

JAN LAUWERS & NEEDCOMPANY

WAR AND TURPENTINE

Stage adaptation of Stefan Hertmans' novel



© Gwen Lapoche

A Needcompany production.

Coproduction: Toneelhuis (Antwerp), Festival de Marseille and the Province of West Flanders.

Produced with the support of the Belgian Federal Government's Tax Shelter.

With the support of the Flemish authorities.

Stefan Hertmans'

WAR AND TURPENTINE

Stage adaptation, directing, set design Jan Lauwers

Music Rombout Willems

With

Viviane De Muynck

and

First Sergeant-Major Urbain Joseph Emile Martien - Benoît Gob

The Angel of History - Grace Ellen Barkey

Worker, Soldier, Maria Emelia Ghys - Sarah Lutz

Worker, Soldier, Maria Emelia Martien - Mélissa Guérin

Worker, Soldier, Relative - Elik Niv

Worker, Soldier, Relative - Maarten Seghers

Worker, Soldier, Relative - Mohamed Toukabri

General, pianist - Alain Franco

Chaplain, cellist - Simon Lenski

Soldier, violinist - George van Dam

All the paintings and drawings are by Benoît Gob

Costumes Lot Lemm

Dramaturgy, subtitling Elke Janssens

Lighting design Ken Hioco

Sound Ditten Lerooij, Dries D'Hondt

Production Management Marjolein Demey

P.U.L.S. Stage Bosse Provoost

Costume Assistant Lieve Meeussen

Fencing Instructor Jacques Cappelle

Trainee Josephine Dapaah

Set Building Toneelhuis

Set Dressing Simon Callens

Logistical Support Irmgard Mertens

Set, lighting Saul Mombaerts, Tijs Michiels

Dramaturgical introduction Erwin Jans

Press Agent Liesbet Waegemans for Panache

Photography Maarten Vanden Abeele

Based on the novel "War and Turpentine" by Stefan

Hertmans, published by Harvill Secker.

Subtitling based on the French translation of 'Guerre et

Térébenthine' by Isabelle Rosselin © Editions Gallimard

Subtitling based on the English translation of

'War and Turpentine' by David McKay © Harvill Secker

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Isabelle Molhant, Valérie Daems, Christel Simons

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WAR AND TURPENTINE

Jan Lauwers is making a stage adaptation of Stefan Hertmans' compelling epic "War and Turpentine". Following the success of "Isabella's room" (2004), which looked at Lauwers' family history, he is now exploring the history of Hertmans' family, somewhere between art and war, and in the midst of the Flemish struggle.

Just before he died in the 1980s, Stefan Hertmans' grandfather gave his grandson a couple of old exercise books full of writing. His grandfather's life turned out to have been marked by an impoverished childhood in pre-1900 Ghent, horrifying experiences as a soldier at the front in the First World War, and a great love who died young. In the rest of his life he transformed his sorrow into tranquil paintings. Stefan Hertmans' years of fascination with his grandfather's life ultimately led him to take up his pen and write this moving novel.

In his stage production of 'War and Turpentine', Jan Lauwers presents a story that eludes the broad narrative of history. The story of Urbain Joseph Emile Martien: Stefan Hertmans' grandfather, forgotten war hero, and painter. To stage the work, Lauwers has assembled a unique ensemble of performers, flanked by Viviane De Muynck, to depict the beginning of the twentieth century with, among other things, the advance of industrialisation, the violence of the Great War, love, happiness, sorrow and the secrets of a human life, set to a new composition by Rombout Willems.

The novel 'War and Turpentine' by Stefan Hertmans was nominated for the Premio Strega Europeo and the Libris Literature Prize, as well as winning the AKO Literature Prize, the Flemish Community Prize for Prose and the Gouden Inktaap. The book has been translated worldwide for such prestigious publishers as Hanser Verlag (Berlin), Gallimard (Paris), Harvill Secker (London), Alfred Knopf (New York), Text (New Zealand/Australia), Marsilio (Italy) etc.



© Maarten Vanden Abeele



The Soldier Urbain Martien

JAN LAUWERS ON 'WAR AND TURPENTINE'

Adapting a novel for the theatre is a delicate undertaking full of risk. It always reminds me of the old joke about the priest who, on leaving the cinema after seeing the Hollywood film *The Bible* muttered 'The book is still better...'

