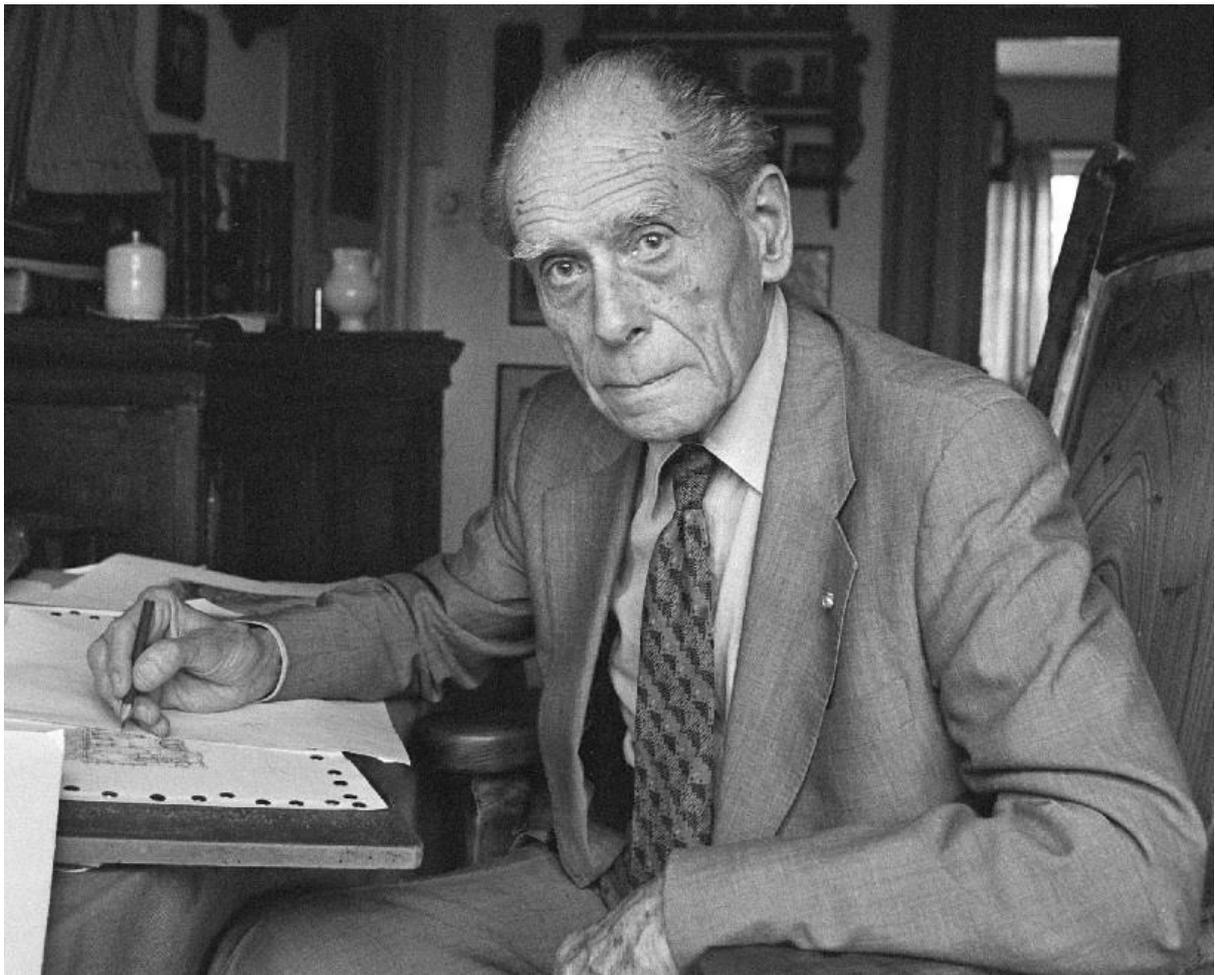


Anton Pieck

Anton Pieck (1895-1987) was a Dutch painter, engraver, illustrator and etcher whose work, though dismissed by the cognoscenti as derivative and kitsch, remains popular to this day.¹ In the period 1960 to 1978 he provided the artwork for six of Winston Graham's Poldark novels in Dutch translation, including an edition of *Ross Poldark* which is unique among the hundreds of titles that bear WG's name.



Anton Pieck in 1980

Though Pieck's career spanned most of the twentieth century, his art does not reflect its time. Rather, his paintings and drawings, whilst showcasing both his accomplished draftsmanship and distinctive, instantly recognisable style, recall an idealised, romantic past.

