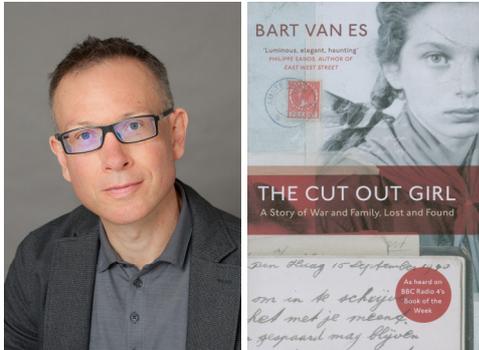


## COSTA BOOK OF THE YEAR 2018



### ***The Cut Out Girl* by Bart van Es** Fig Tree

#### **About the book:**

The last time Lien saw her parents was in The Hague, when she was collected at the door by a stranger and taken to a foster family far away to be hidden from the Nazis. What was her side of the story, Bart van Es – a grandson of the couple who looked after Lien – wondered? What really happened during the war, and after? So began an investigation that would consume and transform both Bart van Es's life and Lien's. *The Cut Out Girl* braids together a powerful recreation of Lien's harrowing childhood story with the present-day account of Bart's efforts to piece that story together. And it embraces the wider picture too, for Holland was more cooperative in rounding up Jews for the Nazis than any other Western European country. This is a story about the powerful love and challenges of foster families, and about the ways in which our most painful experiences – so crucial in defining us – can also be redefined.

#### **About the author:**

**Bart van Es** was born in 1972 in the Netherlands and grew up in Norway, Dubai and Indonesia as part of an expat family, being schooled in both English and Dutch. In 1986 the family moved permanently to the UK, where Bart went on to study English at Cambridge, gaining a First. In 1999, Bart won a Research Fellowship at Christ Church, University of Oxford. Whilst there he published *Spenser's Forms of History* and *A Critical Companion to Spenser Studies*. 2004 saw him elected to a Fellowship at St Catherine's College, Oxford, where he is now a Professor in Renaissance Literature. His former students include the prize-winning authors Katherine Rundell, Caroline Bird and Hannah Sullivan. Bart's most important academic book, *Shakespeare in Company* (2013), was the first work systematically to analyze the literary impact of the playwright's working relations with fellow actors and dramatists. This book was followed by *Shakespeare's Comedies: A Very Short Introduction* in 2016.

In 2014, Bart began to look into his family's wartime history, knowing that his grandparents had been part of the Dutch resistance. He knew of a Jewish girl, Lien, who had lived in hiding with the van Es family during the occupation. He also knew that Lien had continued to live with his grandparents as a foster child in the 1950s, but that a row sometime afterwards had led to an acrimonious break. In December 2014 he met Lien for the first time. She was now living in Amsterdam and had kept a great deal of documentation on her life story. This included the letter that her mother had sent to the resistance in which she and her husband gave up their only daughter. Lien had also kept the letter that Bart's grandmother sent her in 1988, which severed contact for good. These documents and Lien's testimony sparked off an investigation that would change Bart's life. *The Cut Out Girl* is the outcome of his quest to recover Lien's story. It recounts a stunning narrative of holocaust survival but also the horror of Dutch wartime collaboration. In addition, it looks at the love and the sadness that families can bring us, in the present and in the past. Bart and his family are now very close friends with Lien, who turned 85 last September and is in excellent health. Bart and his wife have three children and live in Oxford.

**What the judges said:** "The hidden gem of the year. Sensational and gripping, and shedding light on some of the most urgent issues of our time, this was our unanimous winner."