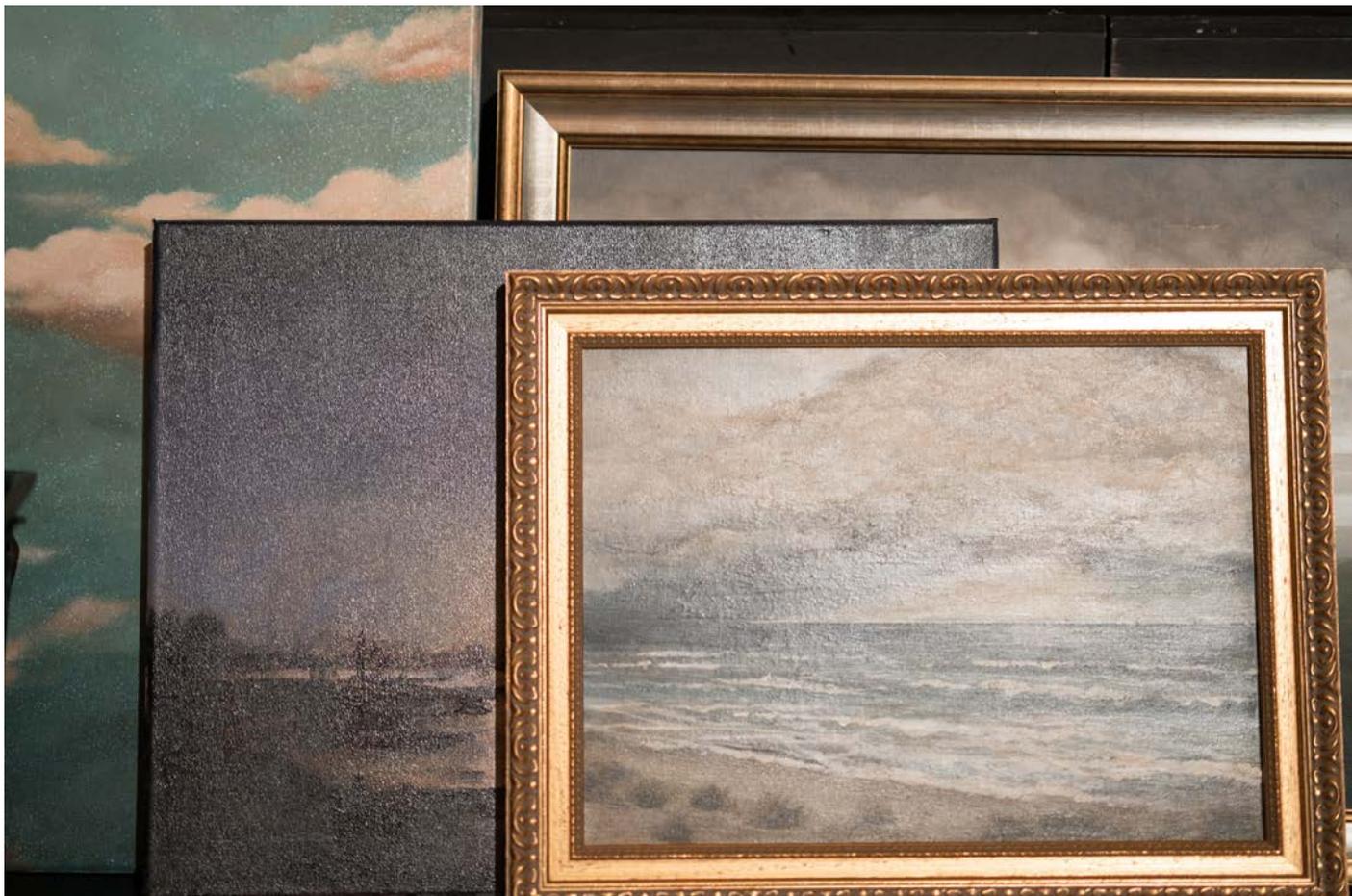
Stefan Hertmans is a dear friend. I like working with and for friends. 'War and Turpentine' is a book that is close to my heart. But a successful novel, a bestseller, is always dangerous. 'War and Turpentine' is to Stefan what 'Isabella's Room' is to me. A milestone in a career, a paradigm in an oeuvre, as it is sometimes described. Is this book the best in his oeuvre? In a capitalist sense it most certainly is. In our part of the world it is rare for a poet to earn money from his scribblings. But that's as far as it goes. 'War and Turpentine' is the umpteenth crystalline blow from a great thinker, visionary poet and incisive essayist. It certainly adds more colour to his oeuvre. It makes him a 'classical' writer.

Both these works are about one's own family, in his case a grandfather, in my case a father. Perhaps that's why I have ventured to do it: because as a result of my experience with 'Isabella's Room' I know that we are living at a time when art has to reclaim its place at the heart of the public domain. By telling such personal stories, which are moreover rectilinear and irreversible, we laboriously drag ourselves out of the ivory tower where we so delightfully dwelled in the last century.

Stefan asked me not to bother him with the adaptation. He told me I could do what I liked with it, and that he would come and have a look sometime. This was a mark of extreme confidence and esteem that was a great encouragement. But what is an adaptation? Reducing 400 pages to 40, it's as simple as that. Destroying nine out of ten pages. Trying to make a two-hour performance by mutilating a masterpiece. I was only too aware of this. By distancing myself from an interesting book, I have tried to make an interesting play. I built in a number of difficulties to achieve it.

In the adaptation I have accentuated the autonomy of each medium to be found in theatre. Hertmans is a poet and that means that in his novels he is a writer of 'sentences'. I have therefore not changed a single word, not added any writing, but only in some places changed the third person into the first to make the story theatrically more dynamic.

I asked the composer Rombout Willems to write for a classical trio: piano, cello and violin. A contemporary composer who welcomes the classical into his work. In my view, the true tragedy of the book lies in the fact that the twentieth century is impossible to understand and that to most people modern and contemporary art has turned out to be relentlessly rapid and iconoclastic. The hero of the story has to be understood in the light of this. He is broken by the horrors of the twentieth century and his own incomprehension of what beauty ought to be.