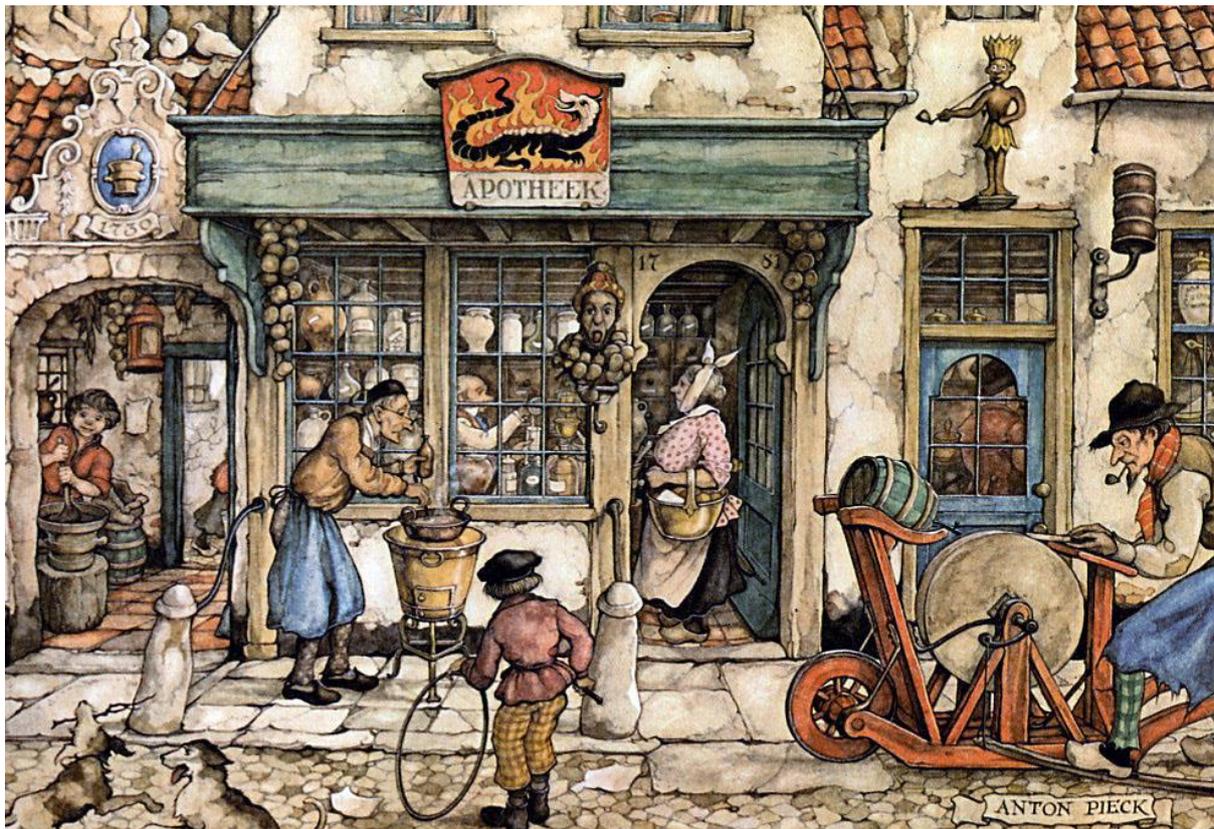
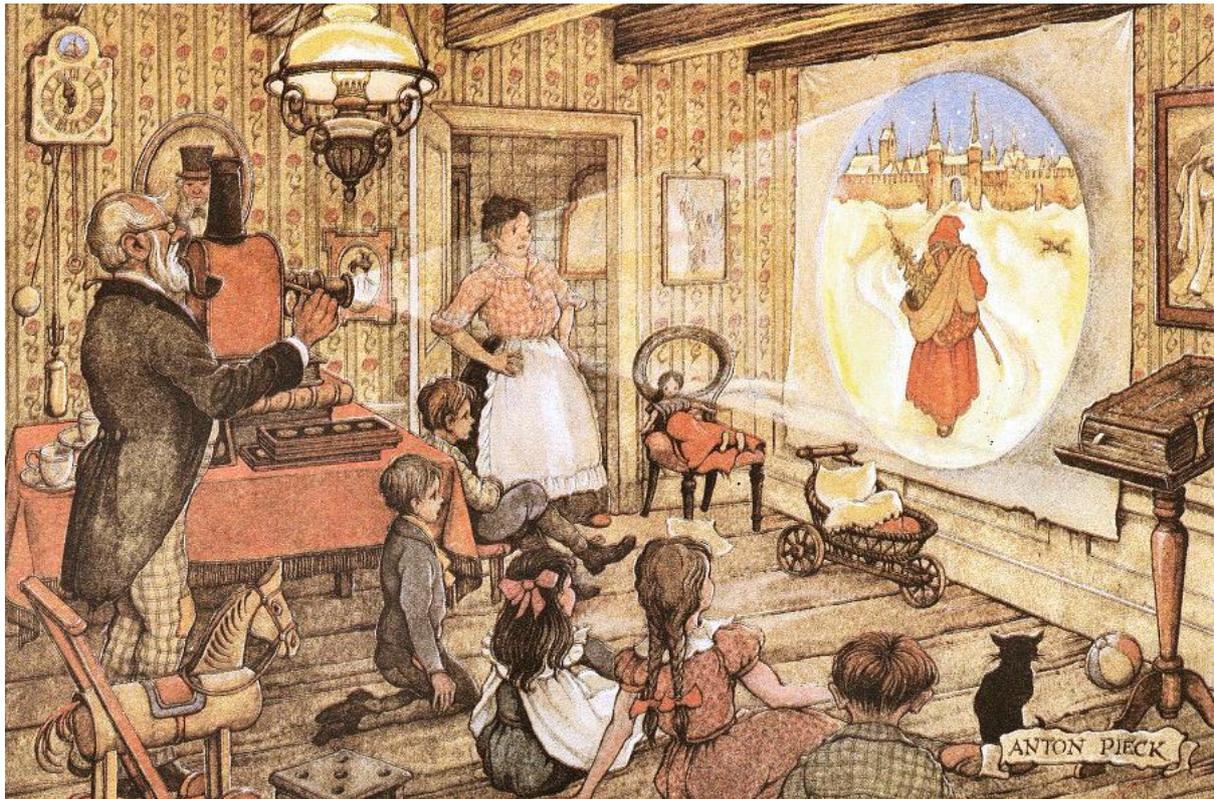
Anton Franciscus Pieck was born in Den Helder, a remote coastal community forty miles north of Amsterdam, in 1895. His father was employed by

the Royal Dutch Marine and his mother was a housewife. After studying at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and the Bik en Vaandrager Institute, both in Den Haag, Pieck stayed on after graduation at the latter school to become an art teacher.

Although the Netherlands remained neutral during the Great War, many Dutchmen, Pieck included, were mobilised to be on standby in case of conflict. Though made a sergeant, he spent most of his spare time drawing for his fellow recruits. A 1915 army report described him as "one who looks more at the past than the future and will therefore never amount to anything." Under the realisation that he was unsuited for ordinary military life, Pieck was sent to Den Haag, where he gave drawing lessons to other soldiers, enabling him to spend his time doing what he loved best. After the war he resumed teaching art at the Kennemer Lyceum in Overveen, Bloemendaal, a job he held until his retirement in 1960, even though it never quite fulfilled him – for, after school, he couldn't wait to dash home to draw and paint. But the position ensured his financial stability; it also enabled him to accept only those commissions which pleased him, rather than having to sweat over work he disliked. As well as teaching, he also illustrated diplomas, bulletins and a range of other documents for the school.

