

# Between Odes and Silences: An Interview With Dr. Kila van der Starre

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## Introduction

On Thursday March 14, 2024, *FRAME* sat down with Dr. Kila van der Starre, assistant professor of Modern Dutch Literature at Utrecht University, to talk about the role of poetry in the context of celebration. In our conversation, we discussed the social life of poetry as a highly emotive literary genre, and the methodological interventions

needed in literary scholarship to acknowledge its social function. Along the way, we discussed the methodological challenges of the experimental method of *material reading*, the role of silence in communal poetry readings, and poetry as a celebrated literary genre in and of itself.

**FRAME:**

*You have done empirical research on how Dutch adults experience and come into contact with poetry. Repeating the title of your dissertation, Poëzie buiten het boek. De circulatie en het gebruik van poëzie (2021, open access), you write that most adults in the Netherlands experience poetry off the page, that is, through non-book media, such as television, radio, the Internet, in public spaces, at events, in newspapers, and in people's houses. These findings have led you to conclude that poetry is a social and collective genre, which fulfills a function in people's social and private lives. Why is it that poetry is primarily experienced in public? What makes it different from the novel, which is perhaps experienced more in private? What is the social function of poetry in people's lives?*

**Van der Starre:**

I am actually not so sure prose is not experienced socially. Many types of readers engage with others socially through literature. Book clubs have always been, in one way or another, part of reading culture. And nowadays the Internet has made reading prose an even more social endeavour, if that is what you are looking for. I do think poetry is maybe more intrinsically social. Due to its typically concise form, it's much easier for a poem to circulate in society than, for example, a whole novel text. But of course there are also ways in which narrative texts circulate in our society that poems don't, if we would acknowledge that Netflix series and films are narrative 'texts.' But indeed, poems are often short, and secondly, they're often lyrical and thus emotional. The lyrical form has everything to do with emotion. That's why we also say, "I'm lyrical about this and that" ["Ik ben er lyrisch over"],<sup>1</sup> and that has to do with this very emotional aspect of lyrical language and poetry. If we go back to the history of stories and poems, they circulated for centuries in an oral way, which is by definition social, because you are together with other humans in time and space. Now we have the internet, so texts

<sup>1</sup> The translations from Dutch to English and from English to Dutch in this text are provided by FRAME.

can be social without those engaging with it being in the same time and space as other people, and poems turn out to be a very ‘twenty-first century’ genre: often short, very ‘shareable’ and related to affect.

The lyrical form of an ‘I’ speaking to ‘you,’ plural or singular, is also part of the social history of poetry. It’s also the reason I think we use it a lot in emotional situations. Concerning your theme of celebration, that’s why we often use poetry when we are very happy, like when a baby has been born or when people get married, but also to transfer difficult negative emotions, such as sadness or anger and anxiety, like in funeral announcements, at funerals, and during national and international crises. It’s the celebration of different emotions, combined with the oral character and the shortness, the briefness of it, that creates this social function of poetry.

**FRAME:**

*In your work, you mention the all too present hegemony of the written word and of book-centric perspectives among literary scholars, and your dissertation clearly shows the necessity of a more nuanced analysis. You emphasise that we need to pay more attention to the ways poetry is being used by people, and the ways poems circulate “outside the book,” both of which are important to understand the semantic and social meaning of literature. You received many awards for your dissertation, your work has shaken up the Dutch literary field, and received lots of international attention. Have there been any changes in the hegemony of poetry books since your publication?*

**Van der Starre:**

During and after my PhD, influential institutions used my research results. For example, the Dutch Government used it to write about culture in the Netherlands in general, and the literary culture and culture of poetry. Has the literary field changed? It’s constantly changing, but that’s not thanks to me of course. Obviously, as a scholar you are primarily observing, analysing and interpreting the situation and not so much advising,

although I did that as well in the research report that I wrote in 2017, “Poëzie in Nederland,” which is based on empirical research, on the national questionnaire that I did together with Stichting Lezen and Nederlands Letterenfonds, both very powerful institutions in this part of the field.

