

## DE NIEUWE TONEELBIBLIOTHEEK

Deze tekst is afkomstig van de online bibliotheek op [www.denieuwetoneelbibliotheek.nl](http://www.denieuwetoneelbibliotheek.nl).

De rechten, inclusief en met name de rechten voor uitvoering, liggen voor alle teksten bij de auteur en het is dan ook verplicht om voor elke vorm van uitvoering toestemming bij de betreffende schrijver aan te vragen. Voor elke schrijver is het van groot belang om te weten of zijn teksten worden uitgevoerd, dus neem alstublieft bij elke lezing, encenering, bespreking in het onderwijs e.d. even contact op met de auteur! Het contact adres voor deze tekst is:

<b>Schrijver</b>	Tine van Aerschot
<b>Titel</b>	A Partial Exposure of A Half Decent Elephant
<b>Jaar</b>	2013
<b>Uitvoering</b>	

Copyright (C) 2013 by Tine van Aerschot

TINE VAN AERSCHOT

A PARTIAL  
EXPOSURE  
OF A  
HALF DECENT  
ELEPHANT

De Nieuwe Toneelbibliotheek, Tekst #199  
© 2013, Tine van Aerschoot  
Eerste druk 2013

ISBN 978-94-6076-199-7  
NUR 107

Niets uit deze uitgave mag worden opgevoerd of  
verveelvoudigd zonder schriftelijke toestemming van de  
schrijver en De Nieuwe Toneelbibliotheek

No part of this book may be reproduced in any way  
without written permission from the writer and De  
Nieuwe Toneelbibliotheek

*De Nieuwe Toneelbibliotheek bestaat uit*  
Margreet Huizing  
Joanne Mensert  
Connie Nijman  
Ditte Pelgrom

*Omslag ontwerp en druk*  
Tine van Aerschoot i.s.m. Grafisch Werkcentrum  
Amsterdam, Thomas Cravenmaker en DNTB  
*Typografie en basis lay-out*  
Connie Nijman  
*Printwerk*  
HollandRidderkerk, Ridderkerk

info@denieuwetoneelbibliotheek.nl  
Postadres  
De Nieuwe Toneelbibliotheek  
Willem Beukelaarsstraat 42  
1097 CT Amsterdam

Dit boekje is online te bestellen op:  
[www.denieuwetoneelbibliotheek.nl](http://www.denieuwetoneelbibliotheek.nl)

A  
PARTIAL  
EXPOSURE  
OF  
A  
HALF  
DECENT  
ELEPHANT

I like the elephant.

It is modest.

It wears its testicles on the inside.

When it is female it is a cow.

When it is male it is a bull.

Simple.

Straightforward.

And dignified.

Unlike the ring-tailed lemur

a small

nervous

red eyed

primate from Madagascar

*showing serious testicular development*

whose different genders are named

the princess and

the dictator.

In its favour

It has to be said

that the lemur

*lemures meaning ghosts or spirits*

is thought to host

the souls

of the Malagasy ancestors.

I am not sure I fully understand

the hosting-of-souls-model,

but I do understand that anything

to do with ancestors is

important and a big task to fulfil

for any primate.

So.

I get the testicle part.

But 'princesses and dictators'?

These names could just be the result of a  
tedious and twisted  
way of labelling new species  
but to the once eager feminist  
in me they sound embarrassing.

It is a bit beside the point.

But I find a gander  
to be a good linguistic counterpart  
to the goose.

The doe

*Minnie*

and the buck

*Mickey*

in the mouse population

can to my taste only be suitable for  
rock-  
face-  
jumping-  
mountain-  
mice.

If such a harvest  
or mischief  
or nest  
could exist.

Still.

Knowing that the potential asses  
of a potential neighbour  
would be known  
as jennies and  
as jacks  
makes my day a little brighter.

Another thing that slightly brightens my day is  
that all this information

*all of it*

is readily available on the World Wide Web

*all the time.*

And the most ingenious part about this is  
that the Web does not pretend to be true.

*It could be.*

Some of it is as true as true ever can be.

But it does not claim to be.

The elephant does not need  
gender names  
to provide it with status.

