear on the posters. He worked freelance for the magazine *Flair*, reviewed children’s books and translated articles. He wrote an extended article for the magazine about the life of Astrid Lindgren, and made his debut as a translator from German with *Der neue Pinocchio* by Christine Nöstlinger. More translations followed, from German (Jürg Schubiger), French (Frédéric Clément, Chris Donner) and English (Carolyn Coman).

In 1992 Bart Moeyaert became the editor of a magazine for young people. Three years later, he decided to dedicate himself full-time to writing. He left the publishing house where he had made his debut and moved to Querido, where *Blote handen* (*Bare Hands*) was published in 1995. The book has been translated into eight languages, winning many awards (including the Zilveren Griffel, the Boekenleeuw and the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis), and marking the beginning of a new phase in Bart’s work.

After 1995, Bart Moeyaert no longer restricted himself to fiction alone. *De Standaard Magazine* commissioned him to write in-depth articles about design, two of his television screenplays were filmed, in 1998 he worked with Joke van Leeuwen to create a theatre programme as part of the “Geletterde Mensen” series, and he wrote his first play for Theater Luxemburg, *Rover, dronkeman* (*Robber, drunkard*), which was later translated and also performed in German. When, in 2000, Bart trod the boards with the stories from *Broere* (*Brothers*), it felt like a gift: the audience was as diverse as he’d always dreamed of.
Bart appeared on stage more and more frequently: occasionally as an actor — as, for example, in *Bremen is niet ver (Bremen Isn't Far)*, but usually as a narrator: in 2004 he presented *De Schepping (Creation)*, with the Nederlands Blazers Ensemble, the first part of a trilogy, which was followed by the second part (*Het Paradijs/Paradise*) in 2010, and finally by *De Hemel (Heaven)* in 2015. He has been invited by various bodies to undertake reading tours in different countries, following his books on a journey around the world, to places including South Africa, Suriname, Japan, Sweden, Canada, Italy, France, and the German-speaking countries.

Bart Moeyaert made a surprising debut as a poet in 2003 with *Verzamel de liefde (Collecting Love)*. Three years later, Bart was appointed as the city poet of Antwerp for two years. He received an honorary doctorate from the University of Antwerp. His work as city poet resulted in the anthology *Gedichten voor gelukkige mensen (Poems for Happy People)* in 2008. After his period as city poet, Bart deliberately chose to spend some time out of the limelight.

In 2003, Bart became the head tutor on the writing course at the Royal Conservatoire in Antwerp. His novella *Graz*, which the Stan theatre group also produced on stage as a monologue upon its publication in March 2009, received an extremely positive response from critics, and became something of an insider tip. At the request of violinist Janine Jansen, Bart adapted *L’Histoire du Soldat* in 2011, the story by Ramuz that Stravinsky based his composition on. The result was *Iemands lief (Someone’s Sweetheart)*.

The compilation *Jij en ik en alle andere kinderen (You and Me and All the Other Children)*, marked Bart Moeyaert’s thirty years as a writer. The year 2013 was all about the celebration of this anniversary. A year later, Bart Moeyaert was appointed as the artistic director of the Netherlands’ and Flanders’ guest-of-honour programme at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2016. He developed the concept for this large project, mapping the Dutch-speaking regions from a literary and cultural point of view.

In January 2015, Bart, with the Nederlands Blazers Ensemble, concluded the trilogy that he began with *De Schepping (Creation)* and continued with *Het Paradijs (Paradise)*. The
third part is *De Hemel (Heaven)*. A plan to perform the three parts in 2016 at various locations on one single day is currently taking shape.