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To illustrate this I have asked Benoît Gob, a performer and artist and also drawing virtuoso, to explore the academic drawing and painting of the 19th century and to portray the 'virtuoso' copyist on stage.

What is more, I have made the narrator a woman. This gives rise to a radically different interpretation of the book; in this way the play becomes something in its own right. In addition, more by necessity than anything else, I have left out Hertmans' highly personal thoughts, the musings of the first-person subject, which give the story a special timbre. To enable another conflict to arise on the stage. Because theatre always means conflict. Every moment on the stage is a conflict. Handing the story to a woman results in a new sense of tragedy. It is not by chance that Viviane De Muynck plays this role. She is not only one of the most captivating actresses currently roaming Europe (you can take that quite literally), but also a good friend and, just like Stefan, a significant partner-in-crime. I have also added a new character: the Angel of History, developed and performed by Grace Ellen Barkey, my muse and support. She is the reader's 'original' thought. The subjective observer who mentally puts the pieces back together and makes no distinction between living and dead, past and present. It was by starting on the adaptation with these two women in mind, and knowing that I could rely on Viviane's tremendous dramaturgical insight, that I ventured to set to work on this radical masterpiece.

One thing sticks in his mind in the days that follow: the sight of the animal heads in the gory courtyard. In his memory, the gentle glow of afternoon is falling over that heap of breath-taking ugliness, and what he sees are colours, tones, the subtlest transitions of light and shade, greys and red, sepia and midnight blue, crimson turned almost black, the delicate yellow, nearly white, of a scrap of undamaged hide by a dead snout. He thinks back to one of the old books he's seen his father leafing through – more specifically, to one painting that made a strong impression on him even as a small child: a skinned bull, painted by the famous Rembrandt. In that painting, a thing that in itself could not be called attractive was altered into a spectacle possessing power and beauty. This antithesis gnaws at his innards. It slowly dawns on him, as he stares into the roaring stoke hole in the iron foundry and the sparks dance around him like fireflies, that his shock of revulsion at the sight of that apocalyptic heap of rotting flesh filled with gaping dead eyes has awoken something that tugs at him, that hurts, that opens a new space inside him – that for the first time he feels a desire that seems greater than himself. It is the desire to draw and paint, and the instant he becomes aware of it. The sudden realization washes over him with overwhelming force, in which there is an element of guilt. The realization that he wants to do what his father does. It wells up inside him like a sob, like a painful, electric shock from deep within, where his unconscious has taken its time to ripen before coming to light. And he cries.¹



Rokeby Venus (La Venus del espejo) - Diego Velázquez

¹ Hertmans S. "War and Turpentine", by Harvill Secker, London, and Alfred Knopf, New York, 2016

THE ANGEL AND THE COPYING ERROR

*The weight of this sad time we must obey;
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
The oldest hath borne most: we that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.*

Shakespeare, King Lear

1.

Let's imagine that the twentieth century was writing its will. What would it want to leave us? What would the twenty-first century inherit from its predecessor? Or let's take another image. Let's imagine the twentieth century as a patient stretched out on a psychiatrist's couch. From what point of view would it talk about itself? In what voice? About which traumas? Or, more concretely, let's imagine that, during a therapy session, the twentieth century was asked to express itself in a single image. Which image would it be? Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* perhaps, which the German philosopher Walter Benjamin described inimitably in his ninth thesis on the philosophy of history: 'An angel is depicted there who looks as if he were about to distance himself from something that he is staring at. His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. The Angel of History must look just like this. His face is turned towards the past. Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it at his feet. He would like to pause for a moment, to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. This storm is what we call progress.' History as an accumulation of rubble and catastrophes. This was written in 1940, a few months before Benjamin's supposed suicide on the French-Spanish border while fleeing from the Nazis, and the image of the Angel of History has lost none of its disturbing power in the twenty-first century.

2.

'To awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed.'² In passing, Walter Benjamin gave a naïve and, precisely for this reason, correct and pointed definition of the epic ambitions of art: to tell the great story of the past and its connection with the present. Is this one of the reasons for the conspicuous presence of novels on the contemporary stage? Does the novel, more than any other genre, have the epic power to piece the rubble of the past together again to form a meaningful whole? Is this why the theatre feeds as much as possible on the epic? It is in this search for personal stories in the grand history that the director of *Isabella's Room* and the author of *War and Turpentine* came together.

3.

In 1935, Paul Valéry made the following note in one of his cahiers: 'Descartes should have written: I suffer, therefore I am.'

4.

Urbain Joseph Emile Martien, the grandfather of the Flemish author Stefan Hertmans, died in 1981. It was also in that year that Hertmans made his debut as a writer. Before he died, the grandfather gave his grandson two well-filled notebooks in which he had written part of his life story. More than three decades later, the novel *War and Turpentine* was born out of these writings. Urbain Martien is one of the voices through which the twentieth century speaks,

² Quote from Walter Benjamin translated by Dennis Redmond.

although he himself never lay on a psychiatrist's couch. Urbain Martien was still too much an inhabitant of the nineteenth century for that, a still relatively stable and coherent period that was able to preserve its mouldering foundations until the Serb Gavrilo Princip made the whole house collapse with just a single well-aimed shot. The catastrophe of the Great War was at the same time the first great caesura in the life of Hertmans' grandfather. The largest part of the notebooks he filled was an attempt by a now ageing man to come to terms with the horrors of his youth. The second great tragedy in his life, which was indirectly also linked to the war, was the premature death of his great love, Maria Emelia, from the devastating Spanish flu. It was probably brought to Europe by American soldiers and was spread on a massive scale by the huge gatherings that took place to celebrate the end of the war. Urbain later married Gabrielle, Maria Emelia's sister, and gave his daughter the name of his dead beloved. He dealt with his traumas by painting still lifes and by writing in the notebooks that his grandson was to inherit.