Even when in the mammal world  
it is not always categorised



as being of royal or noble descent  
And even when in most descriptions  
of the animal kingdom  
the importance of 'elephant'  
is on a sliding scale

It is still a certainty that  
throughout every account  
of a people's world history  
the elephant is and will always be  
*for at least a while longer*  
an empowered beast.

And it is and will always be  
*for at least a while longer*  
omnipresent.

In my universe  
*the one where all reflections start from me*  
The elephant used to have only a few faces.

Before my slight obsession  
with this magnificent creature  
My image of 'elephant' was sadly  
and largely shaped by  
my experiences as a child in the Antwerp Zoo  
my onetime ever visit to the circus  
the odd TV documentary  
the museum of colonial acquisitions  
and by the manipulative  
indoctrinating  
self-righteous religion  
that is the Disney machine.

I thought of 'elephant'  
as some sort of  
stern white imperial grandfather  
fighting for a noble cause.

Its main role was to support  
the poor little coloured people  
of the poor little coloured countries  
in their exotic poor little coloured ways.

This image stayed true to me  
for decades.

It stayed true to me  
long after I fairly naively  
but very forcefully rebelled  
against any patronising enforcement of  
our western imperialism  
our culture  
our religion  
our all-encompassing wisdom  
on any community  
or individual.

Somehow

Before my slight obsession with the elephant

I was oblivious to the image I had created.

I forgot to reconsider its meaning.

I forgot to clean up its act.

And in so doing I forgot

to clean up my own prejudice.

It does make me wonder.

How much more bigotry

there is firmly installed within me?

How much underlying

racism

intolerance

discrimination

is still lingering undetected?

Judging by the difficulty I experience

in spontaneously embracing

my fellow human  
any fellow human  
I assume an awful lot.

Like anything or everything I consider  
It does not really matter that much  
what I think of the elephant.

But when I take a little peek  
at what others have written  
and said  
and thought  
about this mighty animal

I feel truly happy  
and in some instances almost ecstatic.

For example

It is said that an elephant has no joints.

When it falls it cannot rise again and dies.

*This the elephant knows.*

Out of fear of toppling over during the night

It selects a tree to lean against whilst sleeping.

*This the hunter knows.*

He observes his prey carefully.

When he has found the tree trunk

that the animal favours during the night

He gets his axe.

And he cuts halfway through the trunk.

So it happens that

*in mid-sleep*

*and with its full weight leaning*

elephant and tree are felled together.

Several very learned people

have clearly stated this.

And they have insisted upon it.

For over fourteen centuries.

Other equally learned scribes  
have elaborated upon this.

Some claim that

when the beast is falling

It trumpets loudly

and a big elephant will go to it at once.

It fails to lift it

and together they trumpet loudly

and twelve big elephants

will go to them at once.

But they too fail to lift the fallen one.

*In one manuscript there is a happy ending*

After the group

of now fourteen elephants

trumpet loudly

A very small elephant  
comes running  
to the scene of the disaster.

He puts his little trunk  
under the fallen animal  
and lifts it up.

The hair  
and some of the movement organs  
of this little elephant  
have accidentally been partially burned.

And because of it

no evil

not even a dragon

can ever touch it.

It is not always clear  
where all this information originates.

For the an-elephant-has-no-joints-theory



Some clearly point to Aristotle.

But as far as I can detect

None of this is of his doing.

Diodorus

Siculus

Strabo

Ambrose

Cassiodore

Solinus

and many other names

are mentioned as possible original sources.

But tracking down all these people

*and all of their knowledge*

is far beyond my reach.

Science is basically

and to a large extent

developing in exactly the same way

as ordinary gossip does.

There seems to be no limit  
to the freedom of interpretation  
and to the imagination  
with which  
scientific notions  
are passed on  
and elaborated.

According to the newer scientific standards

It is pointless  
to create  
an understanding of the universe  
without looking at the universe.

To all probability  
this is oh so true.

But there 'lieth' so much  
poetry and beauty  
in the science of guessing

or just making it all up as you go.

My favourite source has to be

Gaius Plinius Secundus

*or Pliny the Elder*

and his Natural History.

His is considered

to be one of the first attempts

to write a complete encyclopedium

about

the glorious

frightening

volatile

world

he lived in.

For years

Most of Pliny's writings

were designed to avoid attention.