In the 1920s Pieck published his first drawings. He struck up a friendship with Felix Timmermans (1886-1947), a Flemish novelist and painter whose jovial outlook convinced him to become more spontaneous and follow his own spirit. Pieck illustrated Timmermans' signature novel *Pallieter* (1916; "a cheerful sketch of Flemish rural life") after visiting Flanders to absorb the local atmosphere. Pieck remained an enthusiastic traveller all his life, visiting England, France, Ireland, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Poland and Morocco to make sketches. Yet he had no interest in modern architecture – he looked instead at nature and picturesque towns and villages. Pieck always regarded Belgium and Great Britain as his second mother countries because, less modern than The Netherlands, they better suited his anachronistic bent. Despite having lived through only five years of the nineteenth century, Pieck was strongly drawn to this bygone age. He made countless paintings, drawings, etchings and engravings depicting Dickensian scenes. People in high hats or crinolines taking a coach ride, watching a magic lantern show or listening to a barrel organ or chamber





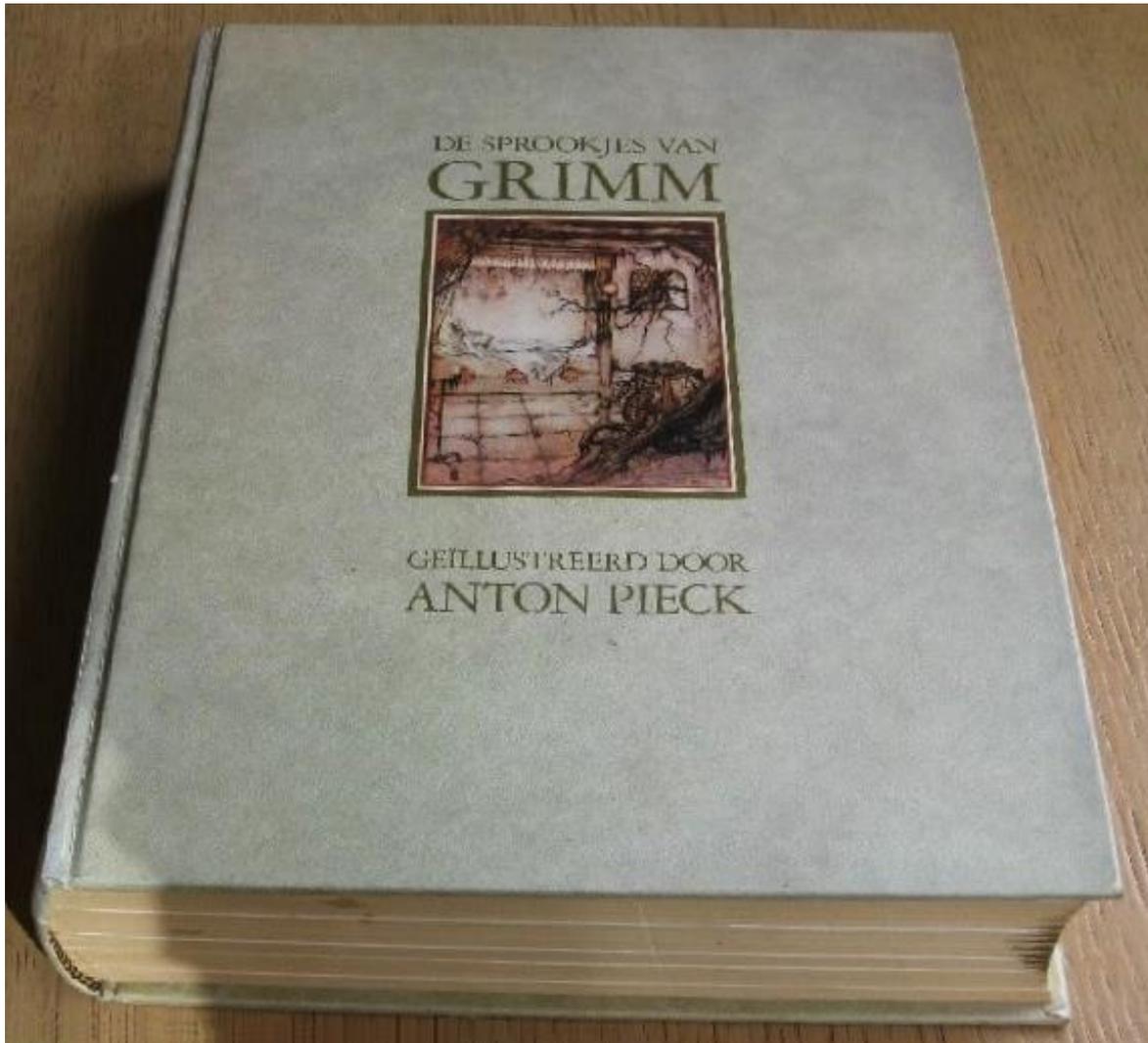
music all contributed to his artistic ideal. He only accepted commissions which allowed him to illustrate novels or stories set in some past time, such as Hildebrand's *Camera Obscura*, Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* or WG's *Ross*

Poldark. Above all he was sensitive to atmosphere. Everything that seemed ancient appealed to him. His buildings, stairs, roads and wells all had to look crooked, crumbling, touched by decay – nothing in his art was allowed to appear new or stand straight.

Although he lived long enough to experience the 1980s, the nature of Pieck's work led many to assume he was a nineteenth century artist long since dead – yet it was true that Pieck himself felt that he lived in the wrong century. For modern art, architecture or technology he had no time. He never owned a car, radio or television and even made all his own prints by hand, using an authentic, manually-operated press kept in his home. Pieck regretted that so many old buildings were pulled down in favour of more contemporary structures devoid of any character. In his opinion, people in the past spent more time crafting beautiful buildings because they felt a much stronger attachment to place. Conversely, once the arrival of cars, highways and railways facilitated long-distance travel, it became less important that "home" should look or be made nice. Yet Pieck wasn't completely out-of-touch – for instance, he had tremendous respect for the work of Walt Disney and Norman Rockwell. But mostly he dwelt in his own world of dreams, in a sentimental, anodyne, vividly imagined past he was able to replicate so strikingly on paper.

Pieck's most acclaimed illustrations appeared in *Grimm's Fairy Tales* (1940 – see next page) and *The Arabian Nights* (eight volumes, 1943-56). In preparing for the latter monumental undertaking, the artist spent six weeks in Morocco sketching local people, buildings and scenes to evoke a convincing Middle Eastern setting.

His work on *Grimm's* led directly to Pieck's most famous contribution to Dutch popular culture: the fantasy-themed amusement park, De Efteling. When it opened in May 1952 at Kaatsheuvel, a small village between Rotterdam and Eindhoven, it became (three years before Disneyland) one of the first of its kind anywhere.² Pieck personally designed all the houses, buildings and animatronic installations in the park's Fairytale Forest, including Little Red Riding Hood at her Grandma's House, Hansel and Gretel's Gingerbread House and Sleeping Beauty's Castle. De Efteling quickly became and remains (as of 2022) Benelux's biggest and most-visited theme park.