5.

Jan Lauwers says, of *War and Turpentine*: 'In my view, the real tragedy of the book is in the fact that it is impossible to comprehend the twentieth century and for most people modern and contemporary art has turned out to be relentlessly fast and iconoclastic. The hero of the story has to be understood in light of this. He has been broken by the horrors of that twentieth century and his own incomprehension regarding what beauty ought to be.'



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6.

How does an era pass on its legacy? A culture survives through its characteristic patterns, in which its knowledge of the world and the previous generation's rituals for the management of crises are stored, so as to be handed down to the next generation as completely and as intact as possible. These patterns provide stability. To ensure this stability, a culture has to develop great alertness to possible deviations and variations in what is handed down. In the 'traditional' cultures, the new is therefore treated with the greatest possible suspicion and is only exceptionally tolerated. What has happened in the West with the advent of the new age is that the new has become the norm. The new is no longer simply tolerated from time to time, but is repeatedly demanded. The 'old' is replaced by the new at a tempo that makes any real attribution of meaning impossible. Nietzsche called modern people, driven by consumerism and novelty, 'the Legionnaires of the moment'. How do we remain linked to the past? How do we retain a historical consciousness? Modernity is the break or the copying error in this transmission. In modern times, the gap between generations has become so large that there is no longer any possibility of things being handed down intact. We no longer inherit experiences or the time-tested insights of our fathers, we consult data instead. History is an incalculable and anonymous digital archive that can be visited 24/7. If we are online, that is. We are no longer the children of our fathers, but children of our time. We moderns no longer want to inherit (and are probably no longer able to).

But at the beginning of the twenty-first century we are increasingly aware of the cultural and ethical poverty of an existence bounded by a purely 'pragmatic' history. Our so-called freedom has bolted. We live in a culture that constantly mobilises, perverts and commercially exploits our desires. Pleasure, in every possible sense of the word,

has become a compulsion. Freedom a 'must'. Protect me from what I want is a slogan that the American artist Jenny Holzer uses in her visual work. It is also the title of a 2003 song by the English band Placebo, which starts with this verse: 'It's that disease of the age / It's that disease that we crave / Alone at the end of the rave / We catch the last bus home'. Freedom as the prime disease of our era, the disease we pursue and at the same time the disease against which we have to be protected.



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7.

War and Turpentine is not only Hertmans' attempt to reconstruct his grandfather's life as faithfully as possible and to safeguard it from being forgotten, he also situates his grandfather's life story in the broader history of Flanders, of industrialisation, the war, the Flemish movement and so on. Through his grandfather, Hertmans describes a world and an ethos that no longer exist. To Hertmans, the First World War is a key moment in the development of Europe: 'the intimacy of the atmosphere of Europe was permanently damaged. What blew in through the infernal holes shot in humanism by the war was the heat of a moral void, of a wasteland that barely allowed itself to be sown with new ideals, because it had become abundantly clear how much man had allowed himself to be misled by it. The new politics that was to flare up with an even greater destructive potential was that of revenge, resentment, rancour and a settling of accounts; but the soldier who made his marching stride a matter of honour, who had learnt to fence as if in a ballet lesson, who foolishly enough bowed to his enemy before running him through, this soldier would never return.' The period between the wars has rarely been evoked in such a sombre light. Hertmans describes his grandfather as a person on the fault line between two eras. The writer sees the grandfather as a moral lens through which to view the previous century. Urbain Martien is still presented with the ethos, the values and the traditions of the nineteenth century. He struggles with the horror of the war, his memories, eroticism, his marriage, his artistic ambitions and the rest, but he still has a number of patterns that allow him to stabilise and sublimate the loss and sorrow: self-control, self-discipline, a sense of duty, the catholic religion, the extremely faithful copying of old masters and the painting of still lifes. This 'touchingly old-fashioned attitude' was never to leave him, but the world around him changed

unrecognisably and he became someone out of place in the new era: 'his bursts of passion and rage against no one in particular, with no visible cause – perhaps most of all against his own lost innocence – spoke silent, taciturn, bitter volumes for those of us who lived with him.'

8.

In his book *Die schrecklichen Kinder der Neuzeit*, Sloterdijk refers to the revolutionaries, the artists, the scientists, the inventors, the adventurers, the entrepreneurs, the managers, the daredevils, the dreamers... all those who are constantly trying something new. They are the children who supply the ideas and energy of the new era, the engine and the fuel behind the developments of the last two centuries. The 'disruption of the senses' that Rimbaud put forward as a new programme for poetic creation has now become commonplace as an experience. Each individual has in the meantime become 'a drunken ship' sailing on a turbulent sea, with as its only compass the categorical imperative of *il faut être absolument moderne*. It is probably no coincidence that Sloterdijk devoted a great deal of attention to the rise of Dadaism, because for the first time it expressed the rupture in words with complete radicalness. Dadaism did not want to inherit anything more, nor pass anything on. It proclaimed the pure present, with no before nor after, and thereby set the tone for the twentieth century, which was characterised by the purely sequential, with no history of development or transferral.