The unpredictable Emperors

*Caligula and Nero*

did not necessarily take kindly

to people who formed an opinion.

*About anything.*

But when Vespasian became sovereign

Pliny's luck turned.

And his Natural History blew up

to a size

that held over 160 volumes

and covered over 20.000 facts.

Today, 37 of the 160 books

have made it onto the internet.

The 123 remaining volumes

have fallen through the cracks of evolution.

It is impossible to figure out  
why evolution spared  
Pliny's notes on the elephant.  
And it is impossible to understand  
why a better protected  
better equipped  
and all-round stronger species  
like the mammoth  
vanished.

And what feels like the trial animal  
or the model-sized one  
the elephant  
survived the test of time.

Accidents and luck  
must be key ingredients  
in cases of surpassing  
the impossible demands

of natural selection.

The acquired ability of the Northern Wood Frog  
to freeze into a solid block of frog  
and to come out alive  
on the defrosting end of the spectrum  
must surely be  
some sort of testimony  
to the luck-and-accidents-theory.

The fact that the first thing  
this frog wants to do  
upon his awakening  
is to shag anything  
that is shaggable  
might be a testimony  
to a more guided or godlike form of selection.

*Or not.*

Pliny is said to have died dead  
of a heart attack whilst trying  
to save a friend  
from the horror  
of being buried by lava  
in the city of Pompey  
during the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

In book 8 of 37  
Pliny states  
that an elephant  
can climb up against a rope  
and slide down again  
with its face downward.

This would imply  
*I suppose*  
that elephants do have joints.

But I have not found any information  
as to how this rope climbing is achieved.  
At least not in the first English translation  
of the Natural History  
from 1601  
by Philemon Holland.

Numerous versions of the Natural History  
exist.

The differences between them are fascinating.

For instance

When Philemon H. tells the story

of the elephant

feeding itself on trees' foliage

A dragon drops down on it.

Upon which the dragon



bites the elephant behind the ear.

Thus placing his head

out of reach

of the elephant's hand.

It then coils its tail

around the elephant's feet.

Thus preventing the elephant

from running away.

Thus being able to suck all the blood

out of the elephant's body.

Thus emptying the elephant

of all its strength.

Upon which the elephant drops dead.

And thus

By the heaviness of his weight

kills the dragon wrapped around it.

In 18th century translations

The hand of the elephant has become his trunk  
and the dragon has turned into a serpent.

In 20th century versions

The trunk stays

but the serpent has become a snake.

Illustrated Latin manuscripts

of the *Naturalis Historia*

made by monks in the Middle Ages  
usually depict red or blue dragons  
entangling the elephants.

The drawings of the elephants

have been based on the descriptions

found in classical writings.

The results are as wonderful

as they are surprising.

Some look like goats  
with a trumpet-like snout  
and a big human eye.

Others seem more inspired  
by the pig or the cow.

What I find fascinating  
about Pliny  
and Philemon Holland  
and so many others  
is their leniency towards probability.

I think they believe  
if it is probable to them  
It is also possible.

And because they have no real means  
of going to see for themselves

They possibly accept probability for reality.

I also believe

being right

or having conclusive evidence

was not very high up on their list of priorities.

The fact that Samuel Johnson

the man who assembled

the Complete English Dictionary

in 1755

one of the first English dictionaries

described several nouns as

'a word I do not know the meaning of'

indicates that accuracy

was not always the objective.

This to me

opens up the field of science  
in such a way  
that it becomes messy  
and magical  
and delusional  
and crazy  
like life itself.

It is a perfect  
valid  
way  
of dealing with reality.

I have to admit  
that it is not always useful  
in specific situations.

But in others

it is totally appropriate  
and fun  
and enriching.

It forces  
my rigid brain  
to open up.

It forces me  
to be more aware.

It makes my mind spin  
in an exciting  
tumbling-down-the-stairs  
kind of way.

If it would still be permissible  
to start a scientific theory

with 'apparently'

We might be in a lot of trouble  
on a certain level.

But we would gain  
a lot of colour on the next.

Apparently

For mating

or consummation of the union

The female elephant lies on her back  
while the male elephant covers her  
facing downward.

According

to the missionary guidelines

this is the approved way

to multiply

for everybody.