Anton Pieck was extraordinarily popular during his lifetime. In 1938 he started designing Christmas cards for the children's benefit organisation Voor het Kind (For the Child), which sold well not only at home but also in the United States. This led to a huge industry predicated on the production and marketing of greeting cards, calendars and puzzles adorned with his art. Sales remain healthy, even though many buyers are too young to have experienced the era evoked by the works themselves. Pieck is so beloved in his homeland that in 2004, seventeen years after his death, he came 81st in a poll to find "The Greatest Dutchman".

At the same time Pieck was and often still is derided by critics and sophisticates who disdain his work as insubstantial and regard De Efteling as a monument to mediocrity. And it is true that, though a fine craftsman, Pieck was never an innovator and had no interest in any of the more groundbreaking art movements of his time. His work is cosy, nostalgic,

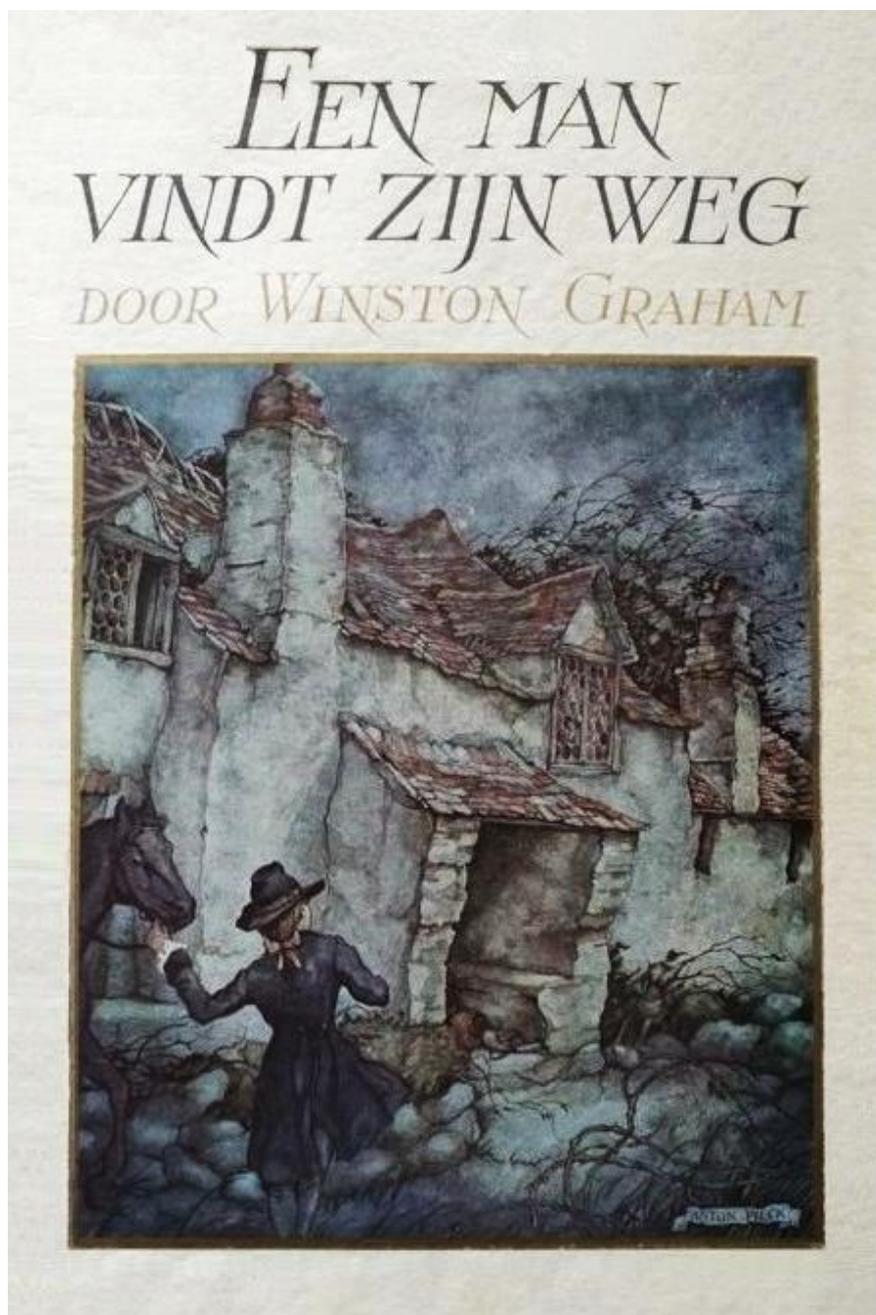
unprovocative, lacking in drama and devoid of any message. He never once made a self portrait and the commercialisation of his work naturally did his artistic standing little good. When in 2004 Dutch magazine *HP/De Tijd* parodied "The Greatest Dutchman" poll by running another to find "The Worst Dutchman", Pieck was one of their 100 nominees, though not voted into the final list.

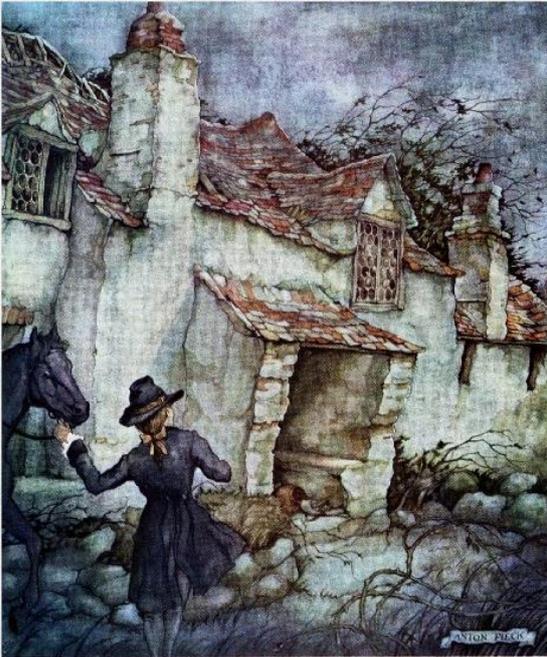
Still, Pieck merely wanted to draw and paint for his own enjoyment. As he pointed out, many artists in previous centuries wished only to create fine work, unaware that it would ever be judged as "art". Ignoring his critics, he worked steadily on throughout his long, quiet, productive life. Polarising as his output may be, nobody can deny that he was a gifted artist whose style may justifiably be termed Pieckian – for little other work is more instantly recognisable. Indeed, some has historical importance, for Pieck sketched numerous towns, streets, villages and landscapes before modernisation changed them forever. And while his work may lack any deliberate socially conscious message, Pieck did put his talent to good use during World War II, when he counterfeited official documents for use by the Resistance at the risk of his life. He also hid Jewish refugees in his home and had the audacity to refuse to become a member of the Nazi-controlled *Kulturkamer* (Chamber of Arts and Culture), even though many other artists were forced to do so at the time. In recognition of these acts, Pieck was decorated in 1960 as a Knight and in 1980 as an Officer in the Order of Orange-Nassau. He received other honours too: in 1977 he was asked to design an official stamp for the Dutch Post Office, in 1983 a bronze statue of his head was unveiled at Overveen and a year later his own museum opened in Hattem. Anton Pieck kept working until the day he died, on 24 November 1987, aged 92.

