

Introducing New Teachers: Nadine Akkerman & Doris Einsiedel

Nadine Akkerman has started at the University of Leiden this semester and teaches literature classes in all three bachelor years. Meanwhile she is busy doing research for her PhD.¹

Where did you start your own studies?

I studied in Amsterdam at the Vrije Universiteit. I did English there. I also went to York as an exchange student. The people that I met there, the teachers, have been very influential, putting me on the track for what I'm doing now.

What is your research about?

I am concerned with the early-modern period; I'm studying the correspondence of Elizabeth Stuart. She lived in exile for quite some time during her reign and she wrote letters to different philosophers, theologians and other important people. I'm creating a corpus because the letters aren't organised yet, so I'm travelling a lot, going through private collections. That does make it feel quite special to do.

How did you end up in Leiden?

Last year I taught at the University of Nijmegen but I had to travel quite far for that and Leiden is more interesting for the kind of research I'm doing, so when there was a job opening I applied. I haven't seen much of the city yet, but I like the town hall and all the small alleys.



You haven't been here long, but can you name some differences between the Universities of Leiden and Nijmegen?

The literature courses are built up quite differently. In Nijmegen they are more genre-based, versus period-based in Leiden. I prefer the way it's done in Leiden.

What do you think of the students here?

They are well-organised. They don't complain about the reading material, while they have to read a lot! I think that's pretty good.

What do you do in your spare time?

I do some sports, aerobics and swimming. I did a lot of swimming when I was younger, but I didn't want to go all the way because from training so often you get very broad shoulders, I wanted to avoid that! Next to sports I also like to go out for dinner with friends.

And reading?

My favourite author is Dame Antonia, also known as A.S. Byatt. One of the topics she writes about is the position of educated women in an educated society dominated by men, as was the case with female professors in the mid-20th century.

Before we end, do you have an advice for the students in Leiden?

You should read more secondary literature! (**More? When would we find the time?**) Oh, and you should also have fun. And lastly: question your teachers. They don't always know the answer and they aren't always right.

By Daný van Dam & Katja Perevedentseva

Doris Einsiedel is a new teacher in Leiden, giving two American Literature courses. Although her nationality is German, she has international roots, so it was no surprise when she went to a foreign country for her higher education. She studied American Studies and German Literature, among others, in the United States of America. She graduated in 2005 and worked in editing and translation while she was looking for the right place to do her research. By this time she was already living in The Hague while teaching in the east of Germany. When she was offered a job at the University of Leiden she was asked to teach next to her research. She had discovered she liked to teach when she acted as a teaching assistant at California State University in 2001 and for now, at Leiden, teaching has become her first focus.



¹ Due to miscommunications, Nadine Akkerman has not been able to comment on the article. Please keep in mind that while the content is correct, the words aren't always exactly hers. We apologize for this.



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