

A Machiavellian in love

The Harvest of the Plums

DIMITRI VERHULST

Mattis, a self-declared ‘champion of solitude’, spends his empty days in a dilapidated house beside a lake, far from civilization. All his relationships have failed, he has survived an appalling childhood and hates his mother. He drinks and smokes too much, grumbles to himself, and looks upon life with derision and self-contempt. Ultimately he has to admit that he doesn’t excel even at solitude. He decides to give up his reclusive existence and sell the house.

A gem of a novel. Quirky though, certainly.

CUTTING EDGE

When Elma strides into his life, naked, wading across the lake, he has second thoughts. Elma is mysterious, she comes and goes unannounced. Their love does not come naturally, even if it is mutual, since Elma is still mourning the death of her husband Erik. Mattis, unable to stand the thought that she was once happy with Erik, tries to erase the memory of him. ‘I had to commit a crime of passion, by murdering a dead man.’ When he eventually persuades Elma to throw out her husband’s things, he starts to feel the fear of commitment that he found so intolerable in her.

‘The Harvest of the Plums’ is a novel permeated with both humour and a masterly evocation of melancholy. The cynicism and sarcasm, the utterly unique way with words, the magnificent phrasing and unending series of witticisms make this a vintage Verhulst.

Each and every one of the sentences is a treat.

DE MORGEN



AUTHOR



Dimitri Verhulst (b. 1972) is one of the most successful contemporary writers in the Dutch language. He produces a steady stream of literary work which has been translated into 25 languages. He is renowned for his pitch-black worldview, his tragicomedies, juicy language, social engagement and intimate portraits. Verhulst’s style can only be described as ‘Verhulstian’: raw, archaic and with an eye for the grotesque. His texts are suffused with alliteration, rhyme and word play. Many of his characters inhabit the fringes of society and it is these people he wants to give a voice. He draws extensively on his own life, including his childhood, for his novels.

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