It was quite easy to create eye openers for lots of people, because, as you also say, the view on the literary field is so book-centric, so top-down, and so linear. I think it’s more of a circulation or movement. If you point out that it is possible to view the field in an inclusive way, if you look bottom-up and if you choose a less book-centric perspective, many people are surprised by what kind of literary field appears.

It’s interesting to look at these institutionalised developments, because they say something about whether a phenomenon is becoming mainstream or not. One of the things that is really developing is the way that funds such as the Nederlands Letterenfonds and Literatuur Vlaanderen are looking at authors who are poets but don’t publish books or haven’t published books yet. They have put some committees together to look at oral forms of literature without saying that you can only get funding if you’ve published one or two books, like they often do. For a few years now, we also have an official Instagram poetry prize in the Dutch language region, and poetry slams are very mainstream now, just like spoken word: Babs Gons — the Dutch queen of spoken word — is now Dichter des Vaderlands [poet of the fatherland] of the Netherlands, and many current city poets are also from that scene. From an institutional perspective, many things are shifting and changing in the poetry world.

**FRAME:**

*I think even these little developments that you talked about, prompted by a renewed appreciation for the sociality of poetry, are also influencing mainstream media production, for example in some of the shows on Netflix. There is a 2022 film adaptation of the Jane Austen novel Persuasion where*

*the protagonist directly addresses the audience. It's really interesting to see how these ideas are circulating.*

*In your dissertation you make a distinction between poetry being “useful” [“het nut van poëzie”] and poetry being “usable” [“de bruikbaarheid van poëzie”], inspired by Rita Felski. Why do you focus on usability?*

### **Van der Starre:**

I always find the users of poetry and the way users make poems circulate in society the most interesting part of it. Lots of my colleagues focus on the poets themselves, but I just never find them very interesting [Laughs]. I used to be a poet myself, maybe that's why. I am interested in the many, many people who use art in their lives and I therefore have a very broad definition of art. I think it is the things that people do with art that are so interesting, because most of them don't work with art or are not even involved in the cultural sector. They really do it because they're humans: it's a way to express identity or emotions, to communicate something with others. That is what fascinates me the most. I also think that from a 'highbrow' literary perspective it is very easy to look at the makers, because they are often educated like artists or as humanities scholars, they're 'our type of people.' It's a very elite bubble. But anyone can be a user of poetry. That's interesting to me, because we often assume that the users are also an elite bubble, but they are not. The users of poetry are a big, diverse mix of people, all using poems in their own ways. In general, I think we should try and break through walls and make things inclusive and diverse and democratic. The way poetry circulates has everything to do with humans and humanity. Poems do not circulate organically. People are acting, making decisions. They are agents who are handling poetry, interacting with materials and materiality, making poetry circulate. That is how the meaning of poetry is produced: it is a mix of the material code, such as the material carrier and the direct context of the poem, and the linguistic code, the verbal elements of the poem.

**FRAME:**

*This ties into our next question. In your dissertation, you discuss various types of poetry that are regarded by critics as non-poetry or bad poetry, such as poetry used in elegies, or Candlelight poetry, which are poems written by non-professional poets, performed on the radio by the late Jan van Veen, who read these — often rhyming — poems for more than half a century on the Dutch radio before he passed away this year. Why do critics not consider these types of poetry to be poetry?*

**Van der Starre:**

In the Dutch language there are different words for poetry. So we have “poëzie” [“poetry”] and “gedicht” [“poem”], but also “vers” [verse], “versje,” “rijmpje,” and more. “Poëzie” and “gedicht” — perhaps similarly to the word “verse” in English — have a totally different history and etymology. In Dutch, many people have a different feeling and different connotations with “poëzie” and “gedicht.” Lots of people in my empirical research say: “Poëzie is of a higher quality than a gedicht.” For example, about 70% of Dutch adults do not call a *Sinterklaasgedicht* poëzie.

These distinctions have something to do with quality. We can feel that, and critics and literary scholars have also been making these distinctions for ages: they’ve been saying this is *poëzie* and this is a *gedicht*, or maybe “*slechte poëzie*” [“bad poetry”], and “this is not even interesting enough to look at.” It also has to do with exclusion, when we say that people who write certain types of poetry — such as Instagram poetry, or Candlelight poetry, or spoken word poetry — are not included in our definition of poetry. That’s something I find fascinating, but also potentially harmful.