Apparently

An elephant never mates in captivity.

It is too polite

to have sex

when it can be observed.

It is too sensitive

to want its offspring

to undergo the same fate

of an incarcerated life.

Apparently

An elephant mates back to back.

Apparently

The penis of an elephant

is very similar



to the penis of the horse.

Only in comparison  
to the general size of the elephant  
it is disproportionally small.

Apparently

The male elephant  
discharges its urine backwards.

Apparently

When the elephant wants to bare a son  
It goes to the east  
near paradise  
where the mandrake tree grows.

The cow seduces the bull  
by feeding it some of the tree's fruit.  
Upon which she conceives  
immediately in the womb.

The cow is pregnant for two years

The cow is pregnant for five years

The cow is pregnant for ten years

The cow is pregnant for twenty-two months.

When the time comes to give birth

She goes into a pool

until the water reaches her udders.

While she is in labour

The bull guards the female.

They fear their enemy

the dragon

*or snake.*

If the male should happen to find one

He will trample upon it until it is dead.

When the cow goes into labour

All the other females of the group

stand in a circle around her.

The pregnant elephant bends her legs  
and squats down

to diminish the height

the calf has to fall.

The newborn will be raised

by the collective of female elephants.

Apparently

An elephant always travels in a herd.

The oldest

leads from the front.

The next oldest

brings up the rear.

But in passing through a river

The smallest one

goes first

so as not to wear away the bottom

and thus increase the depth of the water.

Apparently

An elephant cannot swim.

It is too heavy.

Apparently

An elephant can swim for hours on end.

When it is tired

It stops swimming

and its body floats

*the same way an iceberg floats*

with 10% revealed

and 90% covered by the water.

Apparently

When an elephant is captured

It is tamed very quickly

by means of barley juice.

Apparently

The elephant is the largest land animal  
and the closest to man in intelligence.

It understands the language of its country.

It obeys orders.

And it remembers duties.

Apparently

An elephant has a great natural gentleness  
towards those who are not very strong.

When it finds itself

among a flock of sheep

It will remove with its trunk

those that come its way

so as not to unwittingly

crush them.

Looking to the past

Trying to connect

to the alien understandings

of brilliant minds

of past times

is as good a representation of the present

as a newspaper

or a collection of today's newspapers

is.

I am in love

with Archaeology

and with History

Plain History

and Art History

and Social History

and with so many other sciences.

But they tend to build

impenetrable walls

between before and now

between real and surreal

*or false.*

Logic seems to be needed

a lot of the time as well.

When I look at things

*and at living*

from within these systems

Something in me

starts drowning a little bit.

And another little bit

might be suffocating.

I have no system.

Subsequently

I have no form.

I am tempted to apologise for it.

But not too seriously.

I started to look at elephants because

like a sailboat

or a Renaissance pocket sundial

or the sound of a ukulele

*combined with*

*the high-pitched voice*

*of a tall silly man*

The sight of an elephant

makes me happy.

This



colossal

gray

when-I-stand-in-the-shade-you-cannot-see-me

animal

and I

have started

an undeniable

romance.

It is very clear

that I am not the only one

to have succumbed to

its quiet

strong

tolerant

charms.

So many are fascinated

in love  
obsessed  
with the elephant.

I am not jealous.

So many have investigated  
researched  
pondered upon  
painted  
and written  
about the elephant.

The love  
and the awe  
I find in the traces left  
is very genuine.

But so is the greed.

And the need to conquer.

And the cruelty.

The representation

of different human voices

and opinions

is endless.

The representation

of the needs of the elephant

is sadly

*and typically*

very very slim.

When I was five or six

I went on my first real school outing.

When the morning bell rang

We all got on the bus.

For most of us

The excitement was too much  
to be able to keep quiet.

For me

Overexcitement meant

I needed to keep very still.

When I moved about too much

It felt as if I might not make it.

And we were after all going to the zoo.

I remember

this overwhelming feeling of anticipation.

I remember

not having enough pocket money  
to buy a bag of peanuts  
to feed the monkeys.

I remember  
smelling the intense smell  
of monkey pee  
in the monkey compound.

I remember  
giving the apple from my lunchbox  
to an elephant.

