



Loekie Zvonik – *Who Was the Hatter?*

221 pages, 40.000 words, published in January 2018



Didier and Hermine experience a short-lived affair while studying at the University of Gent. By coincidence they meet again, twelve years later, to travel together to a congress in Vienna. Their past infatuation turns into an intense friendship, in which Hermine inadvertently becomes Didier's muse. Didier is a classic romanticist, with a great fascination for the dark side of life. Even Hermine is not able to save him.

In this breathtaking chronicle of a proclaimed death, Hermine reconstructs the last weeks of his life. In a serene, elegant and subtle style she tries to retrieve his motives. Ultimately, trying to answer the question to what extent it is possible to love someone, while at the same time keeping your distance.

Who Was the Hatter? was published in 1975. The novel received high praise and was awarded with de VBVB Debut Prize a year later. At the time, readers felt they could recognize the protagonists of the story, reminding

them of the dramatic relationship between Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes.

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“Zvonik’s prose has a serene and calm touch to it. It is precise but loving. What a sad, but beautiful and well written story, thinks the reader that doesn’t know the background story yet.” – *Literair Nederland*

Loekie Zvonik (Gent, 1935 – Hasselt, 2000) was the pseudonym of Hermine Louise Marie Zvonicek, a Flemish author with a Czech background. She wrote three novels and a number of short stories. Zvonik studied German philology in Gent. There she met fellow student Dirk De Witte, who later became a tormented writer, obsessed with the theme of suicide in literature. In December 1970, De Witte ended his own life.

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Reviews

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“Zvonik has a clear and subtle style. As a reader, you feel her pain without her having to scream it out. Loekie Zvonik wrote a heartbreaking farewell to a beloved friend, which is still gut-wrenching - even fifty years later.” - *De Standaard* *****

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“Zvonik was great, extremely great, even. As the two pages in which she describes her mother’s death in a very sharp and honest manner show.” - *Knack*

“Zvonik’s novel is the tragic epos of an (anti)hero who tries to involve others in his thoughts of doom, but who does not succeed. The writer also holds up a mirror to today’s readers.” - *Friesch Dagblad*

“With both cool and loving descriptions, filled to the brim with literary references, [Loekie Zvonik] paints the ill-fated course of the relationship [between Hermine and Didier], a chronic of a proclaimed death.” - *VPRO Boeken*

“The many quotes from Rilke, the references to Hesse’s *Der Steppenwolf* and Dirks/Didier’s imitation of the suicide of Swedish author Stig Dagerman make this novel readable on a higher level. They illustrate Dirk’s obsession with writers and suicide, a fascination he shared with author Jeroen Brouwers. Is Dirk the Witte a life that became literature because of *The Hatter*, or was his life literature which came to life (and death)? Both arguments can be made. What is evident is that this novel, more than forty years after its initial publication, is still able to move its reader.” - *thisishowweread.com*

“Zvonik writes clearly, atmospherically and with great empathy. She knows exactly how to bring across Didier’s aura of heavy dejection to the reader. This chronic of a proclaimed death still grabs its reader by the throat, even 43 years after its first publication.” - *De Morgen* *****/2

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“Love and death, suicide and mourning, obviously not very original. Literature is full of these types of themes. We immediately think of Shakespeare, who sang the praises of love and life in all possible manners. Or we think of Rilke, who is cited many times in *Who Was the Hatter?*. Or of authors who are more contemporary and closer to home, such as Connie Palmen and A.F.Th. van der Heijden. However, Zvonik breathes new life into these constants by literally placing them across literary history. In *Who Was the Hatter?* Zvonik continuously refers to authors such as Kafka, Hesse and Pavese in order to give shape to Didier, who was obsessed with literature. After all, without literature, there wasn’t much left of him. It enables her to blend even the tiniest details into a smooth and complex whole. The combination of literary ingenuity and Zvonik’s compelling and elegant writing style, make *Who Was the Hatter?* a surprisingly modern novel.” – Wout Vlaeminck, author

“Zvonik’s novel is the tragic epos of a (anti)hero who tries to involve others in his thoughts of doom, but who does not succeed. The writer also holds a mirror up to her readers of today’s day and age. The publisher of this renewed edition truly understood this.” - *Friesch Dagblad*

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