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Annie M.G. Schmidt

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1911 - 1995

Annie M.G. Schmidt

Going against the grain of a bourgeois country

“Never do what your mother tells you to do, then everything will be alright.” These words are typical of the Dutch writer Annie M.G. Schmidt. They are a fine example of why so many of her verses, songs, books, plays, musicals and radio plays are both sparkling fresh and comically rebellious.

Annie was born in Zuid-Beveland in 1911. The daughter of a clergyman, she was a precocious child, and she examined the world around her with a somewhat surprised look in her eyes. She wrote her first verses of poetry when she was fourteen. After World War II, she went to work for the Amsterdam newspaper *Het Parool*, where she met the illustrator Fiep Westendorp. From 1952 to 1957 they worked together on a series of children’s

stories about a boy and a girl, Jip and Janneke [Jim and Jennifer], that were published each day in the newspaper. This marked the beginning of a lifelong collaboration that resulted in books such as *Pluk van de Petteflet*, *Otje* and *Floddertje*.

In the 1950s, Annie had enormous success with her fortnightly radio series *De familie Doorsnee* [The Average Family]. Everyone in the Netherlands listened to the series, regardless of which socio-political group they belonged to. The ups and downs of this family portrayed the contemporary life of Dutch families after the war. Annie also captured the spirit of the times in other works like her lyrics for cabaret shows and later in musicals. Her first television series “*Pension Hommeles*” [Bicker’s Boarding House] was screened

and was followed by the legendary series “*Ja zuster, nee zuster*” [Yes, sister, No, sister], that was adapted for the big screen in 2002. Annie M.G. Schmidt’s rebellious texts made her one of the most influential, and at the same time most gentle critics of the respectable, bourgeois and pillarised Netherlands.

Through her work, Annie M.G. Schmidt inspired many children and adults. Millions of copies of *Jip en Janneke* alone have been sold and her writing has been

translated into numerous languages. Her publisher referred to her as “the true Queen of the Netherlands”. When he asked her to hold a book-signing session at the *Uitmarkt* in Amsterdam, the organisers asked him to never do it again: the narrow lanes and alleys of Amsterdam could not cope with the crowds and congestion. The secret of her success? “I have always been eight years old. And I actually write for myself. I think that is the point. I am eight.”



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Sub-topics

Primary education sector

Children’s and young people’s literature (by other authors too)

The language of Annie Schmidt (note, for example, the rhymes!)

From Annie’s texts to illustrations, music, musicals and films

Secondary education sector

Cabaret in the Netherlands

“*Nozems*”, “*Provos*” and the anti-authoritarian 1960s
Commercial business and young people
(Annie merchandising)

Past and Present

What do parents and grand-parents remember about Annie Schmidt?

In the Treasure Chest

Pluk van de Petteflet

References

Places to Go

The Hague: Literary Museum (with a large children’s section!)

Local library

Books for young people

The works of Annie M.G. Schmidt

Background literature

Annie M.G. Schmidt, *Wat ik nog weet*. Amsterdam 1992

Annejet van der Zijl, *Anna*, Amsterdam, 2003

Harry Bekkering et al. (ed.), *De hele Bibelebontse berg*, Amsterdam 1990 (history of Dutch children’s literature)

Websites

www.annie-mg.com