

extreme close-ups, symbolically charged images and long silences broken by moving rejoinders. Troch avoids sentimentalism and obliges the observer to seek out the emotions for him or herself.

Empathy and identification are verbs for her; pleasure entails an effort. Film may, actually must, make people squirm. It's good that afterwards the audience feel confused, rebellious or sad. It is in this spirit that in *Kid* the world is seen through the eyes of two brothers – a seven-year-old rascal and his two-year-older good brother – who don't always understand everything. The absent father, the mother who is beset by creditors, the moribund farmstead; the what and the why of everything remains vague. The only clear thing is that the happy child is being forced to grow up.

Whereas her first three films formed a triptych around children, in *Home* Troch focusses on young adults. Including the generation gap: young and old live in their own, non-communicating worlds. At the centre is a seventeen-year-old, wrestling with his own identity, who has spent a period in a closed institution and is now hoping to find a new home with his aunt. But the unhealthy home situation of a new friend brings out both the best (friendship, loyalty) and the worst (betrayal, violence) in him. By opting for a not quite square 4:3 ratio image format, Troch creates a claustrophobic universe while the intertwinement of smartphone images, home movies and observational shots cause the generations to clash visually as well. *Home* is in a more narrative mode than Troch's earlier films; it is also an illustration where the hormones go berserk more, run in a documentary, realistic film style.

This film-author's cinema remains driven more by emotion than plot. 'I want to uncouple myself from what's in common use and research how I can give cinema something extra, via music, image and narrative style', states Troch, 'I want to free myself from expected patterns. Because cinema is an art form I don't have to be bound by conventions. I would love to make films for 500,000 viewers, but if it means settling for a compromise, then no.' Fien Troch is quietly and resolutely following the path to an original, lively and individual output.

IVO DE KOCK

Translated by Sheila M. Dale

History

Before She Became Mata Hari

Newly Discovered Letters by Margaretha Zelle

The letters and photographs published in this beautiful new book cover the last two years in the life of Margaretha Zelle (1876-1917) before she left the Netherlands and began a new life in Paris, becoming famous the world over from 1905 as the oriental dancer Mata Hari, *femme fatale* and female spy during the Great War.

Written between 1902 and 1904, these newly discovered letters were unknown to Pat Shipman when she published her biography of Mata Hari, *Femme Fatale: Love, Lies and the Unknown Life of Mata Hari* in 2007. They had been lying, forgotten for more than a century, in an attic chest belonging to her in-laws, whose help she was seeking during difficult divorce proceedings against her husband, Rudolph (John) MacLeod.

It is her own story, in her own words - the often heart-breaking tale of her bad marriage, aged eighteen, to a much older, authoritarian bully of a man, a colonial officer in the Dutch East Indies, a jealous, violent and syphilitic domestic tyrant, whose abuse and control, accusations and spying eventually became unbearable and led to their separation. Though he was an officer, he certainly was no gentleman: he refused to pay the alimony that was her due, and drove her to despair by taking away her little daughter, Nonnie. The courts were unable to intervene and to force him to pay up. So all the cards were stacked against her: separated, she still was a totally dependent woman, on a slow but inexorable trajectory to debt, destitution, despair, illicit liaisons and social exclusion.

The painful story in these letters, of her social downfall in Dutch society around 1900, reminds one of the bleak and bitter naturalistic novels in Dutch literature of the period, by Arnold Aletrino and Herman Heijermans; but equally of the autobiographies of her female contemporaries, the first woman doctor of the Netherlands, Aletta Jacobs, and the Dutch-French-Belgian writer Neel Doff. As *documents humains* Zelle's letters fill an important

gap in our knowledge of the life of Mata Hari, and will benefit her new biography by Jessica Voeten and Angela Dekker, which is due out in 2017.

Nonetheless, in these letters we also see how Margaretha Zelle went in search of a new future. Deciding to emigrate, she never looked back and started a new life on her own terms, a resilient, nomadic life of an imaginative kind, reinventing herself as a totally new *persona* - an exotic oriental dancer, a star of immense charm and eroticism, scoring triumph after triumph, right up to the First World War, as a star of the theatre, dancing in theatres all around Europe - projecting a beguilingly seductive image wherever she performed, in the Musée Guimet, the Trocadéro and the Folies Bergère in Paris, La Scala in Milan, the Metropol theatre in Berlin, and the Apollo theatre in Vienna, leading a life of glamour and luxury in the capitals of Europe, having scores of admirers and lovers everywhere. And yes - in all those countries, she did have a thing for members of the officer class.

In the end, though, as she was flitting from one officer in one European country to others in different countries, the Great War caught up with her, and she had to pay the ultimate price. Sentenced for espionage and high treason, she was executed,

aged forty-one, by a French firing squad, at dawn on 15 October 1917 in the Bois de Vincennes.

Today, in her native Leeuwarden (which she left aged fifteen), there is not much that reminds one of her. And looking back from today, it is almost impossible to understand how she ever managed to conjure up this new and exotic image as a Javanese princess, embodying the height of European orientalist fantasy - especially when the photographs in this new book show her so very clearly as a solid Frisian woman from the north of the Netherlands.

She really did make the most of it - in the performance of her second life as Mata Hari, and living on ever after, through countless pictures, paintings, sculptures, musicals, opera, novels, and films, as an icon and a byword for *femme fatale* and female spy.

REINIER SALVERDA

Don't Think That I'm Bad - Margaretha Zelle Before Mata Hari / Denk niet dat ik slecht ben - Margaretha Zelle vóór Mata Hari, bilingual edition by Lourens Oldersma, Bormmeer - Tresoor, Gorredijk - Leeuwarden, 2016, 215 pp.



Mata Hari (1876-1917). Photo taken by the Amsterdam Studio Merkelbach in 1915

'The Only Friend of the Indians' **Restoring the Reputation of Father Pieter-Jan De Smet**

On 4 December 2016, outgoing US President Barack Obama ordered work to stop on the Dakota Access Pipeline. For months, environmental activists and members of the Lakota people of the Sioux Nation in North Dakota had been protesting against the laying of this pipeline. In their protests they invoked a treaty signed by the Lakota and neighbouring Native American tribes with the US government in 1851, which grants the region crossed by the pipeline to the Lakota. This treaty also had a Belgian flavour, as one of the negotiators was the Belgian missionary Pieter-Jan De Smet (1801-1873).

De Smet (sometimes referred to in Dutch as *Grote Zwartrok* (Great Blackrobe)), was in the news in 2016 when the Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) in Antwerp and the Catholic Documentation and Research Centre in Leuven joined with the provincial