

Thinking the obscene and the  
obscene in thinking

# Dubious Matters

STEFAN HERTMANS

The obscene in this book refers to more than only the sexually offensive: the forbidden generates fear and contains a mixture of fear and lust. Nowadays, 'the obscene is a disappearing act: it is showing all in such a way, there is nothing left to be seen, perfect emptiness of significance and pure form—flat truth without content or signification, and because of that no longer truth.' Starting from this paradox Hertmans concludes there is much obscenity in the morals of contemporary society.

**Cultural products marked as obscene always  
also make food for thought**

RUDI LAERMANS

In the next chapters, he treats this paradox in concrete cases. In 'On gerontophobia', he discusses our relationship with death, in 'On repetition' he treats the human fear for repetitiveness, in 'On the hidden' he analyses our fascination for hidden places and in 'On images' he reflects on irrational violence. All these chapters make use of cultural references from popular and high culture.

At the end Hertmans becomes aware of the dubiousness of thinking: 'Because there is no escaping from the dubiousness of thinking, one can only think against better knowledge—thinking that acknowledges there is a point where one just has to start, a point where one has to run the risk of being dubious.'



## 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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