

A satire of Bulgarian literary life under communism

Life Seen from Below

DIMITRI VERHULST

When the Russian writer Mikhail Sholokhov picked up the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1965 it was a joke on a number of counts. The quality of his work was substandard and it was an open secret that he did not write his books himself. Sholokhov was a puppet of the Soviet regime, a paragon of the compulsory social-realist style, surrounded by an entire apparatus of ghost writers.

Bulgaria had for years been the USSR's most faithful vassal state, attempting to be redder in all things than Moscow. Bulgarian authors were therefore forced to take Sholokhov's work as their example. Artists who offended against the style imposed on them were deported to extermination camps.

On the face of it a cheerful light opera in which the flowery Flemish language takes centre stage, but behind it lies a grim reality.

ELSEVIER JUIST

Liliya Dimova is the art-loving merry widow of an aggrieved Bulgarian writer, and once the muse of half of Sofia. Her final wish in life is to correct the literary history of communism and wipe out every word written by Sholokhov by using the pages of his book as toilet paper, for love of her late husband, and for all the other forgotten people who paid such a high price for their freedom of expression.

Packed with a Verhulstian wealth of poetry and politics

HUMO



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. He draws extensively on his own life, including his childhood, for his novels. Photo ©Ringel Goslinga

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