



What do you think about the University of Leiden and the English department?

I like the way the literature courses are organised in Leiden, covering a number of different authors and genres, as opposed to, for instance, focusing on three authors in more detail over the course of a whole semester. In my opinion this gives a better overview of the period. After teaching abroad I was not used to the Leiden system of having a break during the tutorials but I find that students really give their full attention again after a break. I like to have lots of discussion during the tutorials, both about the required reading material and about background information. I feel that these discussions help students develop a differentiated understanding of the subject. I find that the level of the students is quite high.

In what area do your own interests lie?

I am doing my research in contemporary literature, especially migration literature. I have spent much time on Mexican-American literature and am now focusing on Anglo-Indian writing. Next to this, I am interested in modernism and postmo-

dernism.

What do you think about Dutch cities?

Right now I am living in The Hague but I will be moving to Leiden vicinity soon. I like Leiden because it is a very lively city, in some regards similar to Groningen, where I lived for a short period. One of the attractions of Dutch cities is that everything can be reached by bike.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I like to spend my time on music. I also like to go running. As for cooking, that is definitely not my strong suit but luckily that is not a big issue.

What advice would you give to the students of English here?

People should look at the things they are doing as an opportunity, not as a task. Try to look for the positive side of the things you do and enjoy what you are doing. I would also encourage people to go abroad because it is a great experience and you can learn a lot from it.

By Daný van Dam & Katja Perevedentseva

Halloween: “Trick or treat!”

This inconspicuous little request uttered by seemingly delightful little blighters in fancy-dress, might tempt the unwitting home owner into asking for a trick before handing over some treats. However, for those in the know, this little sentence is neither a request nor inconspicuous; and when you do say trick, those little blighters will be anything but friendly. Frankly, this little utterance is tantamount to extortion. The trick in question is not so much a trick as it is an all out assault on your lovely home. The little blighters now turned brats, will pelt your home with eggs and/or cover your trees and bushes with loo-roll (so-called TP'ing teepeeing) , turning your once beautiful home into something resembling a hovel. It is as if the devil has taken possession of these once lovely children. Luckily this only happens on one night of the year, it is the night of All Hallows' Eve, Halloween.

Each year on the evening of the 31st of October, kids dressed as witches, ghosts, devils or in otherwise suitable attire, will go around the streets of the United States, knocking on doors to ask for sweets. Houses are adorned with Jack-o-Lanterns, images of witches, ghosts and skeletons; an evening brimming with horror and full of people with a penchant for scaring the bejesus out of poor innocent victims. You'll find

plenty of movies made on the subject.

While most of us are familiar with the imagery of this quintessential American Hallmark holiday, many of us do not know the full story behind it. For Halloween goes back centuries and is steeped in pagan imagery and tradition.

The origin of Halloween lies in the Northern European Pagan fest of the final autumnal harvest. At the time when the Celts/Gauls still inhabited the Northern European landscape the year was divided into two halves, a dark and a light half. The dark half ranged from November till May, the winter months and associated with death; the light half ranged from May till November, the summer months and associated with life. The end of the light half, the time of the final harvest, was marked by a three-day fest, the fest of Samhain/Samonios.

It was at this fest that the bounty of the harvest would be celebrated, and livestock would be slaughtered to provide meat for the winter months. It is probably this transition between life and death, and the dichotomy of life bringing sustenance attained by slaughtering animals that brought the spirit world into Halloween. This celebration is on the cusp of life and death. Therefore, the ancient pagans believed that on these three days the veil between the spirit world

and the living world would be lifted and that the spirits would, albeit for a short while, roam the earth again.

Through the course of history, the Celts were eventually marginalised to the outskirts of the British Isles. It was here that the fest of Samhain was kept alive. In the ninth century the Catholic Church assimilated the fest of Samhain into the Christian Calendar. Pope Gregory III and his successor Gregory IV moved All Saints' Day from the 13th of May to the 1st of November, to coincide with the pagan fest. This was done to aid the conversion of pagans to Christianity; by retaining the fest and by simply renaming it, the transition to Christianity wouldn't be too big of a leap. The fest now fell on the eve of All Saints' Day, otherwise known as All Hallows' Day, which is where the name Halloween is derived from. It is the feast of All Hallows' Eve; Hallows' Eve(n); Hallowe'en; Halloween. Although now a Christian holiday the fest did keep all its pagan elements;

however, most of its meaning was lost in the course of the centuries.

Eventually, Halloween was brought to the United States by Irish and Scottish immigrants. It was here that it finally morphed into a fest of horror and gore. So remember those Celts; without them the 31st of October would be nothing more than any other October evening; cold and boring.

By Allan Riepsaame



Guy Fawkes Night

*Remember, remember the fifth of November,
Gunpowder, treason, and plot,
I know of no reason why gunpowder treason
Should ever be forgot.*

You might be forgiven for thinking that these are merely the opening lines of the movie "V for Vendetta", a movie about a man in a mask trying to bring down his corrupt government. Yet, the writers of this movie chose these lines, which are part of a traditional rhyme, with care. It alludes to a famous event in British history, The Gunpowder Plot; a Catholic plot to attempt to blow up the Protestant King James I and his parliament on the fifth of November, 1605. To this day its failure is still celebrated in Great Britain and some other Commonwealth countries, by Protestants and Catholics alike. It is celebrated as Guy Fawkes Night or Bonfire Night.

It was at midnight on the fifth of November 1605 that Justice of the Peace Thomas Knyvet and a group of armed men discovered Guy Fawkes standing next to a pile of fagots (i.e. bundles of sticks), with a watch, matches and touch-paper in his pockets. Nearby, they found round-about twenty barrels of gunpowder. Whilst this in itself is quite dubious, the fact they discovered him in the vaults underneath the House of Lords, made this into a serious matter. Especially, since both King and Parliament were going to be present in the House of Lords for the State Opening of Parliament later that day. Guy Fawkes was apprehended and subsequently arrested. On his

arrest he readily admitted, that it had been his intention to destroy the King and Parliament.

Guy Fawkes was part of a larger group of Catholic conspirators. The plot was instigated to spur a rebellion against James I and the Protestant State in an attempt to restore a Catholic monarchy. After Guy Fawkes' failure, the conspirators fled. They were eventually caught and either shot or captured, then tried and executed. Guy Fawkes himself was taken to the Tower of London, tortured and interrogated. He was sentenced to be hanged to near death, then drawn and quartered. When he was about to be hanged, he jumped off the gallows and in doing so broke his neck and so avoiding the rest of his gruesome sentence.

By an Act of Parliament, the fifth of November was designated as day of celebration. The celebrations traditionally include bonfires, fireworks and the burning of effigies of Guy Fawkes. In the latter lie the origins of the word 'guy' meaning 'bloke'. Children would make these 'Guys' in order to make some money to buy fireworks with. They would sit on the street and cry 'Penny for the Guy'. Traditions may vary throughout the different regions of the UK. In some regions the eating of bonfire toffee, toffee apples, baked potatoes or groaty dick (i.e. a type of pudding) is also a big part of the celebrations.

So, remember, remember the fifth of November...

By Allan Riepsaame