This refusal to inherit has been given many names in modern and contemporary art: avant-garde, iconoclasm, *tabula rasa*, provocation, alienation, transgression, autonomy and so on. From Marcel Duchamp's urinal, *Fountain* (1917) to *For the Love of God* (2007), the diamond-encrusted skull by Damien Hirst, modern art has for a century celebrated its absolute freedom! But even this freedom has come up against its limits and has once again encountered reality: '... through my experience with *Isabella's Room*, I know we live in an age when art must once again claim its place at the centre of the public space. By telling such personal stories, which are moreover rectilinear and irreversible, we laboriously drag ourselves out of the ivory tower where we so agreeably spent the previous century,' according to Lauwers. Both the play and the novel arose out of the true legacy of the father (and grandfather). On his death, Lauwers' father left his son a large collection of exotic objects from ancient Egypt and black Africa. They are given a place, literally, in *Isabella's Room*, just as Hertmans' grandfather's notebooks form the core of *War and Turpentine*. This material legacy led in both cases to a work of art that concentrates explicitly on the necessity of inheritance or of receiving history. And on the ethical appeal that it makes.

To the question of what literature is for, the German writer W.G. Sebald replied: 'Perhaps only to help us remember and to teach us to understand that there are connections that cannot be fathomed by any causal logic.' Hertmans adds: 'Literature is not a form of description for the sake of description, but of description to preserve and consequently also to understand, to feel deeply how it really was. To Sebald, this 'wie es eigentlich gewesen' implies a devoted and attentive description of every significant detail, as a result of which that one experience may be shown up that provides an epiphanic insight into the concrete, now historic connection that is covered over by time.' Sebald sees forgetting as a dimension of evil. What is being expressed here is a poetics of resistance against forgetting, of the search for connection with the past and with a community. Art as 'the work of remembering' and as 'the work of making connections'. A form of fidelity to the past, but without conservatism and a form of belonging to a collectivity, though with no loss of individuality. The ethical-political obligation to commemorate history, the mission to dig it over and 'save' it from oblivion in order thereby also to save the present and the future, is more relevant and urgent than ever.

9.

In his notebooks, Urbain Martien wanted to write down his experiences as a soldier as faithfully as possible. He wanted to remain true to the events and to his fallen comrades. Just as he wanted to remain faithful to the original, down to the smallest details, when copying the great masters, so skilfully faithful that he never developed his own personality as a drawer and painter. Decades later, in his novel, Hertmans tried to sketch a faithful portrait of his grandfather. In their turn, Lauwers and co. try in their stage production to remain true to Hertmans' novel. It is a chain of testimonies.

In an interview, Hertmans quoted a sentence he read at the Jewish Museum in Warsaw: 'if you listen to witnesses long enough, you become one yourself'. The testimony is passed on by means of faithful listening. However, remaining faithful is not purely a matter of repetition or imitation, but of choosing a new perspective. Hertmans chose a historical and psychological interpretation of his grandfather in the form of essay-like passages and remains a distinct authorial presence in the novel. We get to know the grandfather through the eyes of his grandson.

However, in his staging, Lauwers, the theatre-maker, imposes silence on the reflective Hertmans. However rich and refined the author's thoughts are, they have been removed. There is no place on stage for the explicit historical and psychological interpretation. The communication there is more direct, physical, more visual. The passages that Lauwers selected from the novel are descriptive, sensory and physical: the fatal accident the young Urbain sees at the smithy, his heavy and dangerous work in the iron foundry, the first time he sees a naked girl in a pool, times spent with his father, who was a fresco painter, the horror of war... Lauwers retains the three parts of Hertmans' novel – the early years, the war years and the post-war years – but opts for a radically different perspective.

'What does it actually mean, spending your whole life with the sister of your great love?' Following the death of Maria Emelia, Urbain, out of a sense of duty and responsibility, marries her sister Gabrielle. Later, he insists that their daughter should bear the name of his dead beloved. Hertmans' novel is a respectful attempt to understand his grandfather's trauma. By selecting Viviane De Muynck as narrator, Lauwers brings about not only an upheaval in the narrative perspective, but also makes room for the tragedy of Gabrielle, the woman who was obliged to live in the shadow of her dead sister. What is more, Lauwers lets her speak from the hereafter. The dead often remain a presence in Lauwers' productions, as the guardians and witnesses of the past. Viviane De Muynck carries the audience along with her through the narration. She is the only one who speaks. Urbain (Benoît Gob) is a silent presence as a meticulous copyist in his studio. The other actors (Sarah Lutz, Elik Niv, Maarten Seghers, Mohammed Toukabri and Melissa Guérin) and the three musicians 'act things out'. In the middle section of the performance – the war years – they throw themselves into a simultaneously brutally monotonous and deliriously aggressive choreography of hand-to-hand fighting, before, in the third part, transforming the set into an intimate domestic scene in which the tragic love story is told. They are the 'company' – the silent chorus, the silent co-narrators, but also the silent witnesses – from which the narration arises and to which it also returns. The performance assumes epic, film-like dimensions. Lauwers does not avoid great emotions: when Maria Emelia (Sarah Lutz) dies from the Spanish flu, we see it happen with full realism. The music that Rombout Willems composed for piano (Alain Franco), cello (Simon Lenski) and violin (George van Dam) also involves itself in the epic nature of the piece and follows the movements of the narration, from intimately poetic through aggressive and agitated to romantically melancholic. The live performance of the music on a revolving platform – something between a bandstand and a floating raft – and the musicians' participation in the action greatly increase the intensity of this theatrical event.