Two elephants were kept  
in an outdoor enclosure  
that resembled a giant rock.

Around the rock  
was a steep ditch.

Around the ditch  
large boulders were placed

to protect us from falling in.

When the elephants stood  
as close as possible  
to the edge of the plateau  
with their forefeet halfway over the rim  
and you stretched as far as possible  
The trunks of the elephants  
could just reach your hand.

I patiently waited  
until a spot by the boulders cleared.

I stood on my toes.

I made myself as tall as I could.

I leaned with my full weight on the rock.

I put my apple on the palm of my hand.

I made my little arm reach as far as it could.

Again I waited.

I was scared and excited at the same time.

I believe I actually stopped breathing  
when the largest elephant of the two  
spotted my apple  
and moved towards me.

It stretched its trunk  
and its breath was tickling me.

It was very hard not to pull back.

With the little wiggly bit  
that looks like a finger  
he touched the apple  
and sniffed my hand.

And then it was all over.

I had only moved a tiny bit.  
Maybe even less.

But the apple rolled off  
and fell deep into the ditch.

The elephant did not even look at me.

It went on.

To the next hand.

To the next treat.

I was so disappointed.



I may well have cried a little.

I am not sure.

But I made sure

that I never told anybody

what had happened.

Some individual Elephants

*probably in spite of their wishes*

have become very famous.

There are rumours.

About an ancient Greek elephant Kleitos.

It is said to have learnt

to write the alphabet.

And it is said it could spell out

several words.

But the first Mega Star Elephant

in the western history

has to be Hanno.

He is one of many gifts

from the Portuguese King Manuel the first

to Pope Leo X.

It is 1514.

Hanno is transported  
from Portugal to Italy  
by ship.

He enters Rome  
in grand style  
with a full entourage.

When the parade reaches the balcony  
*from which Leo X is watching*

Hanno  
*the royal gift*

falls to his knees  
barks three times  
fills his trunk with water  
and sprays it high into the air  
drenching the nearby spectators.

His Holiness is elated.

Hanno immediately becomes his favourite pet.

Every day

Leo pays Hanno a visit.

The elephant responds to him

with loud trumpeting

and crying.

On special holy days

Hanno is paraded through the city.

All dressed up.

Carrying a silver tower on his back.

Two years after his arrival in Rome

Hanno

*who is now seven*

falls ill.

The best Papal doctors tend to him.  
They sadly manage  
to nurse the elephant  
to death  
with a purgative  
containing a substantial amount  
of gold.

The pope is very upset.  
Raphael drops everything  
and paints a magnificent fresco  
in honour of the beloved animal.

Some time later  
King Manuel attempts  
to give Pope Leo  
a rhinoceros.

The ship carrying the precious load

is shipwrecked in a storm.

The carcass of the rhino  
washes up on a French beach  
and is sent back to Lisbon.

There it is first stuffed  
and later shipped off again to Rome.

No record is found  
of what happened  
to the rhinoceros  
after its arrival.

These extravagant presents  
are small tokens of gratitude.

Portugal received  
substantial support  
from the Vatican

in all its attempts to

conquer

colonize

and

*more to the point*

Christianize

as many parts

of the newly discovered worlds

as possible.

The introduction of the Victorian Zoo

to the general public

creates an unprecedented

and unstoppable

appetite

for exotic creatures

and extravagant showing-off.

And because these times are ruled

by the market laws  
of supply and demand

The 19th and 20th centuries  
are littered with cruelty.

There is the toilet paper competition.

Its main prize:

3.000 Dollars

or a baby elephant named Annabel.

The winner

*who lives in Alaska*

can not help but choose the baby elephant.

A little while later

Annabel

becomes the first animal

of the Alaska Zoo.

There is the ballet of elephants.



A conspiracy  
between a ballet God  
and a musical Genius.

Fifty elephants  
and fifty young women  
all dressed in tutus  
dancing a choreography  
by Balanchine  
to Circus Polka  
by Stravinsky  
in Madison Square Garden.

The performance was such a success  
that it sold out 425 times.

When I first read about this ballet  
Two totally unrelated thoughts occurred to me.

In the skeleton of an elephant  
The bones of the feet  
remarkably resemble  
the feet of a bird.