Though more a commercial than a high artist – and perhaps for that very reason – Pieck's popularity persists. De Efteling still attracts many visitors; so, too, Hattem's museum, where a range of his work and personal effects can be seen. His books, paintings and drawings are still regularly reprinted, which all goes to show that, as he surely understood, while the present fades all too soon, the past endures.

* * * * *

In 1960, Den Haag publisher ZHUM (Zuid-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij or South Holland Publishing Company) issued the first Poldark novel in Dutch translation – a handsome hardback edition of *Ross Poldark* translated by Hans de Vries and retitled *Een Man Vindt Zijn Weg* (*A Man Finds His Way*), with artwork provided by Anton Pieck. This comprised a painting featured prominently on the dust jacket (below) and reprised as a full-colour frontispiece, a distinctive motif embossed on the book's front board and twelve drawings (nine full-page and three half-page) placed throughout the text, to render a presentation of WG's fiction quite unlike any other.





Frontispiece

WINSTON GRAHAM

EEN MAN VINDT ZIJN WEG

Een romantisch leven in Cornwall

*

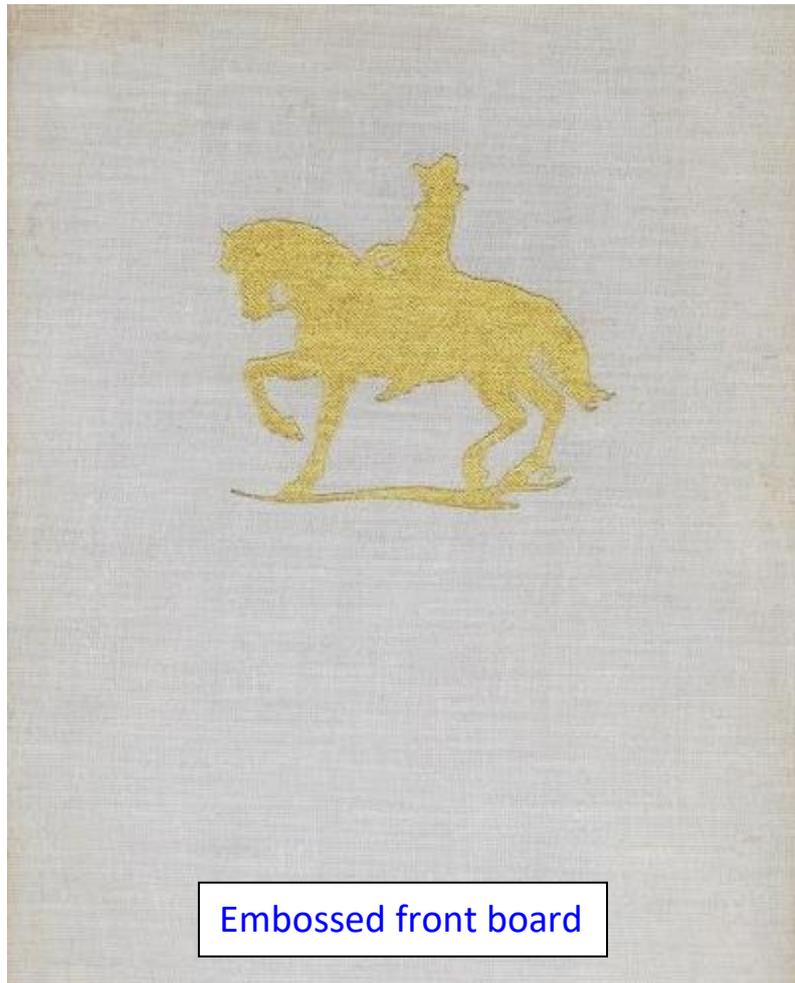
Geautoriseerde vertaling van

HANS DE VRIES



AD. M. C. STOK

ZUID-HOLLANDSCHE UITGEVERS MAATSCHAPPIJ — DEN HAAG



Embossed front board



This is the original drawing – india ink on paper, from 1945 – which provided the motif embossed onto the front boards of both *Een Man Vindt Zijn Weg* and *Bij Donkere Maan* (see page 21). It was offered for sale in 2018 and made €375.

On pages 11-20 below are the twelve Anton Pieck drawings featured in ZHUM's 1960 edition of *Een Man Vindt Zijn Weg*



"The Red Lion, Truro"







"Trenwith"



"The library"

First below: "Lady Whitworth and Mrs Teague"





De oude heer Treneglos
Anton Pieck

"Old Mr Treneglos"







* * * * *

In due course, ZHUM produced five more hardback editions of Poldark novels, namely:

(2) *Demelza, Mijn Vrouw* i.e. *Demelza* translated by Hans de Vries as *Demelza, My Wife* (1963)

