

Memorial to a grandfather

War and Turpentine

STEFAN HERTMANS

Right before his death in the 1980s, Stefan Hertmans' grandfather gave his grandson a few notebooks. For years, Hertmans was too afraid to open them – until he finally did and laid bare some unexpected secrets.

The life of his grandfather turned out to be marked by his impoverished childhood in late nineteenth-century Ghent, by horrible experiences as a front soldier during the First World War and by his great love who died young; the rest of his life he spent turning his grief into silent paintings.

A blast of narrative fresh air. One of the 10 best books of 2016.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

In an attempt to fathom that life, Hertmans wrote down his memories of his grandfather. He quotes from his diaries and looks at his paintings. Hertmans tells the story with an imagination that only great writers possess, and does it in a form that leaves an indelible impression. 'War and Turpentine' is a gripping search for a life that paralleled the tragedy of a century, and is a posthumous, almost mythical attempt to offer that life a voice at last.

'War and Turpentine' is one of those rare direct accounts by a front-line soldier and can be seen as the Flemish answer to Erich Maria Remarque's famous 'All Quiet on the Western Front'.

'War and Turpentine' has all the markings of a future classic.

THE GUARDIAN



AUTHOR



Stefan Hertmans (b. 1951). Photo © Praet

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