It seems like this has to do with the history of poetry scholarship as well. We’re coming from a formalist tradition, related to the New Critics, with a focus on close reading, where emphasising the complexity and ambiguity of a poem seems to be important, which works well for most ‘highbrow’ poetry. However, this method doesn’t really work that well on, for example, Candlelight poems or an average Instagram poem. Methods that do work are

material readings, affective readings, and sociological readings. Exclusion is always related to power and tradition. In this case, the power in literary tradition is related to — I'll just put it out there — snobbism, intellectualism and elitism. That happens in lots of disciplines. Popular culture studies are quite new. They emerged in the 80s and 90s. My research relates to this development. I am interested in what is called poetry by the people: both the makers and the users. Paying attention to both results in an inclusive perspective on a genre which, for ages, has been viewed in an exclusive way.

**FRAME:**

*Do you think there is a message to be found in what critics say about what is good and bad poetry? Why do many say that poetry which reaches a broad audience is bad poetry?*

**Van der Starre:**

I believe it has to do with not seeing the value of what the masses like. During the interbellum, in the modernist period when women started going to universities and people from all classes started being highly educated and also becoming artists, something similar happened. There was a real discourse between older generations of artists and intellectuals who were saying things like “*de barbaren komen*” [“the savages are coming”]. And for what? Because women and other previously excluded groups of people started educating themselves. I don't think it's very conscious — people are just scared of the unknown.

**FRAME:**

*As we learn from your work, poetry may have a broader social function than previously considered. One of these functions is that it is widely used within ceremonial settings, such as weddings and funerals. In your dissertation, you write that poetry has been on the rise especially since the big wave of secularisation that hit the Netherlands in the 1970s: for instance, poetry now appears in the place where biblical passages used to be in obituaries. Do you think that*

*poetry takes up the same communal function as religion, or that poetry as a medium can facilitate the sort of feelings of community and support that people long for after drastic life changes?*

### **Van der Starre:**

The short answer is yes. There are some theories about the relationship between the number of Dutch people who go to church, which is declining, and the number of people who attend poetry festivals and performance poetry events, which is increasing. As always, we have to look at whether we can speak of correlation or causality, but I do think they are connected. If you have ever been to the *Nacht van de Poëzie* [Night of Poetry], you probably recognise this kind of heavy, meaningful experience, which is not religious, but can feel spiritual. The poetry performances are live and we are all listening to them together. This can remind one of historical experiences of oral poetry, which have always been very social. The liveness creates an extra dimension, especially because many poems are about meaning and the meaning of life, emotions, love, death. Poetry can give you an experience that might be similar to a religious experience.

Of course, part of the history of Western literary studies as a discipline is related to the study of the Bible. An interesting connection between poetry and religion is also the ways in which people used to hang religious quotations in their houses, which some now seem to do with poetry and small texts that say something about the meaning of life. This doesn't necessarily mean that religious poetry is completely 'lost': in many funeral announcements we find for example poems by Nel Benschop, a Christian Dutch poet whose poetry can be described as explicitly religious.

### **FRAME:**

*Another central component of your research is focused on "street poetry," which refers to various presentations of poetic texts on walls of buildings, engraved within plaques, or in other ways cemented into the spatial environment.*

*In 2017 you launched the website [www.straotpoezie.nl](http://www.straotpoezie.nl), which is based on crowdsourcing and citizen science, and which presents more than 3,300 examples of street poems in the Netherlands and Flanders in an open access database. You write that, although it is often believed that street poetry is a contemporary phenomenon, it can be seen all throughout history. The practice, however, has been institutionalised since the 1980s and the 1990s. Do you think that we should see the phenomenon of street poetry or poetry in the public space nowadays as an institutional ode to poetry in and of itself?*

**Van der Starre:**

Yes, definitely. We're quite unique in the Netherlands with the amount of street poetry that we have, which has to do with the institutionalised ways in which we realise odes to poetry. Quite early on we started having a "Gedichtendag" ["Poetry day"], which became a "Poëzieweek" ["Poetry week"], and we have many "stadsdichters" ["city poets"], "dorpsdichters" ["town poets"], "rivierdichters" ["river poets"], and "plattelandsdichters" ["countryside poets"]. Many of these poets are partly funded by government councils. That is in itself an ode to poetry by Dutch society.

