

Martin Michael Driessen

De pelikaan



A surprising tragicomedy about two men who keep each other in a stranglehold

Former opera and theatre director Martin Michael Driessen's sixth book is a comedy of errors about two men inescapably connected by a web of blackmail. As in his prize-winning story collection *Rivers*, Driessen is a master of inspiring empathy for individuals who take their fate into their own hands, usually with tragic consequences.

In Communist Yugoslavia in the late 1980s, pelicans and a clock museum are the closest things to local attractions in a sleepy town on the Adriatic coast. The two leading characters are Josip, the driver of the funicular, who has a disabled daughter and a deranged, nagging wife, and Andrej, an unmarried postman and nature photo grapher. On a walk in the mountains, Andrej sees Josip making love to his mistress. Andrej takes photographs and begins to blackmail Josip.

The financial arrangements and Josip's misguided suspicions about his blackmail er's identity lead to entertaining complications. But then Andrej is hurt in a traffic accident and Josip comes to his aid. Josip discovers envelopes in Andrej's house that have been steamed open and realizes that the postman has stolen posted money.

Josip then uses this information to blackmail Andrej. Neither one has any idea who his tormentor could be; in fact, the two of them become friends. This personal drama with unexpected plot twists takes place against the background of the impending Balkan war, which drives apart the village's ethnic groups. The two men's mutual stranglehold is a metaphor for the fault lines in the former Yugoslavia, where friends became enemies from one day to the next.

No one in *The Pelican* is wholly good or evil. The characters' backgrounds and motives are described in an intimate style that enables readers to empathize with all of them: 'You always had expectations of other people, good or bad, and it was confusing when they did the opposite.' With skilful irony, Driessen gives malice and misunderstanding a human face.

Prose characterized by craftsmanship, imagination and an almost oldfashioned pleasure in storytelling, embedded in an ingenious plot.

De Morgen

Driessen's craftsmanship is a sheer delight: like a puppeteer, he makes his characters run in circles around each other, suspecting a bit too much and discovering too little, while showing his readers the big picture through ingenious shifts in perspective.

NRC Handelsblad

Vertalingen

Driessen, Martin Michael. (*De pelikaan*). Engels / vert. uit het Nederlands door n.n.. sinds april 2018 Fictie, Vert. van De pelikaan. Amsterdam: Van Oorschot, 2017.

Driessen, Martin Michael. (*De pelikaan*). Hongaars / vert. uit het Nederlands door Miklós Fenyves. Budapest: Gondolat, sinds april 2018, verschijnt oktober 2018. Fictie, paperback. Vert. van De pelikaan. Amsterdam: Van Oorschot, 2017. Uitgegeven met subsidie van Nederlands Letterenfonds.

Driessen, Martin Michael. (*De pelikaan*). Sloveens / vert. uit het Nederlands door Mateja Seliškar Kenda. Ljubljana: Modrijan, sinds augustus 2018, verschijnt februari 2019. Fictie, paperback. Vert. van De pelikaan. Amsterdam: Van Oorschot, 2017. Uitgegeven met subsidie van Nederlands Letterenfonds.

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Martin Michael Driessen (b. 1954) is a director of plays and operas, a translator and a writer. He made his debut in 1999 with the novel *Gars*, which was followed in 2012 by *Vader van God* (Father of God) and in 2013 by *Een ware held* (A True Hero), all of them acclaimed by the press and nominated for...

Details

De pelikaan (2017). Fictie, 200 pagina's.
Aantal woorden: 51.031

Publicaties

10 Books from Holland (Voorjaar 2018).

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