

FICTION

A masterpiece of ironic black humour

Villa des Roses

WILLEM ELSSCHOT

Set in a down-market Paris boarding house before World War I, this novel is a masterpiece of ironic black humour.

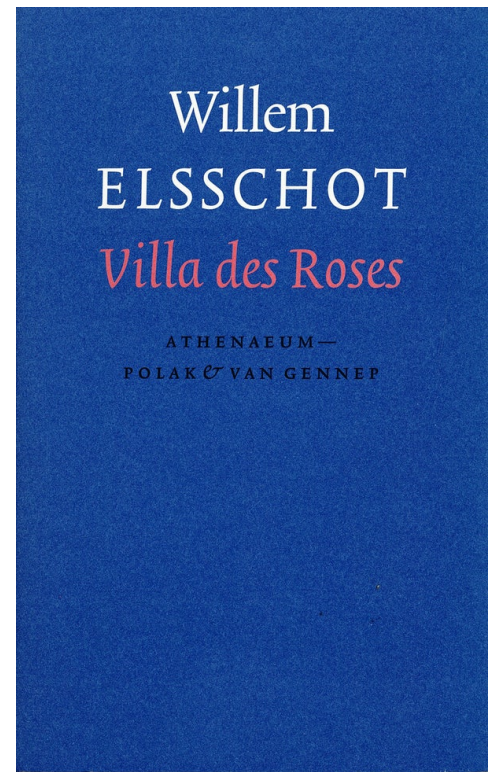
The Villa's owner, the energetic Madame Brulot, is childless and lavishes more affection on her pet monkey, Chico, than on her husband, an embittered ex-solicitor. Among the guests are the ancient but mischievous Madame Gendron, the suicidal Brizard, naïve Norwegian Aasgaard, three assorted Eastern European females and the bumptious young German businessman Grünewald. Much of the book's narrative is taken up with Grünewald's seduction and subsequent abandonment of the widowed maid Louise.

Full of sparkling sarcasm. One can speak of Elsschot's oeuvre as great European literature.

FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG

There are chilling scenes: the disposal of Louise's aborted foetus over a fence, the terrifying revenge exacted by Madame Gendron for her humiliation by the Brulots, and the desolation of Louise's return home to her village after having despaired of finding her vanished lover.

The central love story has an autobiographical basis – the author trained in Paris as a young businessman. But his authorial detachment makes the narrative even more poignant and involving. This is a tour de force by one of Dutch-language literature's greatest stylists.



AUTHOR



Willem Elsschot's (1882-1960) works are classics of Dutch language literature. A dry sharp humour, often turning to cynicism, runs through all his books, but never at the expense of a generous compassion for his characters.

ORIGINAL TITLE Villa des Roses (Originally published by Van Dishoeck in 1913, current publisher: Polis, 116 pp.)

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