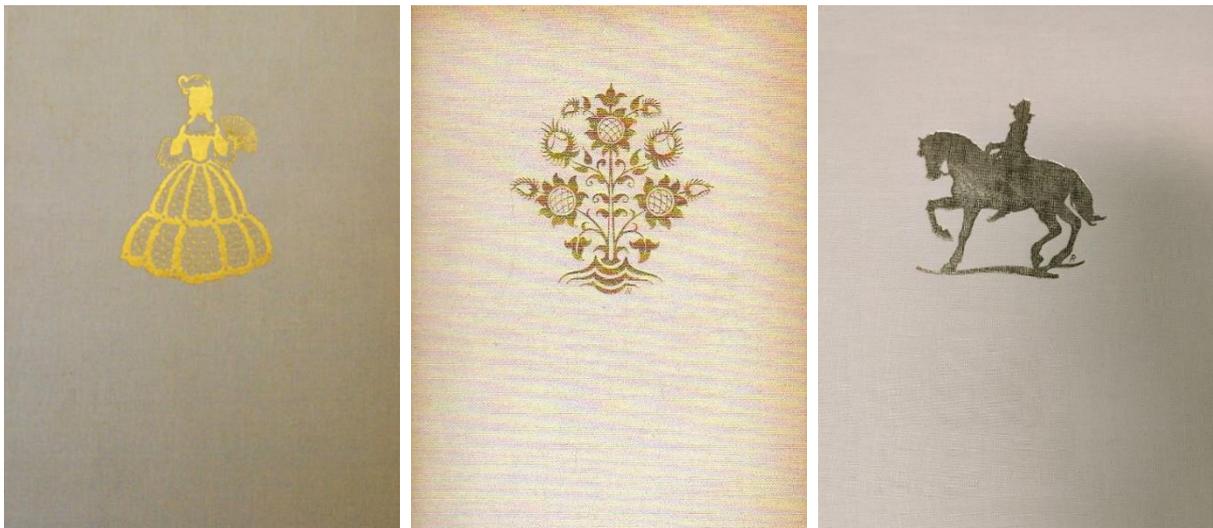
(3) *Op Leven en Dood* i.e. *Jeremy Poldark* translated by Hans de Vries as *On Life and Death* (1965)

(4) *Storm en Zegepraal* i.e. *Warleggan* translated by Puck Doyer as *Storm and Triumph* (1967)

(5) *Bij Donkere Maan* i.e. *The Black Moon* translated by Hans de Vries as *By the Dark Moon* (1976) and

(6) *Als Een Stormwind in de Nacht* i.e. *The Four Swans* translated by Marianne Minier as *Like a Storm in the Night* (1978)

None include illustrations within the text, the fifth and sixth lack a frontispiece and the sixth an embossed front board also – but Pieck's artwork still features on the dust jackets of all. [Note: *The Angry Tide* – third Poldark novel of the '70s trilogy and seventh over all – was not published by ZHUM or anyone else in Dutch translation.]

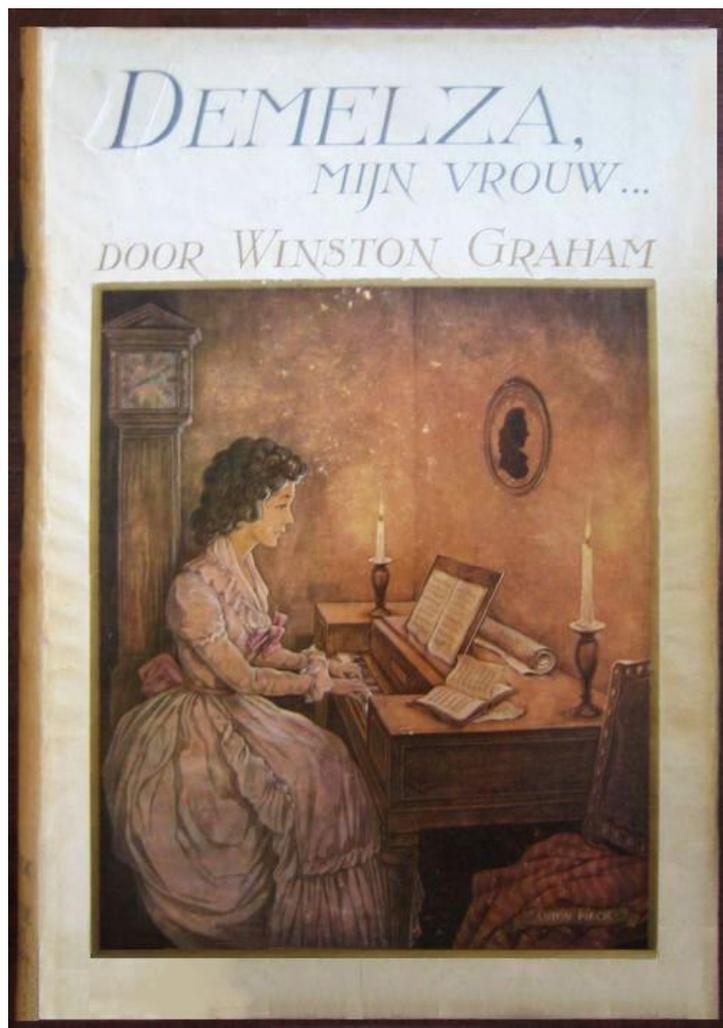
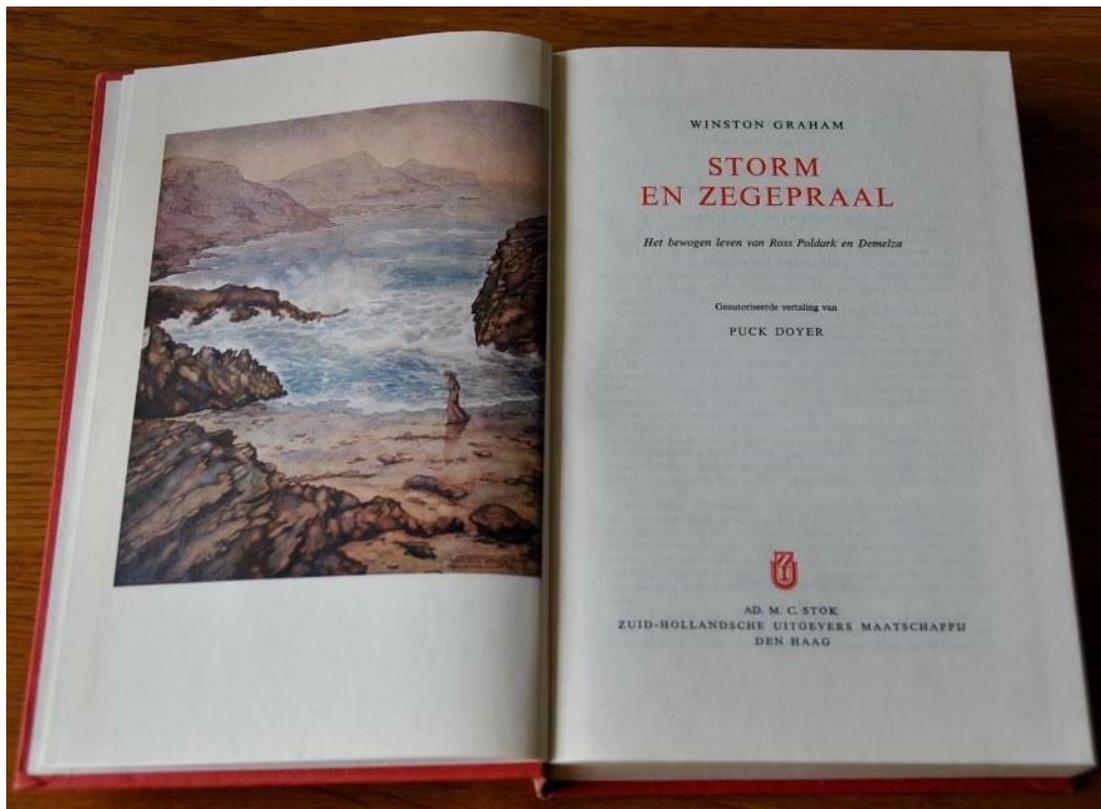


