

Biography Stefan Hertmans

Stefan Hertmans is considered to be one of the outstanding Flemish writers of his generation. He has won or been nominated for most of the literary prizes in the Dutch-speaking world (Multatuli Prize, Arch Prize of the Free Word, AKO Prize, Libris Prize, Bordewijk Prize, Prize of the Flemish Provinces, 'State' prize of the Flemish Community, Paul Snoek Prize, E. du Peron, de internationale Man Booker Prize).

He has taken part in important international festivals such as the Adelaide Writers' Week Australia, the Struga Poetry Festival or Poetry International Rotterdam (1989 and 1997), the Writers' Festival in Durban, Medellin Colombia, Ovid Festival Mangalia Rumania, Mexico City a.m.o. He has lectured at The Library of Congress, Washington (1998), at the Bookfair of Leipzig (1996), has been widely invited for discussions and readings in cities such as Berlin, Frankfurt, London (King's College), Paris, Vienna, Cologne, Amsterdam, Weimar, Madrid etc. He was writer in residence at the university of Vienna (1997), took part in Les Belles Etrangères 1999 Paris, and was elected writer in residence at the Marguerite Yourcenar- villa in Northern France, where he finished his novel 'Like the first day' (AKO Nomination). He lectured at the Sorbonne Paris, Freie Universität Berlin, Universität Wien, Mexico City a.o.

His novels and short stories show a mixture of grotesque and poetic elements, which add to the often surprising intrigue.

With *Gestolde Wolken* (*Frozen Clouds*, 1986) Stefan Hertmans won the prestigious Multatuli-prize of the city of Amsterdam. For his volume of poems *Bezoeking* (*Visitations*, 1988) he was awarded the Arch-prize of the Free Word and the tri-annual Prize of the Flemish Provinces.

The title story of *De grenzen van woestijnen* (*Borders of deserts*, 1988), was published in English in *The review of contemporary Fiction*, Illinois summer 1994. The well-known British author Rupert Thomson took the motto for his novel *The book of Revelation* from this story.

In 1994 his first theatre-text, *Kopnaad*, (*Suture*, 1990) was produced by the Kaaithheater in Brussels, Flanders' number one contemporary theatre, with Jan Ritsema (Amsterdam, Ritsema has worked with Ron Vawter, amongst others) as stage director. This production was nominated for the Theaterfestival 1995 and was staged in various cities in Flanders and Holland. Fischer Verlag Frankfurt archived the German edition, which was turned into a Berlin radio play in 1997.

His novel *Naar Merelbeke* (1994), an ironical 'autobiographical lie' about a Flemish youth and the impossibility of finding anything like your own 'roots', was widely

praised and nominated twice (Libris-prize and ECI-prize). A German translation was published in 1996 (*Amselbach*, Kiepenheuer Verlag Leipzig).

Muziek voor de overtocht (*Music for the crossing*, 1994), a volume of five long poems on Paul Hindemith, Paul Valéry, Paul Cézanne, Vaslav Nijinsky and Wallace Stevens, won the Belgian State prize for poetry 1995.

The essay collection *Fuga's en pimpelmezen* (*Fugues and blue tits*, 1995) has texts on fundamentalism, questionable 'new religiosities', current affairs, Slavoj Žižek and ideology, Jan Fabre's theatre work, walking and speed as metaphors, Elvis Costello and Janacek, Dmitri Schostakovitsch and Keith Jarrett, etc.

Francesco's paradox, (1995) includes, amongst others, poems on Petrarch and a (parodic) cycle on Plato's Banquet as well.

In collaboration with the Brussels composer Walter Hus, *Francesco's Paradox* was produced as an opera for the festivities of Brussels 2000 (Kaaithheater).

In 1997 a Walter Hus Song cycle was launched on CD, based on *Francesco's Paradox*.

His ninth volume of poetry, *Annunciations*, 1997, was welcomed by Flemish and Dutch critics as one of his most important collections of poetry.

1998 he published a book called *Steden – verhalen onderweg*. This book started Hertmans' European career. In an autobiographical key, Hertmans relates his impressions in such ancient but deeply European cities as Dresden, Tübingen, Trieste, Bratislava, Marseille. But he also clearly takes sides when writing about the contrast between Brussels and Amsterdam, or when describing his impressions about Sydney. The book was widely acclaimed by critics in Holland and Flanders as one of the best of the year, and was nominated for the Generale Bank-prijs (former & later AKO). Reaktion Books, London published a translation of this book in 2001 Reaktion Books, London (*Intercities*). A French translation was published by Le Castor Astral in 2003 (*Entre Villes*), it won the Prix La Ville à Lire/France culture and was widely acclaimed.