10.

Both the play *Isabella's Room* and the novel *War and Turpentine* are called 'classics'. What does this mean? Clear, communicative, mature, universal, humanist... Is this the new vocabulary we have to employ when it comes to the arts? The stage production includes a character who does not appear in the novel: a nurse (Grace Ellen Barkey). In an interview, Stefan Hertmans interprets her as a figure of melancholy. In her desire to relieve the suffering she is like the Angel of History who wants to put the rubble back together into a unified whole again and bring the dead back to life. Does this thereby also make her the possible (or impossible) figure of an art from the other side of the break and alienation? Art as the rediscovery of the lost connection between world and empathy? The angel who is still trying to correct the copying error of modernity?

Erwin Jans



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Something about the lost ethos of the old-time soldier is almost unthinkable to us today, in our world of terrorist attacks and virtual violence. The morality of violence has undergone a seismic shift. The generation of Belgian soldiers driven into the monstrous maw of the German machine guns in the first year of the war had been raised with exalted nineteenth-century values, with pride and honour and naive idealism. Their military ethics were based on the virtues of courage, self-discipline, honour, the love of the daily march, respect for nature and their fellow men, honesty, and the willingness to fight man to man. They read aloud from books they had brought, sometimes even literature – often poetry, in fact, however bombastic it may have been. They adhered to Christian morals, had an utter horror of sexual deviance, and used alcohol in moderation, or abstained. Soldiers had to set an example for the civilians they were sworn to protect.

All those old-fashioned virtues bit the dust in the trenches of the First World War. Soldiers were deliberately plied with alcohol before being driven into the firing line (this is one of the greatest taboos among patriotic historians, but my grandfather's stories leave no room for doubt). Towards the end of the war, clandestine cafés – seedy outfits, which my grandfather called tingeltangels – were popping up all over the place, and soldiers were encouraged to relieve their frustrated sexual urges there, not necessarily in the gentlest of ways.³

³ Hertmans S. "War and Turpentine", by Harvill Secker, London, and Alfred Knopf, New York, 2016

WAR AND TURPENTINE

Premiere Toneelhuis, Antwerp*	7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 December 2017
30CC, Stadsschouwburg, Leuven*	9, 10 March 2018
Teatro Central, Sevilla***	16, 17 March 2018
Teatre Principal de Palma, Mallorca***	22 March 2018
Kaaitheater, Brussels*	27, 28, 29, 30 March 2018
Avant-première France	
La Scène Nationale de Sète et du Bassin de Thau, Sète**	29, 30 May 2018
Malta Festival Poznan***	22, 23 June 2018
French première Festival de Marseille**	28, 29 June 2018
Concertgebouw Bruges*	8 November 2018
Cultuurcentrum Strombeek*	10 November 2018
Mars, Mons**	15, 16 November 2018
Vooruit, Gent*	22, 23, 24 November 2018

* Dutch version

** French version

*** English version

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WORK FOR THEATRE

JAN LAUWERS & NEEDCOMPANY

- 1987 Need to Know**
Opening: 24 March, Mickery, Amsterdam
- 1989 ça va**
Opening: 18 March, Theater am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1990 Julius Caesar**
Opening: 31 May, Rotterdamse Schouwburg
- 1991 Invictos**
Opening: 18 May, Centro Andaluz de Teatro, Seville
- 1992 Antonius und Kleopatra**
Opening: 14 February, Teater am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1992 SCHADE/schade**
Opening: 21 October, Theater am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1993 Orfeo, opera by Walter Hus**
Opening: 23 May, Bourschouwburg, Antwerp
- 1994 The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Voyeur**
Opening: 24 March, Theater am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1995 The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Pouvoir (Leda)**
Opening: 11 May, Dance 95, Munich
- 1996 Needcompany's Macbeth**
Opening: 26 March, Lunatheater, Brussels
- 1996 The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Désir**
Opening: 6 November, Kanonhallen, Copenhagen
- 1997 Caligula, No beauty for me there, where human life is rare, part one**
Opening: 5 September, Documenta X, Kassel
- 1998 The Snakesong Trilogy, reworked version with live music**
Opening: 16 April, Lunatheater, Brussels
- 1999 Morning Song, No beauty for me there, where human life is rare, part two**
Opening: 13 January, Lunatheater, Brussels
- 2000 Needcompany's King Lear**
Opening: 11 January, Lunatheater, Brussels
- 2000 DeaDDogsDon'tDance/DJamesDjoyceDeaD**
Opening: 12 May, Das TAT, Frankfurt
- 2001 Ein Sturm**
Opening: 22 March, Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg
- 2001 Kind**
Opening: 21 June, Het Net, Bruges
- 2002 Images of Affection**
Opening: 28 February, Stadsschouwburg, Bruges
- 2003 No Comment**

