



**July/ August 2017**

**Tatjana Debeljački vs. Marian Eikelhof**

Interview

### **Different than other**

**Can you tell us something about your hometown and growing up?**

I grew up in a little village at the seaside in the South of the Netherlands, named Oostvoorne, being the eldest daughter of a family with four children. My mother was an English teacher and felt interested in learning foreign languages, which I must have inherited from her. I started reading English books at the age of five. Only a few years later I literally read every book I could find in the small library of the local church. I was such a fanatic reader that I preferred reading in secret instead of sleeping. 'You will go blind reading in the dark', my parents warned me. I felt different than other children as I spent most of my time philosophizing about serious themes and psychological questions whereas they were playing and having fun.

Especially books about war intrigued me, as my both my parents had suffered a lot during the second world war. The terrifying stories of my mother who had been kept as a prisoner in a Japanese concentration camp in Indonesia, together with her mother and sister, made me wonder about the true motives and drives of mankind. I developed a strong compassion to help vulnerable people and to be active in the peace process. At the age of nineteen I started studying psychology at

the university of Leiden. I became specialised in treating traumatic neurosis caused by for example a violent incident, a disturbing experience that took place in one's youth, being raped etcetera. Apart from being active as a writer and a poet I still enjoy working as a psychologist leading my own consultancy firm 'Ariadne'.

**When did you publish your first book and how the success followed later?**

I published an erotic story in a novel of short stories at the age of 29. Although the editor told me that I was talented and capable of writing literary works with a high standard, it took me years to believe in myself. In the meantime I published scientific readers in the field of psychology and in the year 2015 I wrote a book for children who are being bullied in the schoolyard and miss the social capacities to stand up for themselves. After being inspired by some colleagues in the field of poetry, I took the step to publish a collection of poems titled 'een nulurencontract met het leven' (layout by Robert van den Berg) in October 2016. The first edition was sold out in two months. Readers have told me they love my bundle of poems as they can recognise the feelings I describe and have similar emotional experiences. Also young people feel attracted by my realistic and direct style. In June 2017 the second edition of my book is brought on the market by my publisher in Malaysia.

**The true purpose of art is to uplift humanity, inspire morals and reverence and instill in people's hearts a sense of true beauty?**

People can lose their sense of identity within the social structures of the modern society and find it hard to give meaning to their relationships while ties between people are less clearly defined and certain than they were in the old days. Classic styles of lifting up the spirits of people by using superficial expressions in poems often fail in touching the hearts of people and moving them deeply. My style of writing is direct, open and understandable for a great public. It has a great impact to write straightforward about emotions like fear, desire, love, jealousy and tenderness. These states of mind are portrayed in a way which inspires people to reflect on their own emotions and be aware of their true nature. My poetry thereby leads to a process of catharsis in which the reader can free himself from negative thoughts and poisonous anger as well as from depressing sadness. As a result of this the soul is cleared and energy is generated to experience the beauty of life as well as finding one's mission on earth without being blocked by dysfunctional frustrations.

## **Your style and the way you express the symbolic power of lust and eternity?**

Lust and the desire for death were symbolized by Sigmund Freud as Eros and Thanatos, being the main instinctive motors directing our behaviour. I always feel death nearby, almost like a good friend waiting for us to get home safely. To accept the fact that everything changes continuously within circles of life and death gives us the strength to enjoy life fully and 'to be' completely in the dimension of 'here and now' whereas running away from the inevitable process of decay puts us in a backward position. Instead of writing about trivial subjects, I prefer to describe the real world with its imperfections and inherent pain. I do not experience death as the end of life. Every crisis, including dying, is essentially a transformation to a higher dimension of consciousness and energy. In my view physical death is not the definite end of everything, yet merely part of our process of inner growth whereas dying symbolically refers to states of loneliness and depression occurring in the period we are still alive. Not being able to develop one's potentials and being denied by loved ones is when we, human beings, suffocate and suffer the loss of life's eternal flames. Referring to the symbolic power of lust, I find it important that women's poets dare to express their deepest fantasies and wildest erotic dreams, as far too long this has solely been the domain of men. I write about different forms of lust and sexual intimacy without having taboos, however always within a framework of love and trust between two partners. A poem which for instance highlights a one night stand without any affection is meaningless and contains no hope for human kind. Our ability to develop higher morals and feel a deep and sincere empathy for others make us capable of much more than making love in an animalistic way. The meeting of two souls leads to a feeling of intense satisfaction which cannot be acquired in short-term relationships between practically strangers.

