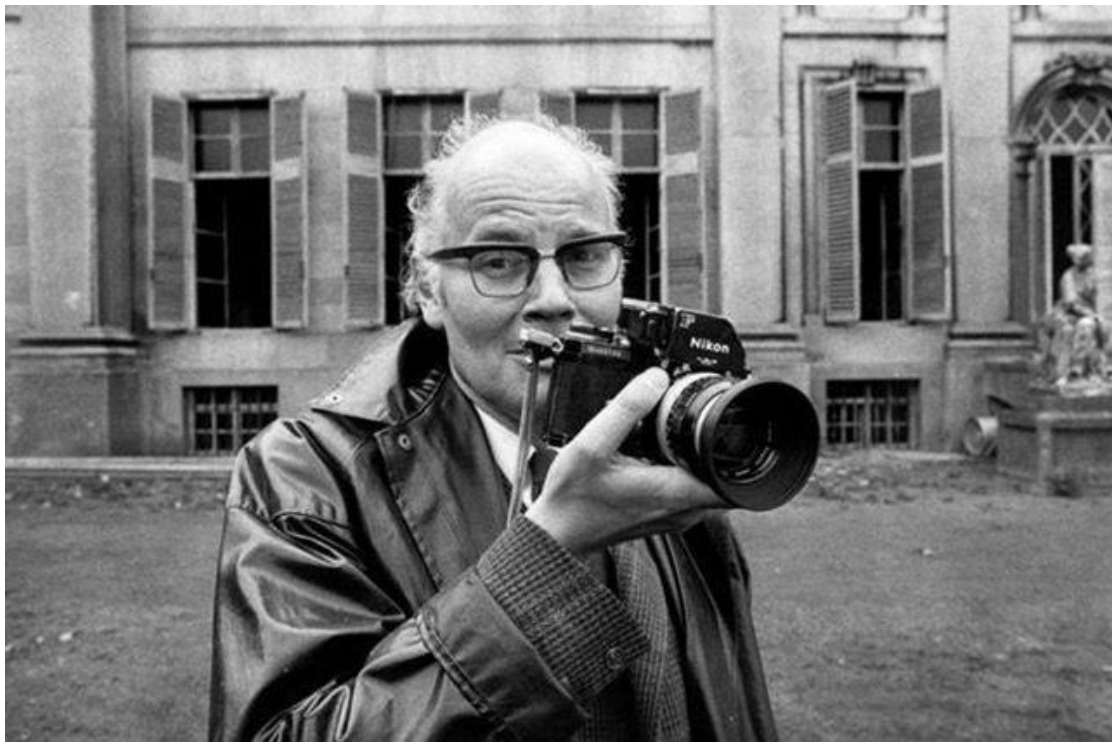


LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Introduction

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Guy Vaes. Copyright photo: Rousseau.

Guy Vaes (1927-2012) was a Belgian author whose magic realist fiction also drew on modernist psychological investigation and on existentialist ideas of alienation. A native of Antwerp, Vaes had an intimate knowledge of his city and wrote about it obliquely in his fiction and more directly in essay form. As a francophone Fleming, a minority writer in a Dutch-speaking region, he also found a way to decenter his own identity by writing poems and essays on various foreign cities that inspired him, cities that in his own phrase 'measured his exile.' Cities in the British Isles fascinated him and gained his lasting affection: Dublin, Edinburgh and, above all, London. A dedicated flâneur, he loved

exploring such cities and had a boundless enthusiasm for their quirkiest, less evident sides. His essays reveal the art of a subtle psychogeographer whose refined sensibility marries aesthetic and intellectual insights in a quest for the meaning of places and of the author's often complex relation to them.

The Cemeteries of London was published originally as the introductory essay to Vaes's eponymous book of his own photographs. Invoking a range of literary and art works, Vaes offers an aesthetic and historical meditation on the strange atmosphere and special character of these Victorian burial grounds. *An Antwerp Palimpsest* was published originally in magazine form in the context of a civic celebration of the city. With the eyes of an unorthodox walker, Vaes reads against the grain of his native city's geography and architecture. *Poetics of Cities* was published originally as one in a set of lectures given by Vaes at the University of Louvain-la-Neuve. Based on his own experience of London and Singapore, and of others writing about London, Vaes explores how language may unlock the secrets and essences of cities perceived by the sensitive walker.

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