**FRAME:**

*Do you think that, when poetry is added to the public space, there is an implicit messaging at play that suggests that when you, as a citizen, read the poem, you become part of this space and that you should appreciate that?*

**Van der Starre:**

To a certain degree, yes. Although, during my research people also made clear that they don't always like the poetry in the public space near them, or that they find its presence annoying. This is interesting in relation to street poetry because, in general, it is viewed as a very democratic way of circulating poetry because public areas are places where nearly everyone is. Contrastingly, it also isn't received as purely democratic, because sometimes people protest against street poetry. In some cases, street poetry

receives criticism. People perceive it as too commercial, too difficult or vague, and sometimes as too much, as it has become part of lots of city marketing projects in Dutch cities. And yes, I do understand this criticism. People say things like: “Does everything have to be a museum? Do we have to place art and information plates everywhere?” Most people, however, really enjoy street poetry, and even have a favourite poem which they love. As a scholar, I have had the privilege to work together with documentary maker Suzanne van Leendert. She made the beautiful film *Sprekende stenen* (2024) [speaking stones] about street poetry in Utrecht and the ways inhabitants of our city relate to the many poems in the public area. Together with some students from the Dutch studies program I helped Suzanne with her research for the film. She ended up finding all these people in Utrecht who have a personal relationship with a street poem, and in the documentary they talk about the influence the poem has on them personally. The film shows how people engage with poetry in many different ways: the stories are emotional, funny, critical, touching, and light. A great mix of what I try to show through my research: poetry is alive and poetry matters.

**FRAME:**

*As an extension of the social role you assigned to poetry, you have also made the point that poetry can function as a form of collective therapy in the Netherlands. Why and how is poetry therapeutic? And what is the social role of poetry in celebratory, grievous or national cultural contexts in the Netherlands?*

**Van der Starre:**

Poetry is often used in a therapeutic way, which has to do with the emotions and affective aspects of poetry we’ve talked about earlier. Rupi Kaur’s poems on Instagram — the queen of Insta poetry — are often framed by herself and the users of her poems as therapeutic. In her first book, *Milk and Honey* (2015), she even used titles for the different parts of her book, which

are based on the process of psychological healing, and via her social media accounts she often frames her poetry as ‘usable’ concerning thinking and talking about mental health topics. We know that poetry has always been used in this manner, since the very beginning. Funeral poetry, for example, is a centuries old phenomenon. In highly emotional situations, when you are in love, or when you have lost someone, it is very hard to find the right words to formulate what you are feeling, so we turn to poetry to find the language we couldn’t find in ourselves. That’s why we read poems at funerals and at weddings. There is a fascinating article by Liedeke Plate, where she describes the aftermath of 9/11 and the emergence of poetry in public areas (2007). People in New York were hanging poems on walls and lampposts. Many people didn’t know what to do, and used poetry to express themselves in words they couldn’t find elsewhere. After impactful events in the Netherlands, like the MH17 crash, the murder of Anne Faber and Covid, people have used poetry as a way of national collective therapy. The Dichter des Vaderlands [national poet laureate] plays a role here, just like the poetry radio programme Candlelight. This is remarkable considering the fact that therapy is often framed as and perceived as quite personal and oftentimes individual, and poetry can make it a much more social and collective act.

**FRAME:**

*We have now mostly talked about the affective relationship people have with poetry which circulates in public spheres, and what that means for the celebration of poetry in relation to the individual and the (national) collective. We are curious to know more about your research methodology and theoretical framework. You use a kind of poetry analysis that is very different from most methods used in literary studies — “material reading” — which combines two analytical methods: close reading and analysing the (material) carrier, or the medium, of a poem. Do you think material reading can contribute to a different understanding of literary celebration and commemoration?*