- Opening: 24 April, Kaaitheater, Brussels
- 2004 Isabella's room**
Opening: 9 July, Cloître des Carmes, Festival d'Avignon
- 2006 All is Vanity**
Opening: 8 July, Théâtre Municipal, Festival d'Avignon
- 2006 The Lobster Shop**
Opening: 10 July, Cloître des Célestins, Festival d'Avignon
- 2008 The Deer House**
Opening: 28 July, Perner-Insel, Hallein, Salzburger Festspiele
- 2008 Sad Face | Happy Face, A Trilogy, Three Stories on Human Nature**
Opening: 1 August, Perner-Insel, Hallein, Salzburger Festspiele
- 2011 The art of entertainment**
Opening: 5 March, Akademietheater (Burgtheater), Vienna
- 2012 Caligula**
Opening: 17 May, Kasino, (Burgtheater), Vienna
- 2012 Marketplace 76**
Opening: 7 September, Ruhrtriennale, Jahrhunderthalle, Bochum
- 2014 Begin the Beguine**
Opening: 1 March, Akademietheater (Burgtheater), Vienna
- 2015 The blind poet**
Opening: 12 May, Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Brussels
- 2017 Begin the Beguine**
Opening: 26 January, hTh, CDN - Montpellier
- 2017 War & Turpentine**
Opening: 7 December, Toneelhuis, Antwerp



PUBLICATIONS IN BOOK FORM BY AND ABOUT JAN LAUWERS

- LAUWERS, Jan, *Leda*, Bebuquin (Antwerp), a coproduction with IT&FB publishing company, Amsterdam, 1995.
- VANDEN ABEELE, Maarten, *The Lucidity of the Obscene*, Needcompany in cooperation with IT&FB publishing company, Brussels/Amsterdam, 1998.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *La Chambre d'Isabella* followed by *Le Bazar du Homard*, Actes Sud-papiers, Paris, 2006.
- STALPAERT, Christel, BOUSSET, Sigrid, LE ROY, Frederik, (eds.), *No Beauty for Me There where Human Life is Rare. On Jan Lauwers' theatre work with Needcompany*, Academia Press, IT&FB publishing company, Ghent/ Amsterdam, 2007.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *Restlessness*, Mercatorfonds, BOZAR Books, Needcompany, Brussels, 2007.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *Sad Face | Happy Face, Drei Geschichten über das Wesen des Menschen*, Fischer Taschenbuche Verlag (Frankfurt), 2008.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *La maison des cerfs*, Actes Sud-papiers, Paris, 2009.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *KEBANG!*, Uitgeverij Van Halewyck, 2009.
- FREEMAN, John, *The Greatest Shows on Earth. World Theatre form Peter Brook to the Sydney Olympics*, Libri Publishing, Oxfordshire, 2011.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *Sad Face | Happy Face, Una trilogía sobre la humanidad*, Papeles Teatrales, Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades, 2014.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *Silent Stories*, McaM, Shanghai, 2016.
- BRAECKMAN, Dirk, LAUWERS, Jan, *The House of Our Fathers*, MER Paper Kunsthalle, Ghent, 2017.

PRIZES

- Mobil Pegasus Preis, Internationales Sommertheater Festival Hamburg, for the best international production, *ça va*, 1989.
- Thersitesprijs, Flemish theatre critic prize, 1998.
- Obie Award in New York for the play *Morning Song*, 1999.
- *Kinematrix Prize* for Digital Format, International Film Festival Venice 2002, *Goldfish Game*, 2002.
- Grand Jury Honor for Best Ensemble Cast, Slamdance Film Festival, *Goldfish Game*, 2004.
- Le Masque, prize awarded by the Académie Québécoise du Théâtre in Montréal, Canada, for the best foreign production, *La Chambre d'Isabella*, 2005.
- Prize awarded by the Syndicat Professionnel de la Critique de Théâtre, de Musique et de Danse in France, for the best foreign production, *La Chambre d'Isabella*, 2005.
- Culture prize awarded by the Flemish Community 2006, theatre literature category, for the *De kamer van Isabella* and *Ulrike* scripts.
- Grand Prix – Golden Laurel Wreath Award for Best Performance for *Isabella's room*, MESS International Theatre Festival, Sarajevo, (2009).
- Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic Austria, 2012.
- Golden Lion Lifetime Achievement Award at the Venice Biennale, 2014.
- Golden Laurel Wreath for Lifetime Achievement Award, MESS International Theatre Festival, Sarajevo, 2014.
- Premio Mayor, Premio Teatro del Mundo, category 'Translations', for the translation by Micaela van Muylem of the *Sad Face | Happy Face* trilogy, University of Buenos Aires, 2014.
- Barcelona Critics Prize 2015 - International Dance Performance was awarded to *The blind poet*, 2016.
- Golden Mask Award by the newspaper Oslobodjenje for *The blind poet*, MESS International Theatre Festival, Sarajevo, 2017.

