

Life imitating art

Dius

STEFAN HERTMANS

Anton teaches art. One evening one of his students calls by and offers him his unconditional friendship. Dius, the runaway illegitimate son of a shoemaker, gives Anton the chance to finish his thesis about originality and imitation in art history in his studio in Ganzevliet, an abandoned guildhall in the Flemish countryside. Dius and Anton find each other in their yearning for beauty, classical painting and the wide-open polder landscape. What starts as mutual curiosity gradually becomes a firm friendship, with a shared fascination for the sublime. When love takes Dius to Bergamo, Anton is left behind vindictive and melancholy. He moves into the country house that Dius has decorated with the finest materials and artworks. Years later, Dius turns up again, but not long afterwards comes horrifying news.

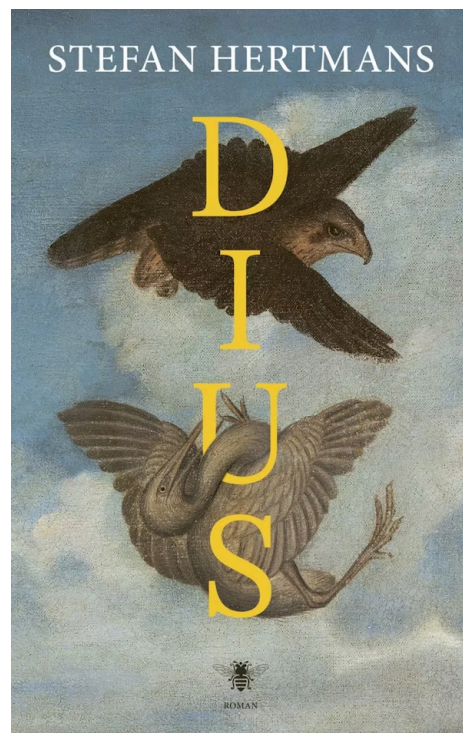
Theme and form are totally balanced. 'Dius' leaves you breathless.

TROUW

In 'Dius' Anton looks back at his friendship with Dius. The lad who at first sight seemed to be a sentimental and mysterious young artist has become an example to him of how naturally and vigorously life can be lived. Behind Dius's Sturm und Drang lurks a disarmingly honest search for beauty and craftsmanship, an admiration for old masters and the emotions that their works express. Dius's guilelessness stimulates Anton – who has got stuck in his theoretical search and a failed love life – to dream once more of perfection and perspective. Against a rich background of artistic associations and references, which encompasses Vittore Carpaccio, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, Giotto and Yves Klein, a special bond grows between two artists' souls.

This imaginative story is vintage Hertmans: major emotions and sensual descriptions, interspersed with ideas. ****

DE STANDAARD



AUTHOR



Stefan Hertmans' (b. 1951) biography reads like a 'bildungsroman': from teacher to jazz musician to professor and writer's writer to Belgian State Prize Laureate and major international success. He has published novels, short stories, essays on literature and philosophy, plays and poetry. Listen to Stefan Hertmans on 'Kopje Koffie' ('Cup of Coffee'), a podcast produced by The Dutch Embassy in Berlin, the Dutch Foundation for Literature, in cooperation with Flanders Literature and the General Representation of the Government of Flanders. *Photo © Praet*

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