

An author delves into the dark history of his house

# The Ascent

STEFAN HERTMANS

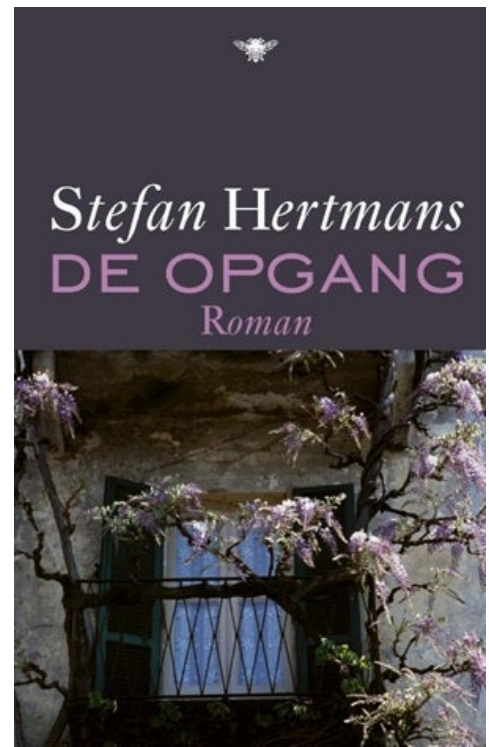
In the summer of 1979, a house in Ghent caught Stefan Hertmans' attention. Despite its dilapidated state, he was captivated by the house and impulsively bought it. He was taken aback to discover that the previous Flemish owner, Willem Verhulst, had been a SS member. It was only twenty years later, when he read the autobiography written by Verhulst's son, that he gained a deeper understanding of the house's horrific history. He became fascinated by the life of this man on the wrong side of history, and set out to find out more about his political and private life.

**An indispensable addition to the many volumes written about WWII and collaboration.**

DE MORGEN

Hertmans spoke with the next of kin, consulted archives, found intimate documents. In his memories, he wandered again through all the rooms in which he had lived for so long. Layer by layer, he unravelled not only the secrets of the house's political history, but also the marital drama that took place there. Verhulst's commitment to the SS was after all completely at odds with the outlook of his Dutch, pacifist and deeply religious wife.

Hertmans discovered, moreover, that many threads link the Ghent house and its former visitors with prominent cultural and political figures in present-day Flanders. 'The Ascent' is a captivating journey through a turbulent century, in which Hertmans once again demonstrates his mastery at interweaving fiction and nonfiction. After the international success of 'War and Turpentine', he once again spins a personal story into an epic narrative.



## 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*

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