*All be it a few sizes larger.*

A few years ago

I read somewhere

*I don't remember where*

that Nijinsky was such a graceful  
and flowing dancer

because his feet

where made of bones

as delicate as birds' bones.

There is also a reference

to a New Zealand newspaper article  
entitled 'Two elephants killed by tutu'.

It made me wonder for days

how this would be possible.

Finally

I found the newspaper clipping on the web explaining that the two circus elephants had been left grazing freely and that they accidentally ate tutu a very poisonous plant.

Both elephants died within a few hours.

There is Betty.

A very intelligent animal whose owner claimed that even a bullet could not pierce her skin.

This remained a true statement until one neighbour put it to the test and shot the elephant dead.

There is Batyr

the talking elephant from Kazakhstan.

This anecdote is my favourite.

Even though it is unintentional

there is a glimmer

of him getting some of his own back

in this story.

The voice of Batyr

made several appearances

on the Kazakh radio.

He was so remarkable

that the national USSR broadcasting board

invited him

to make an appearance

on television.

When Batyr was asked to speak

He said

Раз-два-три иди́ на хуй

or in translation

one-two-three go on you dick.

And then there is

the most horrible

of horrible tales.

Topsy

*the Coney Island attraction*

was a very docile elephant.

When she was fed

a burning cigarette

by a member of the public

She reacted furiously  
and trampled the man to death.

First

They wanted to hang her for murder.

But she would not walk onto the gallows.

And

the American Society

for the Prevention

of Cruelty

to Animals

objected.

So

The Coney Island Luna Park owners

announced

that Topsy

would be publically executed

by electrocution.

*As suggested by Thomas Edison.*

In 1903

Edison was trying

to get his electric current adopted

as the national standard for electricity.

If successful

The proceeds would be

billions and billions of dollars.

So

He exploited

every possible occasion

to get free publicity for his bid.

The mechanism he proposed

for the execution of Topsy

was a predecessor  
of the official American electric chair.  
This constellation was previously used  
to try out the effectiveness of killing  
by electric current.

Horses

goats

pigs

and many other animals

had already passed the test.

The electric chair

was designed

by the Edison Ateliers.

But out of all the artefacts

his employees realised

This is the only invention Edison

did not claim to be his.



On January 4

While Topsy was given

a lethal dose of cyanide

as a backup killer

Edison made sure

his Kinetoscope was ready

to capture the event.

1.500 people gathered

to witness 6.600-volt

pass through the poor animal.

Within seconds the beast was dead.

To help the Edison campaign

The horrific film was shown

to audiences across the country.

The most famous elephant  
of the western world  
and of so-called modern times  
is most certainly Jumbo.

In 1882

Even after more than 100.000 letters  
were written to Queen Victoria  
with pleas to stop the transaction

Jumbo

*the mighty elephant*

was sold

by London Zoo

to P.T. Barnum

for 10.000 dollars.

He became

the star attraction  
in Barnum's circus  
'The Greatest Show on Earth'.

Jumbo was enormous.

A special train carriage  
had to be built for him  
to tour around the United States  
and Canada.

Three years after his arrival in America  
Jumbo was killed in a train accident.

His skeleton was donated  
to the Museum of Natural History  
in New York.

His hide was stuffed  
and continued to travel

with the circus

until 1889.

For decades after his death

Jumbo remained popular.

His name has been borrowed

for almost any saleable product

that is considered to be super-sized.

Jumbo popsicles

Jumbo calculators

Jumbo suitcases

Jumbo couches

Jumbo anythings.

Jumbo Jet

is definitely

one of the more peculiar choices made.

A flying elephant

is not particularly  
an image that encourages my trust  
for transatlantic air travel.

In the Carthaginian army  
Elephants led the men into battle.  
When fearless and invincible  
They stomped among the enemy soldiers  
and trampled them without mercy.  
When frightened  
They turned against their own ranks  
and reaped as much havoc  
as they did  
on the other side  
of the invisible line.

Alexander the Great  
had four elephants

guarding his tent  
when at war.

Antiochus

rewarded an elephant  
with a silver harness  
for its bravery  
to the elephant's great delight.

Hannibal

promised a prisoner his freedom  
if he could beat an elephant.  
With one mighty blow  
the prisoner cut off its trunk  
and the elephant was slain.