## **Believes in the randomness and richness of life and that every day is a possible adventure?**

As a psychologist I am very well aware of the fact that life can be tough for some people who are for example struggling for survival or trying to cope with an immense loss of a loved one. Also my chronic illness rheumatism challenges me to always look at the bright side. Positive thinking is essential to avoid the trap of falling into the pit of depression and developing an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness. Happiness is in fact a verb in my view. Only by self-discipline and by concentrating on the people and circumstances that bring us energy and inspire us to improve ourselves, we will be surprised by the beautiful gifts life will offer in return.

## **What can you tell us about your work, prizes, friendships?**

At an early age I started writing poetry. When I was fifteen years old I wrote a poem about how alienated I felt walking the stairs in a modern, sterile building. I had a very strong urge to write, yet didn't think of myself as being a poet. Those days few people stimulated me to further explore my competence as an artist so it was difficult to realize some one could be interested in my poetry and writings. Most of the time I kept it for myself. At the age of twenty one I won a story contest realized by a popular Dutch magazine for women, called 'Viva'. It handled about the year I had been in Paris to find out more about the world. When I lost my job as an aupair, I chosed to stay in this world city for a while as an eighteen year old to learn more about life. I managed to survive by making friends in Sorbonne, sleeping in trains, empty buildings and other uncommon places. This led to an intriguing story. Few years later I won an other story contest. My story titled 'Omam' described a woman giving shelter to a refugee from Irak and was published in a book titled 'mooie meiden'. Although my story was far from banal and only pictured lustful details in a subtle, discrete way, I used the pseudonym 'Elisabeth Lin' not to offend my social environment at that time. Despite of my success I continued to focus on finishing my study 'psychology' at the Rijksuniversiteit Leiden. In the years that followed I built up my own Psychological Advice firm named 'Ariadne'. It felt like a dream come true to coach adults and children with psychosocial problems. Especially to observe how they changed from deeply unhappy and fearful in social situations to assertive and full of self esteem. My sister who also works as a psychologist, Dr Els Hoey-Eikelhof, and I developed a reader for teachers and coaches of people with a handicap titled 'Voel je Okay'. Subsequently I have written a book for children who are victims of bullying and intimidation by peers titled 'Lekker Boeiend'. If I had not been adviced by the Cuban embassy in the Hague to attend the festival of poetry in Havana in order to defend humanity, I would probably still be writing merely psychology books. In 2010 I went to Cuba and got into contact with famous writers like Alberto Guerra Naranjo, Victor Hugo Perez Gallo, Roberto Bianchi, Irma Nelida Jorge and Alex Pausides, who is the director of UNEAC (the Cuban organization for writers and artists). In Cuba I have been honoured two times by receiving a certificate of special recognition in 2010, followed by the same sign of appreciation in 2016. By then my affinity with poetry was no longer only playing a role in the background of my life. The fact that so many significant writers and poets appreciated my work inspired me to continue writing poetry for peace. I was asked by the well known poet from Greece, Roula Pollard, to collaborate in an anthology against chemical attacks in Syria and later worked together with the

Syrian poet and editor Malak Sahioni participating with my poetry in the anthology 'Salt Boundaries'. End of april I went to Rome where my Italian friends from Associazione Grecam organized a fascinating manifestation of art and literature named 'un solo mare e la parola'. As artists we felt relieved that we could make an effort for the Syrian refugees being shocked about the atrocities the Syrian people have to cope with. My poem 'trash', which describes the cold and indifferent mentality from people who rather look away than be confronted with the refugee problem, was perceived as impressive. Two months later I went to Anzio together with the Serbian poet Elvira Kujovic to receive a prize in the poetic manifestation 'sotto il cielo di luglio'.

