

Fear versus empathy

Antigone in Molenbeek

STEFAN HERTMANS

A young woman is not allowed to bury her brother, because he has been accused of treason. Personal conviction and grief clash head-on with rigid, worldly laws. With 'Antigone in Molenbeek' Stefan Hertmans has adapted Sophocles' tragedy to our contemporary, multicultural society. Antigone is now known as Nouria, a brave young law student from the Brussels district of Molenbeek. Just as in the classic, she wants to pay her last respects to her deceased brother – in Hertmans' version a suicide bomber – and bury his remains. But the authorities decide otherwise. Here the lawmaker is not a perfidious state, but district police officer Crénom, a representative of our fearful democratic society.

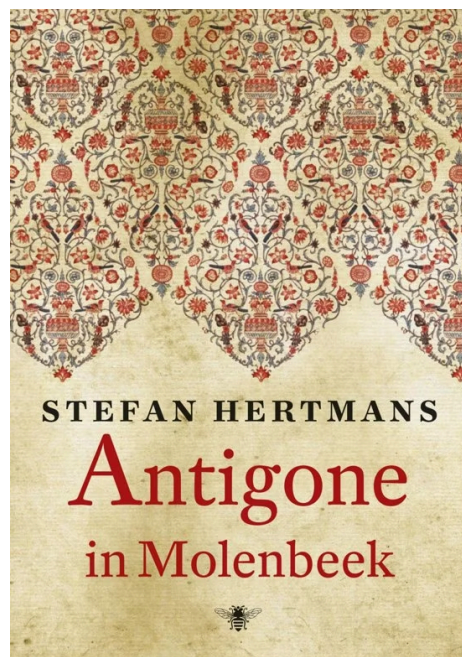
Hertmans' text is a plea for empathy, one that contains an unambiguous warning: our fear can feed radicalisation. This is a relevant contemporary dilemma.

DE VOLKSKRANT

In a poetic monologue we see Nouria go to extremes to give her brother's body a final resting place - and we see it end badly. With his up-to-date version of an age-old issue, Hertmans explores how fear can get in the way of humanity and empathy. Or how a lack of understanding can lead to self-destruction.

Antigone in Molenbeek is a clever, empathetic monologue that leaves us with pressing questions.

DE STANDAARD



AUTHOR



Stefan Hertmans' (b. 1951) biography reads like a 'bildungsroman': from teacher to jazz musician to professor and writer's writer to Belgian State Prize Laureate and major international success. He has published novels, short stories, essays on literature and philosophy, plays and poetry. Listen to Stefan Hertmans on 'Kopje Koffie' ('Cup of Coffee'), a podcast produced by The Dutch Embassy in Berlin, the Dutch Foundation for Literature, in cooperation with Flanders Literature and the General Representation of the Government of Flanders. Photo © Praet

ORIGINAL TITLE Antigone in Molenbeek (2017, De Bezige Bij, 88 pp.)

RIGHTS SOLD German (Hermann Wallmann), Arabic (Dar Fadaat), Bulgarian (Black Flamingo), French (Le Castor Astral), Croatian (Antipod), Polish (Wydawnictwo Akademickie Dialog)

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