Hannibal realised

that if word got out  
it would bring the animals

into disgrace.

So he sent his horseman  
after the now freed man  
to silence him.

*His head*

*Off*

A few months ago I went back to the zoo.

As is so often the case  
Through adult eyes  
the whole thing looked tiny.

I went straight to the elephants.

They are kept in the same spot.  
But the enclosure has doubled in size.

There are two different elephants now.  
Two young five-year-old adolescent bulls.

I stood there  
for a really long time  
observing the elephants.



Every once in a while  
they observed me.

One of them kept on  
raising his left front foot  
the only foot  
with a piece of chain around it  
whenever he came close  
to where I was standing.

Probably something he had to learn  
to make his imprisoned life easier.

Most of the time  
They were blatantly ignoring me  
and everybody else around.

They were far more interested

in each other  
and in the reappearing erection  
of one of them.

There was also a little wet patch  
on the face of the excited one.

It barely showed  
just beyond and a little lower than the eyes.

It was the first sign of musth  
a state of increased testosterone.

Over and over  
He kept on touching his penis  
very slightly  
and then touched his mouth  
to taste his own taste.

He then went looking

for the penis of the other one.

And again

The trunk went

from private parts

to mouth

to private parts.

*Just not his own this time.*

The other elephant

now joined in

and his trunk investigated

very delicately

and very skilfully

all his companion's moist places.

He tasted the eyes

and the little wet spots

and the penis

and the ears  
and the mouth.

They tasted  
and inspected  
each other's asshole  
and penis  
and mouth  
and urine.

The whole ritual was very delicate and  
intimate.

I felt like a voyeur.

At the same time  
I could not look away.

At the same time

I was reminded of the times when

I too inspected someone else's body.

I was reminded of the incredible beauty

of this form of intimacy.

Adam died at the age of 930. Noah died at the age of 950. Abraham died at the age of 175.

Moses died at the age of 120. Adwaita the giant tortoise died at the age of 254. Harriet the giant tortoise died at the age of 178. Tu'i Malila the giant tortoise died at the age of 192. Elephants live until they are 300 years of age when they are Roman. Elephants live until they are 120 years old when they are medieval. Elephants

have a life expectancy of 70 years when they live in captivity.

## Dankwoord

Het initiatief, de steun en het zorgzame geduld van Ditte Pelgrom en Connie Nijman hebben een vaag idee de kans gegeven om een reële tekst te worden. Ik ben hen er zeer dankbaar voor. Mede door de mooie inzichten van Elke Decoker en het subtiële taalgevoel van Oonagh Duckworth is dit boekje geworden wat het is, mooier dan ik zelf mogelijk had geacht.

Tine Van Aerschot wordt in haar onderzoek naar taal en vertalingen gesteund met een ontwikkelingsgerichte beurs van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap.

Tine Van Aerschot (Mechelen, 1961) werkt sinds 1987 in verschillende hoedanigheden (als dramaturg, vormgever, productieleiding, schrijver) met diverse gezelschappen en artiesten (waaronder Meg Stuart/Damaged Goods, Dennis O'Conner, Sarah Chase, Simon Aughterlony). Vanaf 2002 begint ze haar eigen werk te ontwikkelen. Een reeks e-mails, onder de titel *The whereabouts of Trevor Wells*, is een voorzichtige voorloper van de huidige blogcultuur. In 2006 volgt de eerste voorstelling. *I have no thoughts and this is one of them* schetst een wereldbeeld opgebouwd met enkel ontkennende zinnen. *Triple Trooper Trevor Trumpet girl*, een mislukt dagboek vol vragen en bedenkingen over alles en niets, gaat in première in 2008. In 2012 maakt Tine *we are not afraid of the dark*, een stuk over overleven en daarom ook over sterven. Haar nieuwe



project *Between This and That* onderzoekt de veranderende betekenissen van woorden en begrippen door vertalingen, her-talingen en verplaatsingen in de tijd. *A Partial Exposure of A Half Decent Elephant* is een eerste resultaat van dit onderzoek.

## Toneelwerk

*we are not afraid of the dark* – 2012

*Triple Trooper Trevor Trumpet girl* – 2008

*I have no thoughts and this is one of them* – 2006