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Books

The Twin a slow but effective tale of family and duty

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The Twin, Gerbrand Bakker (translated by David Colmer), Scribe, \$29.95

THERE is a yearning quality about the restrained, perambulating but elegant prose of *The Twin*, which has its setting in the cold, wet, Dutch platteland.

This is a story of loss and frustrated ambition.

One twin brother, Henk, dies in a tragic accident; the other, Helmer, is obliged to leave his university studies and return to the family farm. Now middle-aged, Helmer is also left to care for his dying father – who had always favoured Henk – and to take charge of his own life at last.

The sense of place is as important to this story as the characters, whose lives unfold in the minutiae of details about day-to-day life on the farm.

Though the pace is slow, a kind of urgency builds up as the relationship between father and son is delineated through dialogue that has an authentic ring to it.

Other characters are also important to this story, which gives an intimate picture of the connectedness of the lives of people who live off the land: Ada, Helmer's neighbour with her two sons, Jaap, the farm labourer and the people who come to the dairy on business.

When Riet, who was not only Henk's fiance nearly 40 years ago, but the driver in the car accident which killed him, turns up to see Helmer, life will never be the same again.

Shortlisted for the 2007 Libris Literature Prize, *The Twin* is a moving meditation on life and the ties that bind us to each other and to what we perceive as our duty.

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