Goya als Hond (2000), a large volume of poetry, has been acclaimed as a real high point in his work and in contemporary Dutch and Flemish poetry. One of the poems won the prize for the best poem of 1999. The volume was awarded the 'Maurice Gilliams Prize 2002', a prize named after one of the most outstanding Flemish poets.

In 2001 he published the novel 'Like the first day' ('Als op de eerste dag'), which was nominated for the AKO-Prize, and awarded the 'Ferdinand Bordewijk'-Prize, one of the prizes of the Jan Campert-Foundation. This novel was published in French by

Christian Bourgois ed., Paris, in 2003 and was widely acclaimed by the French literary press ('Comme au premier jour').

In 2000 Hertmans published a philosophical reflection on the obscene in contemporary imagination, called *Het Bedenkelijke. Over het obscene in onze cultuur* (2000). It appeared in a series with books by Peter Sloterdijk, Jacques Derrida, Slavoj Žižek.

For the Brussels Kaaitheater he wrote a second theatre play, about the obsessive power of women in Greek tragedies (*Antigone, Clytaemnestra, Medea*). This text showed the radical expressionist influence of writers such as Friedrich Hölderlin and Heiner Müller. It was produced in the autumn of 2001 in a stage production by Toneelgroep Amsterdam with Gerard-Jan Rijnders. (*Mind the Gap*, Meulenhoff 2000).

In the autumn of 2002, Stefan Hertmans published a large volume of essays on contemporary philosophical and cultural issues (including Martin Walser, Peter Sloterdijk, Martin Heidegger, Peter Handke), followed by some inspiring and vividly written essays on, amongst others, J.L. Borges, S. Beckett, D.H. Lawrence (*Het Putje van Milete*).

In October 2002 his book on the work of Jan Fabre '*Engel van de metamorfose*' - 'Angel of metamorphosis', was published. It was also published by L'Arche, Paris. *L'Ange de la métamorphose – Sur Jan Fabre*, traduit par Monique Nagielkopf, éd. L'Arche, 2003. Jan Fabre chose the title of this book for his great exhibition in the Louvre in 2009.

Hertmans' novel *Harder dan sneeuw* (2004, *Louder than snow*), over a terrorist conspiracy of the returned Khazar people, has won him acclamation in Holland and Belgium.

Since 2005, Stefan Hertmans' work is being published by De Bezige Bij, Amsterdam.

He gathered his essays on theatre in *Het zwijgen van de tragedie* (*The silence of tragedy*, 2007), which won the Five Year Prize for Essay from the Royal Academy for Dutch Linguistics and Literature (KANTL).

In 2006 his collected poems were published (*Muziek voor de Overtocht*, *Gedichten 1975 – 2005*).

In 2007 an essay bundle was published: '*Het zwijgen van de tragedie*' (De Bezige Bij, Amsterdam), where Hertmans gathered the essays around his theatre trilogy (*Kopnaad, Mind the Gap, De dood van Empedokles*). A Spanish translation was done: '*El Silencio de la Tragedia*', Uitgeverij Pre-Textos, Valencia 2009.

In October 2008 the novel '*Het verborgen weefsel*' (*The hidden Texture*) was published, an intimate story about a forty year old woman writer concerning her passions and melancholy.

In 2010 a bundle of poetry was published: 'De val van vrije dagen'.

In 2011 a bundle of essays was published: 'De mobilisatie van Arcadia'.

In 2013 Hertmans wrote a libretto for the Flemish Opera, together with Jan Fabre, 'The Tragedy of a friendship'.

In 2013 *Oorlog en terpentijn* (*War and Turpentine*) was published. Translated in many languages (German, English, French, Spanish, Polish, Swedish, Croatian (among others)).

In 2016 the poetry bundle 'Een beeld van jou' appeared - with love poems.

In 2017 'Antigone in Molenbeek' was published about a young Moroccan-Belgian woman from the Brussels neighbourhood Molenbeek, going after the body of her dead brother (a suicide-terrorist).

Translated in English:

- Intercities, Reaktion Books, London 2001
- *Borders of deserts*, short story in The Review of contemporary Fiction, Summer 1994, Illinois USA.
- *The tail of the magpie*, short story, and selection of poems in The literary review, 1997, Madison USA.
- Poems in Modern Poetry in translation, selection of twenty poems translated by Theo Hermans, Yann Lovelock e.o., London winter 1997
- 'Marsyas', in Grand Street 70, spring 2002, New York
- Anne Marie Musschoot, *The courage of the critical intellect*, essay followed by extracts and poems, in The Low Countries, Arts and society in Flanders and the Netherlands, Yearbook 1997-1998, p. 178-186.
- Poems in *New European Poets*, Ed. Wayne Miller & Kevin Prufer, Graywolf Minnesota 2008 ;
- <http://pippoetry.blogspot.com/2010/06/stefan-hertmans.html>
- War and Turpentine, 2013