### **What can you pinpoint about yourself between dreams and reality?**

'Reality is an illusion, however a very persistent one', Albert Einstein once said.

I do believe we can influence our destiny as there is an interaction between our situation and our evaluation of it. The way we perceive life's circumstances, deal with disappointments and are capable of either accepting things as they are and make the best of it or get stuck in feelings of resentment and self-pity are crucial factors in creating our reality. An individualistic approach of making one's dreams come true is dysfunctional as selfish behaviour is not in concordance with universal laws. We can only realize our goals in life by being modest, humble and listen to an inner voice guiding us like an invisible thread intuitively. All we have to do is open our heart and observe what is really essential in life in stead of merely following daily routines and schedules others invent for us. Not to be blocked by these patterns we have to overcome our fear for the unknown. An old expression of the Indians 'it's a great day to die' shows the courage we need to overcome our fear and open ourselves for receiving life's gifts and surprises.

### **Do the results of your work outwit your expectations?**

In my youth there were periods in which I felt insecure because of being different in the sense that I was philosophing about serious, existential questions. I was not the type of person to take things easy and deny the suffering of people in conditions so much worse than mine. I could walk for days at the beach near my house wondering what my role in life was. The intrinsic need to write had nothing to do with an attempt to get recognition. On the contrary, I felt the need to express my thoughts and considerations despite of the fact that I was being bullied for being dreamy and writing poems during breaks at school. Years later, I fully enjoy being accepted and appreciated for my poetry. Every new invitation for a literary manifestation, every recency and every new award comes as a surprise to me, an

unexpected gift from above and, yes, to answer your question: the status quo exceeds my expectations.

### **Can you tell us something about your future projects?**

I am the continental director of WFP (World Festival of Poetry) for Europe. We coordinate festivals around the world and celebrate sanctuaries worldwide. WFP has a network of 180 countries. The founder and main director of this organization is Yuri Zambrano. Luz María Lopez is the cluster executive director of America and Hilal Karahan coordinates western and eastern countries from Turkey. As a part of my work in WFP I arrange a festival under the name Cuba&Holanda Literaria, which will take place in June 2018 in my hometown Rotterdam. In order to enhance the peace process and build intercultural bridges of mutual understanding we will exchange poetry and performances with famous writers and artists from Cuba, Italia and other countries. As a human rights activist I also participate in coordinating the World Poetic Front of Women's rights in which every country is represented by a woman and Malak Sahioni is the international director of international affairs. By strengthening our organization we strive to improve the situation for women all over the world. Our attention is directed to women who are oppressed and abused physically and/or emotionally. We make people conscious of prejudices against women by means of poetry and art.

My personal goals are to continue my work within the Dutch association of poets named 'Atelier Rapa Nui'. We gather regularly in Rotterdam to read poetry and make music with each other as an important cultural activity. In October I will publish an English collection of poems, together with the outstanding poet Elvira Kujovic, in which we express our concerns about the way society is organized and write about injustice as well as about love while this is the best 'weapon' against war and breaks through every barrier of hate and indifference. With the same objective of achieving peace the Cypriot poet Androulla Shati and I will publish a songbook next year. Androulla Shati has been active for a long time to free her country from fascism with her beautiful voice and intriguing poetry. My plan, finally, is to travel a lot this year and to attend literary festivals in India, Spain, Uruguay and Cuba. A writer from Argentina, named Paula Ruggeri once called me 'un alma viajero' which means as much as 'a travelling soul' and I can fully agree with that.

**Have you achieved everything you ever wanted and would you be an artist again if you had to do your life over again?**

Knowing what I know now, I could have probably started earlier in my life with writing poetry books and be confident about their content, but I am well aware of the fact that I am a lucky woman getting the opportunity to express myself and working together with the best artists of the world. I probably needed time to develop myself so much that I have something significant to offer humanity. I have no regrets of the way of my life and the road I walked to come at this point where I can fully realize myself as an artist. On the contrary; I think I belong to a happy few who can lead a dynamic, fulfilling and meaningful life as an artist and as the person I am.

**It was a great pleasure talking to you and you are always welcome to our house "Diogen pro kultura" magazine for art, culture, education and science.**

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