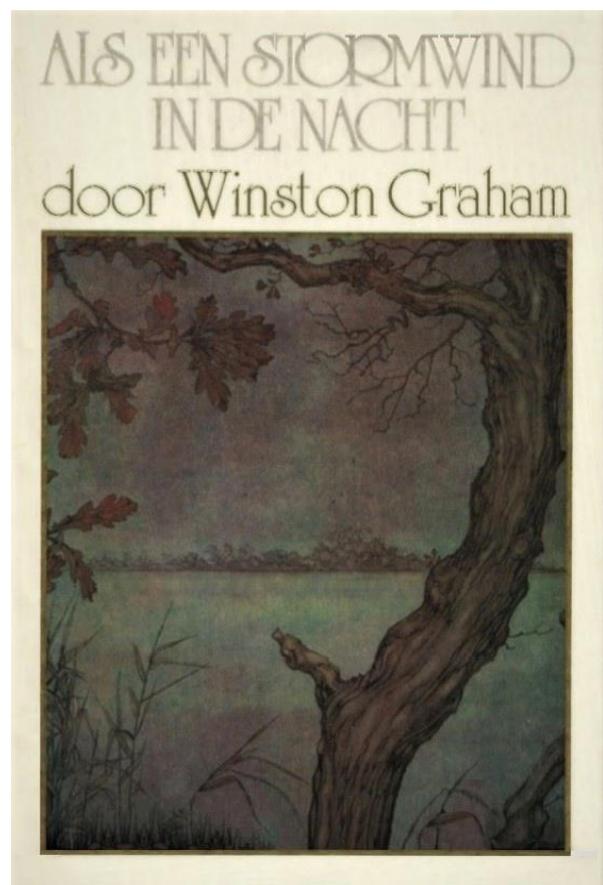
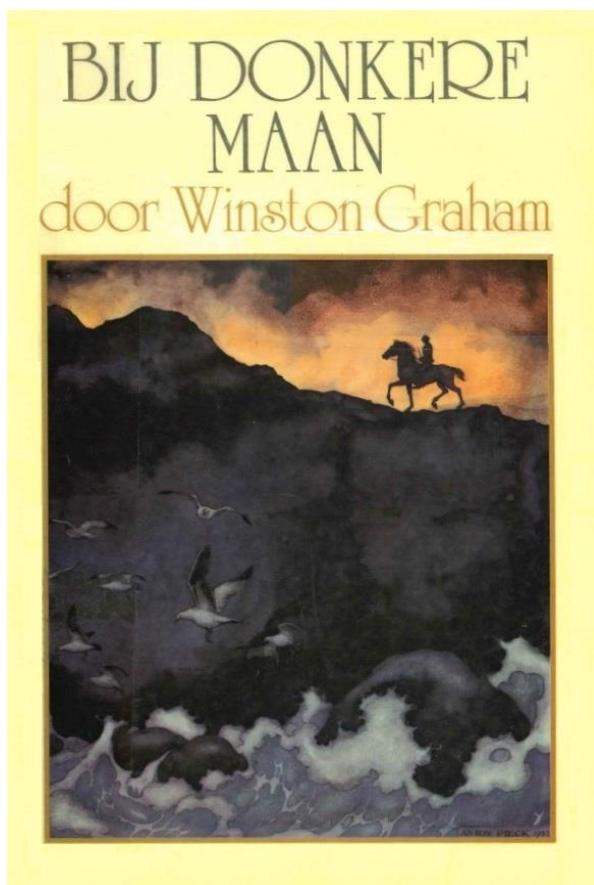
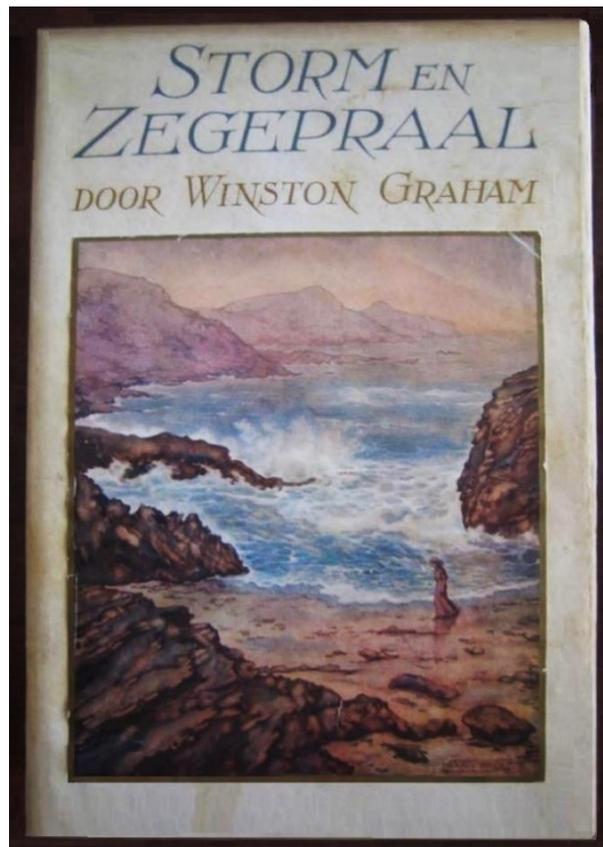
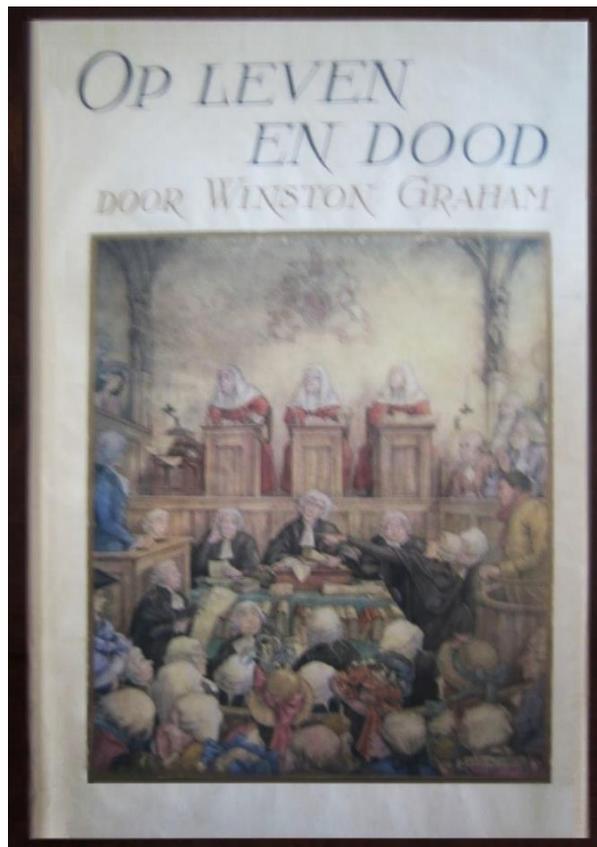
(2), (4) and (5) – front boards