NEEDCOMPANY

is an artists' company set up by the artists Jan Lauwers and Grace Ellen

Barkey in 1986. Maarten Seghers has been a member of Needcompany since 2001. Lauwers, Barkey and Seghers form the core of the company, and it embraces all their artistic work: theatre, dance, performance, visual art, writing, etc. Their creations are shown at the most prominent venues at home and abroad.

Since the very beginning, Needcompany has presented itself as an international, multilingual, innovative and multidisciplinary company. This diversity is reflected best in the ensemble itself, in which on average 7 different nationalities are represented. Over the years Needcompany has put increasing emphasis on this ensemble and several artistic alliances have flourished: Lemm&Barkey (Grace Ellen Barkey and Lot Lemm) and OHNO COOPERATION (Maarten Seghers and Jan Lauwers).

Needcompany revolves around the individual artist. Everything is founded on the artistic project, on authenticity, necessity and meaning. The medium itself is continually questioned, and there is constant examination of the quality of the content to be conveyed in relation to the form it takes. Needcompany believes in quality, cooperation and innovation. Needcompany is a leading voice in the social debate on the urgency and beauty of art at both a domestic and an international level.

JAN LAUWERS

(Antwerp, 1957) is an artist who works in just about every medium. Over the

last thirty years he has become best known for his pioneering work for the stage with Needcompany, which was founded in Brussels in 1986. In the course of this period he has also built up a substantial body of art work which has been shown at BOZAR (Brussels) and McaM (Shanghai) among other places. From 2009 until 2014 Needcompany was artist-in-residence at the Burgtheater in Vienna. Jan Lauwers was awarded the 'Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic of Austria' in 2012. In 2014, he was rewarded with the 'Golden Lion Lifetime Achievement Award' at the Venice Biennale. He is the first Belgian to receive this prize in the theatre category.

Jan Lauwers studied painting at the Academy of Art in Ghent. At the end of 1979 he gathered round him a number of people to form the Epigonensemble. In 1981 this group was transformed into the Epigontheater zlv collective which took the theatre world by surprise with its six stage productions. In this way Jan Lauwers took his place in the movement for radical change in Flanders in the early 80s, and also made his international breakthrough. Epigontheater zlv presented direct, concrete, highly visual theatre that used music and language as structuring elements.

Jan Lauwers needs company. He founded Needcompany together with Grace Ellen Barkey. Together they are responsible for Needcompany's larger-scale productions. The group of performers Jan Lauwers and Grace Ellen Barkey have put together over the years is quite unique in its versatility.

Since Needcompany was founded in 1986, both its work and its performers have been markedly international. And since then, every production has been performed in several languages. Its first productions were still highly visual, but in subsequent productions the storyline and the main theme gained in importance, although the fragmentary composition remained. Lauwers' training as an artist is decisive in his handling of the theatre medium and leads to a highly individual and in many ways pioneering theatrical idiom that examines the theatre and its meaning. One of its most important characteristics is transparent, 'thinking' acting and the paradox between 'acting' and 'performing'.

STEFAN HERTMANS

Stefan Hertmans (1951) has published novels, short stories, essays and a numerous poetry collections. In 1995 he was awarded the Flemish Community's Three-Yearly Prize for his poetry collection *Music for the Crossing* (1995). For *Visitations* he received the Flemish Community Prize (1995) and the Paul Snoek Prize (1996). His poetry collections *Music for the Crossing* (1995) and *Goya als hond* (2000) have both been nominated for the VSB Poetry Prize. For the latter he was awarded the Maurice Gilliams Prize. He is the author of the 2016 Poëziegeschenk (Poetry Gift).

Hertmans' most successful prose works include the novel *To Merelbeke* (1994, nominated for the Libris Literature Prize) and *Intercities*, a collection of travel stories (1998, nominated for the Generale Bank Prize). The 1988 novel *Gestolde wolven* was awarded the Multatuli Prize. *As on the First Day*, a novel in short-story form, brought him the F. Bordewijk Prize. His move from a previous publisher to De Bezige Bij preceded publication of the poetry collection *Kaneelvingers* (2005), his collected poems under the title *Muziek voor de overtocht. Gedichten 1975-2005* (2006) and the collection of essays entitled *Het zwijgen van de tragedie* (2007). August 2013 saw the publication of his widely acclaimed novel *War and Turpentine*. For this novel he received the 2014 AKO Literature Prize and the Gouden Uil and was nominated for the Libris Literature Prize.

ROMBOUT WILLEMS

From 1971 to 1977, Rombout Willems studied guitar and orchestral conducting at the Conservatory in Tilburg. He then developed as a composer and since 1978 has often worked as a conductor and guitarist for a variety of theatre companies and music ensembles in the Netherlands. In 1985-86 he was the conductor for the Kaalslag project, in collaboration with Reinbert de Leeuw and Roland Kieft. From 1987 to 1992 he set up several music-theatre productions, writing the music for all of them. Since 1991 he has had a connection with Needcompany in various capacities, as a composer, musical dramaturge and repetiteur.

He has composed the music for several Needcompany productions, including Grace Ellen Barkey's *One, Don Quijote, Tres* and *This door is too small (for a bear)* and Jan Lauwers' *The Snakesong Trilogy, C-Song, Marketplace 76* and *War and Turpentine*.

NEEDCOMPANY

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