

## Sleeping water

'Sleeping water' is a little photo essay about Jacqueline (Lien/Lina/Line) Elisabeth van der Waals and tells the story of a Dutch romantic poet in the beginning of the 20th century. Although she entered the circles of famous Dutch poets like Herman Gorter, Jacqueline would soon be forgotten by the general public after her death. Some think Jacqueline has done injustice in the course of literary history due to that one malicious poem, for which her entire oeuvre has been punished.



Interesting detail is that from 1902 up until 1921 Jacqueline and her family spent a number of weeks every summer at the estate of Ewijckshoeve, the place where I grew up decades later. This place forms also the backdrop for my photo essay 'Songs for soprano' about the life and times of Anna Witsen.

### ABOUT JACQUELINE

Jacqueline van der Waals was born in 1868 in The Hague. When her father J. Diderik van der Waals obtains his doctorate as a physicist at the University of Leiden, the

family moves to Amsterdam where he becomes the first professor of physics at the University of Amsterdam. Lien has two sisters and a brother. The family spend their holidays in countries like Austria, Germany and Switzerland where Jacqueline picks up the love for mountain climbing.

Then fate strikes. Jacqueline's mother suffers from tuberculosis and dies. It is 1881 and Lien is only thirteen years old. After his wife's death her father is defeated. This lays a shadow over the family and the curtains of their front room remain closed until 1902.

Later Mr. van der Waals, after whom the 'Vanderwaals Force' is named, throws himself into his work and in 1910 he wins the Nobel Prize. In the meantime Jacqueline attends the HBS and studies at home for a teaching certificate. She becomes a teacher in Doorn, Bloemendaal ('t Kopje), Baarn (ladies' cost school Erica) and later Amsterdam.

Jacqueline may be best described as modest, honest, faithful, possessed with a sense of duty, sensitive, intelligent and gloomy. She plays the piano, practices various sports like tennis, cycling, hiking and mountain climbing. She creates a wonderful herbarium (so I have read) and sometimes she does some needlework. She participates in study groups where she discusses philosophers such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. She is a very talented translator (she speaks Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Italian) and she is -as she thinks herself- destined to write poetry.

### HER WORKS

There are a few recurrent themes to be found in her works: nature, how to relate to God, death and poetry. Nature evokes many feelings to Jacqueline. Sometimes of intense happiness, but at the same time it creates sadness and melancholy. Her relationship with death is also remarkable. There is a longing for death, even in moments of happiness. Her godly descent – she is a protestant- and the early death of her mother may have been the reason for this longing. It is described in many of her poems. Fortunately her great sense of duty prevents suicide, unlike Anna Witsen who drowns herself in the pond in front of the Ewijckshoeve house in 1889. Jacqueline must have heard of this emotional event. After all, Jacqueline plays tennis with Herman Gorter en the Loman sisters who knew Anna well. It can't be a

coincidence that Lien came in touch with this country residence. A number of Lien's poems are originated and inspired on Ewijckshoeve and some of them even refer to Anna Witsen's death. It is striking that the two ladies somehow show remarkable similarities.

In 1921 Lien is affected by stomach cancer and bounded to bed. In these last months she writes and dictates her twelve 'death poems' that are generally seen as her best. She finally embraces life and there is an acceptance of death. On april 29, 1922 Jacqueline van der Waal dies at the age of 53.

None of her works were reprinted during her lifetime. Literature critics respond particularly divided to her work. In the 1990s, Dutch magazine Vrij Nederland wrote: "A single enthusiast may still find her work of refreshing simplicity, but she has never come to the height and depth of what is called real literature." Dutch national newspaper NRC on the other hand wrote: "No poet has been harmed more than Jacqueline van der Waals" as her entire oeuvre was equated with the quality of that one childish simple poem about a little goat. However, in Protestant circles her work is more widely known and appreciated.

Personally I think it is interesting how a woman in that time speaks so clear and open about themes like death and I believe it is beautiful to realize that people can derive comfort in how she relates to death. Although I am not a connoisseur, I am not particularly fond of her poetry. But the fact that she wrote a quite a few of them in the place where I grew up decades later is just fascinating.

After all, this place has always fascinated me. The place where I have lived my whole youth has shaped me to a large extent. It is therefore that my photography is derived from the late nineteenth century's artworks made on or inspired by Ewijckshoeve. Works by artists like Willem Witsen, W.B. Tholen or Piet Meiners who had their ateliers there. Or by their artistic contemporaries who regularly visited this place, such as Jan Veth, Breitner or Mauve. The atmosphere in their works can be characterized as melancholy, sober and often dark scenes. Impressionism and naturalism plays an important role.

#### HERSTORIES

Often history is reduced to a list of events which took place in patriarchal societies in which women had fewer rights and

opportunities than men, were subject to discrimination and restrictive stereotypes, faced harassment and violence. This is one reason that women are less likely to play a starring role in this narrow view of history. Another reason is that for many centuries the history books were written mostly by men, focussing on men. Even when women overcame sexism to achieve extraordinary things - as poets, inventors, singers, you name it - their stories have been sidelined, and then forgotten.



In a number of photo essays called 'The Herstories' I tell the stories of those forgotten women in an attempt to bend history towards herstory. By telling the female stories that touched me one way or the other, I hope to contribute a molecule in balancing the past.

After all, equal rights and opportunities for everyone are essential for development, prosperity and peace I think.

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