(2) – frontispiece

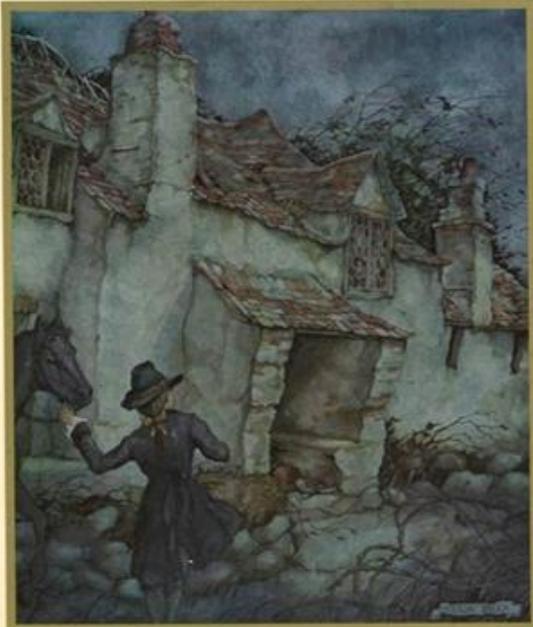
Next page (top): (4) – frontispiece and title page
(bottom): (2) – front cover





(3) to (6) – front covers. Copies of *Als Een Stormwind...* are rare

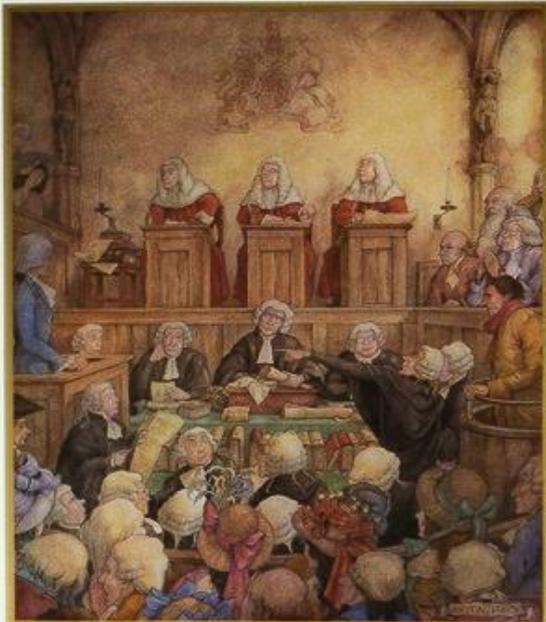
EEN MAN
VINDT ZIJN WEG
DOOR WINSTON GRAHAM



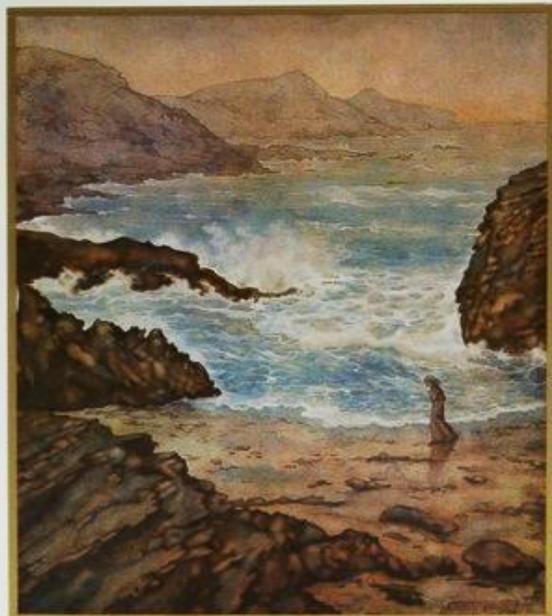
DEMELZA,
MIJN VROUW...
DOOR WINSTON GRAHAM



OP LEVEN
EN DOOD
DOOR WINSTON GRAHAM



STORM EN
ZEGEPRAAL
DOOR WINSTON GRAHAM



When ZHUM republished the first four titles in paperback in 1973-4 (i.e. prior to the release of (5) and (6) in hardback), Pieck's cover paintings were the only surviving artwork

NOTES AND SOURCES

¹ Pieck biographical data adapted from Lambiek.net. Thanks also to Marianne

² The site evolved from an initial Nature Park with playground and Fairytale Forest into a full-sized fantasy-themed amusement park for children and adults with its cultural, romantic and nostalgic themes incorporating elements from ancient myths and legends, fairy tales, fables and folklore. Offering a wide variety of rides including six roller coasters and four ghost trains, De Efteling is now the largest Benelux theme park and one of the oldest in the world. Twice as large as the original Disneyland in California, which it predates by three years, De Efteling attracts over five million visitors a year and has won numerous awards including, in 1992, the IAAPA Applause Award given to "the best theme park in the world". In 2020 it was Europe's most visited such park (ahead of its principal rival, Disneyland, Paris).

* * * * *