

AND...

NAVE OF IMAGES

- Excerpt of *The Fountainhead* (2014) by Ivo van Hove,
- *Les Damnés* (2016 / 2h15) by Ivo van Hove,
July 16 at 14:30, église des Célestins

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- October 12 and 13, 2018, Baltic House Theatre-Festival, St. Petersburg (Russia)

DE DINGEN DIE VOORBIJGAAN THE THINGS THAT PASS

At the heart of the play, two old lovers are waiting for death, convinced that no one knows the horrible secret that binds them together. Their children and grandchildren are trying in vain to free themselves from it: the burden of family always get passed down, even in hidden ways. Of the rigid society of The Hague Louis Couperus described in his novel, Ivo van Hove keeps the stifling atmosphere and the tragic aspect. The stage is a waiting room or a purgatory, a place of disillusionment, an abyss in which buried feelings are either reined in or unleashed. The resonating beat of a clock tells the time, a race whose end is inevitable... Dressed all in black, the characters are like an ancient chorus, carrying within themselves an anxiety that squeezes them like a vice, obstructs all desires, and asphyxiates their dreams. Their emotions are sometimes delicate, but they remain first and foremost raw, often abrasive, without pity for this family caught in their own trap. Ivo van Hove, fascinated by Couperus's so modern intuitions, has chosen to explore how one can escape one's destiny and legacy. Can there be no other form of relationship left to invent, outside of the classic model of the family?

IVO VAN HOVE

The director of the Toneelgroep in Amsterdam since 2001, Ivo van Hove has directed over a hundred shows, plays, novel or film adaptations, musicals, and operas. From Sophocles to Bowie via Shakespeare, Duras, Miller, or Visconti, he has created a protean theatre revolving around human emotions in which everything, from the text to the stage, from the performers to the images and the music, comes together to create meaning: a theatre of urgency, subversive and never moralistic. The audience of the Festival d'Avignon knows him well: his last creation here was *The Damned*, with the actors of the Comédie-Française, in the Cour d'honneur of the Palais des papes.

LOUIS COUPERUS

A poet and writer, Louis Couperus (1863-1923) is a major figure in Dutch literature. His psychological novels, influenced by the naturalism of Zola and Flaubert, offered harsh criticism of the rigoristic society of The Hague and focused on the *fin de siècle* themes of destiny, decline, and decadence.

72th
EDITION

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COUR DU LYCÉE SAINT-JOSEPH

INTERVIEW WITH IVO VAN HOVE

Why did you choose to adapt *Hidden Force* (1900), *The Books of Small Souls* (1901) and *Old People and the Things that Pass* (1906), three novels by Louis Couperus? What about that last adaptation in particular, which you will present at the Festival d'Avignon this year?

Ivo van Hove: Louis Couperus, who wrote around the turn of the century, is a major figure in Dutch literature. He has been translated in several languages, including French, although the translation of *Old People and the Things that Pass* is dated and not very good. In the original Dutch, it's a beautiful text, written in a very poetic language. Although he has been compared to Marcel Proust, Oscar Wilde, or Thomas Mann, Louis Couperus remains relatively unknown because he wrote in Dutch. I thought it was essential to bring this major author to a wider audience. His world view was groundbreaking, he described life in the early 20th century but it applies to our own time as well. He knows how to ask big questions. He talks about family, marriage, human relationships, and our difficulty to accept death. The play is very different from what I've directed here before: *Roman Tragedies*, based on three plays by Shakespeare in 2008, an adaptation of Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* in 2014, and *The Damned* in 2016, based on the eponymous screenplay. With this "trilogy" of texts by Couperus, I've tried to create a new theatricality.

In what way are the adaptation and scenography of this novel different from those other shows?

It has a choreographic theatricality, which you can see in the movements of the performers, who look a lot like an opera chorus. It's a sort of Greek tragedy, but modernised. The stage is a sort of waiting room, of purgatory, of limbo between two worlds, between heaven and hell. The characters are trapped there. The walls are transparent, and on them are painted anguished and terrifying faces in mud, which add a powerful dramatic presence. Visually speaking, Jan Versweyveld and myself were inspired by Flemish painter Léon Spilliaert and by his paintings and their "disturbing strangeness." His creations are very dark, suffused with melancholy, but also very expressive, full of worry and fury. A very personal work influenced by loss and solitude, a theatre of shadows made of shades of monochrome black. In the second act, during that short passage where Lot and Elly go on honeymoon in the South, we were inspired by Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass*, or a 21st-century version of it. They discover a physical world, very erotic, which I staged as if it were a dream. We always dream of the things we most deeply want, even if we can't have them. In all of Couperus's novels, the south is hope, paradise, sensuality, carnality. This scene is a parenthesis, a moment of musical theatre accompanied by Nina Simone's voluptuous "*Wild is the Wind*". Speaking of music, on the clock table at the back of the stage are a number of different instruments: bells, a carillon, a glass harp, a tenor clarinet, etc.

Musician and composer Harry De Wit did an amazing job. He was there throughout rehearsals, he plays without a score throughout the play. He's an actor in the show like the others, and expresses with his instruments what the others say with words. He's a performer, and understood immediately what I wanted him to do. As for the clock, it tells the time ceaselessly, this time which is the definition of our lives and will come to an end for all of us. I think there's a very beautiful moment in the show when the grandmother dies, time stops for an instant, almost as if the universe were ending with her.

Time and growing old are powerful themes in this play.

Yes, young people like Lot, "a young man of 38," already feel old, and much older characters feel rather young. That's why I didn't go with a classic cast, young actors play old characters and older actors play younger characters, it's more theatrical than realistic. The whole play revolves around the tragedy of time, of un-lived lives. There's a secret that's shared by the elders of the family, a secret they think is safe but that everybody knows. The two nonagenarians committed murder sixty years earlier, a very cruel crime of passion: Otilie, Lot's grandmother, killed her husband with her lover Takma. The next two generations hope to free themselves from this terrible past and from this trauma with their death. The other major theme of this novel is the importance of family, of the end of family. Lot says something beautiful towards the beginning, "This family's gone on for long enough!" Couperus dreams of different relationships between men and women, between old and young, not only within the family. He thinks that the bonds of family, of marriage, are a prison and incompatible with freedom. There's a personal urgency in Couperus, who was gay, to talk about those themes of family, marriage, fate, the desire for change, the will to flee society. Those writings, which are often self-portraits, are the only way for him to escape the stiffness of his time. What makes this beautiful novel important is its great modernity, its universality. It may have been written in 1906, but it's about things that are still necessary and urgent in our society. I discovered in Couperus's texts this groundbreaking idea that we should perhaps open our minds to new forms of relationship. Back then, and today still, family is the basis of our societies, but he was already thinking up new forms of relationship, outside of the "classic" family unit, and hoped that future generations could experiment with them. He was a visionary. This show asks whether we can ever free ourselves from what we inherit from our family. Even if it doesn't seem optimistic, there is a small ray of hope at the end of the novel and of the play. Perhaps future generations will manage to change their fate and, who knows, the world.

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Interview conducted by Malika Baaziz and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach