



STORM: LETTERS VAN VUUR (STORM AND LUTHER'S FORBIDDEN LETTER) is a January, 2018 LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of the English-language dub of that film.

12 of a possible 20 points

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Netherlands / Belgium 2017 color 100 minutes live action feature drama dubbed in English Phanta Film / Bulletproof Cupid / Iris Productions / NTR Producers: Marina Blok, David Claikens, Kathleen Goosens, Nicolas Steil, Harro van Staverden, Alex Verbaere

Key: *indicates outstanding performance or technical achievement (j) designates a juvenile performer

Points:

- 2 Direction: Denis Bots (native of Zambia)**
- 1 Editing: Peter Aalderliesten, Björn Mentink**
- 1 Cinematography: Rolf Dekens 2nd Unit DP: Niels van der Kraan**
Stills Photography: Patricia Peribañez*, Ricardo Vaz Palma*

12 total points

Cast: Laura Verlinden (Claar), Yorick van Wageningen (Klaas Voeten, Storm's father), Egbert Jan Weeber (Jacob Proost, Luther's advocate), Peter Van den Begin (Van Hulst), Loek Peters (Baker), Maarten Heijmans* (Alwin, wannabe poet), Angela Schijf (Cecilia Voeten, Storm's mother), Luc Feit (Hermann, a printer), Tibo Vandenborre (Schout), Davy Gomez (j)* (Storm Voeten, a boy), Juna de Leeuw (j)* (Marieke, Storm's rescuer), Nick Golterman (Bailiff Guard 2), Tom Jansen (Priest), Tom Magnus (Bailiff Guard / Creel), Sid Van Oerle (Bailiff), Germain Wagner (Herr Schmidt, merchant), Golda de Leon (Gerlinde), Huug van Tienhoven (Indulgence salesman), Fred Goessens (Gillis), Sem van Butselaar (j) (Duco), Rivka de Leon (Fokka), Robert-Paul Jansen (Bailiff Guard), Kevin Kok (Bailiff Guard 3), Gabriel Boisante (Martin Luther), Nils Verkooijen (Villager)

Dennis Bots, known primarily in North America as director of Oorlogsgeheimen (SECRETS OF WAR) from 2014, moved from World War II to the Reformation for the impassioned drama STORM: LETTERS VAN VUUR. Set in 1521 Antwerp where the Inquisition is being introduced alongside papal indulgences, the latter film centers on adventures of a fictitious printer's son in that city.

Storm is a curious klutz considerably more observant of customers in his father's shop than focused on work assignments. While eavesdropping as customary on visitors, he overhears a man asking his dad to print a forbidden letter, presumably the one known to English-language readers as "The Freedom of a Christian," penned in

1520. This dangerous item has been smuggled from Wartburg Castle where a “kidnapped” Martin Luther was “incarcerated” for his own protection by friendly sponsor Prince Frederick III, Elector of Saxony. Despite being banned by the Roman Catholic Church in Emperor Charles V’s Edict of Worms, published on May 26, 1521, this “heretical” work had been transported as far west as Spain’s northern possessions of Flanders and the Brabant. Reading or possessing Luther’s writings was officially outlawed, setting the stage for dramatic incidents depicted in Bots’s film.

Shortly after witnessing destruction of a rival print shop and burning of its contents, Storm Voeten is in attendance at his father’s workplace when it is invaded by officers of the Inquisition seeking any and all copies of Luther’s writings. When they arrive Storm happens to have his hands on type plates and an original of Luther’s confessional letter to the Pope. He races off with those through Antwerp’s darkened streets, with what passes for constabulary of the period in hot pursuit. About to be arrested himself, if not worse, he’s saved by an Amazonian girl who appears a bit older than himself.

Marieke is an orphan, though not aware of that when she meets Storm. Child of a Portugeuse sailor and local mother, she has been forced to live by her wits in the city’s underground stinking sewers. Marieke’s mother has died from a fatal illness. With her dad somewhere unknown at sea, Marieke gets left with no home and no guardian. Illiterate and female, opportunities for finding work profitable enough to keep her healthy and alive are slim to none. What sustains her is devotion to the Virgin Mary, an inheritance from both name and mother.

Storm, recent philosophical convert to proto-Lutheranism, has a hearty aversion to his own mother's Catholicism. He shares the cynicism of his father, a tradesman who has no faith whatsoever in the efficacy of indulgences as means to liberate anyone from Limbo. Wife Cecilia believes otherwise. In the single most profound line of this drama, she informs Klaas he has no idea of God's will.

Klaas's notion the Supreme Being's plans can be comprehended by human intellect is one she completely rejects, forcing her adolescent son to take sides. Is he going to remain loyal to Mother Church or strike off on a spiritual adventure into uncharted territory with Herr Luther and Klaas providing the only adult guidance?

With life still in jeopardy and his dad imprisoned under suspicion of heresy, Storm must remain hidden and undetected. Marieke has reservations about helping a blasphemer who doubts the Virgin's power. She seeks assistance from that patron saint, forcing a horrified companion to follow her into the nave of Antwerp's Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal. There she prays for an answer to questions about which course of action to initiate.

Grudgingly, the girl permits a fugitive follower to secrete Luther's inflammatory plea for tolerance and individual conscience in a very private hideaway unlikely to be discovered by outsiders.

Once that burden gets secured, a reform-minded youth turns his attention to the question of how to liberate his father. He tracks down a vainglorious aspiring poet, agreeing foolishly to Alwin's planned exchange of Luther's writing for his dad's release.

Marieke is not so trusting. She regards Alwin instinctively as an unreliable Judas weak in character. Just the opposite of her temporary fellow lodger.

Is she correct in doing so? Will her dad ever return? Are changes proposed by Luther, already beginning to lay groundwork for revolt against civil and religious authority, going to improve or ruin her life?

Watching unfolding complications initiated by Storm's rashness, viewers must decide whether or not to applaud him. Unlike the novice printer, they are aware of far-reaching consequences resulting from too insistent a sweeping overturn of civic and religious institutions. The screenplay's heavy-handed endorsement of Luther's point of view and iconoclasm, coupled with a cheerfully upbeat ending completely at odds with historical reality, tilt the picture heavily against Catholicism and tradition. That will alienate many.

Cinematography and lighting are adequate, but not truly impressive, except for shots of the magnificent imposing Cathedral which plays so important a part in this drama. A suspenseful, moody score is definitely an asset, as is the art department's recreation of sixteenth-century Antwerp, a trading center whose residents and visitors often adhered all too doggedly to opposing Catholic and Protestant creeds. Often violently so, as screeners will observe.

The next sixty years would be blood-soaked in religious and nationalist extremism, resolving little politically while threatening to bankrupt coffers of church and princes alike.

Inadequate historical detail unfortunately limits perspectives of young viewers. This is definitely a telling fault in Karin van Holst Pellekaan's rather disappointing screenplay. Inserting romance in place of a likelier friendship is an additional misstep in her writing.

However, performances of two lead juveniles are vigorous and vivid, insuring an enriching viewing experience for adolescents likely

to be caught up in their predicaments as they find parallels with their own questioning lives.

The character transitions of that pair are particularly well delineated. Storm matures from sheltered nuisance dependent on supervision by others to independent planner and resourceful forager. Marieke learns toleration and patience, accepting tutelage of a peer even while seemingly rejecting his religious principles. Shared risks turn hostility into hospitality and comradeship. Neither is alone in the world. Unless choosing to be so. Possibly that's the core idea here: leaving options open rather than kowtowing to a single unexamined philosophy and its brutal enforcers.

Violence is more often inferred than explicit, keeping scenes within boundaries acceptable for teen audiences. Adults will and should quibble about distorted Christian history and an acute slant in favor of Protestant sympathies.

STORM AND LUTHER'S FORBIDDEN LETTER makes a fine launching point for further investigation of an era responsible for opening pathways to both modern skepticism and contemporary optimism. Which gets adopted and maintained is still today an individual decision to make.