**Van der Starre:**

My methodology draws on the fact that the meaning of language exists in both the verbal elements and the material elements of a language. We all know that, for example, ending a relationship via WhatsApp is different than doing it in real life. So we all know that the medium matters. That means that when you hear a poem being read in someone's voice, which might be the voice of one of your loved ones, that this matters. The voice matters, and the meaning of the poem can also be influenced by its context, for example, during a funeral. In my dissertation's first chapter, wherein I talk about the poem "Eb" by the Dutch poet M. Vasalis, I explain that if you read this specific poem in funeral announcements, you can be inclined to read it as a personification of someone who is deceased. That is what I also call materiality, as everything that relates to the context is materiality for me. When a spoken word performer says "I" on the stage, it matters who the person is, what they look and sound like, but also what the location is, and how people around you react to the reading: all these elements can influence the meaning of the words. We all understand that this matters. That's why I say "poetry matters," because I love the ambiguity of the two meanings of the phrase: poetry is important to people, and, simultaneously, its matter and materiality matter.

**FRAME:**

*You highlight that, to better understand the social function of poetry, we should not only look at the textual elements, but also at the material elements of a work: materiality thus becomes the methodology and the object of study in your research. Importantly, your research also tends to address oral poetry as an important way in which poetry circulates outside the book. What were the methodological challenges in researching oral poetry, and how can we do a material reading of this form?*

**Van der Starre:**

That's a good question. There were (and are) lots of challenges! I was very much inspired by our historical literary colleagues,

because they often study oral poetry that has never been recorded, as sound recording wasn't invented yet. The way that they use archives, the way that they use people describing performances, and small signals in texts referring to performance elements, are crucial things to know and are very inspiring. If you have a recording you can do close listening, and I really like that methodology too.

**FRAME:**

*In your research on both the material and verbal elements of poetry, what role does the temporality of our experiences of poetry's material elements play in our understanding of it? For example: the material elements of a street poem can change over time, because it is located on the street and is exposed to external forces, such as the weather. How does this influence the way in which we read a poem? How does time change how we relate to the words?*

**Van der Starre:**

Yes, street poetry is constantly changing. Buildings get taken down and then the poem is also taken down. Often, workers are asked to paint a wall and they just paint over the poem. It is very interesting, because if this happens throughout time, there are often moments that the inhabitants around the poem are like: "Where is our poem? Is our poem coming back?" Weather conditions can also have an effect on the readability of a poem. They can make pieces of the poem illegible, which could influence the way we understand the poem.

And yes, the temporality is also very important, for example in live poetry performance. If you're reading a poem on paper, you can always go back and read the line twice, if you don't understand it, or if you love it. Research has shown us that reading poetry is five or six times slower than reading prose. On the stage, however, you just have to accept the temporalities of the rhythm, meaning that when a poem is being read, its verses will pass on and by quickly. Only in recordings can we go back. I'm very much interested in this mechanism, because temporality

is part of the context in which the poem comes to us, which eventually influences the meaning of the poem. This also goes for the body — the body is also part of the context and materiality, the body is moving, and sometimes you might not be able to catch a word: that's all part of live poetry performances.

**FRAME:**

*In chapter five of your dissertation, you describe the living body as a medium for the poem, focusing particularly on textual tattoos. You suggest that the textual tattoo invites the reader to look for meaning by focusing on the interaction between the tattoo carrier and the text itself. As such, these texts become performances of the self and one's life. How do literary tattoos celebrate and/or commemorate people, events, and memories, and what role does performativity play in these bodily celebrations and commemorations?*

**Van der Starre:**

I read a lot about tattoos and tattoo history for that chapter, which is fascinating. Something that happens quite often with tattoos is that people have a tattoo to commemorate a moment, a person, a date, something like that. It is also very often the case that tattoos are a very private way of commemorating something, so very often the tattoo might be somewhere where not many people can see it. It is, thus, a very interesting way of celebrating or commemorating something intimate and personal, which is very different from a monument, for example, the function of which is connected to the fact that it is not private, but public.

I interviewed around ninety people in the Netherlands and Flanders with a poetry tattoo, and I found out that yes, they do all those things, they use poetry to commemorate themselves or an event, or a person, or an emotion on their body, but they also use it — and I hadn't read about this anywhere, so I think it's a specific characteristic of poetry tattoos — to remind themselves of (I think that's a better way to put it here than "commemorate") a kind of life motto, or slogan. This specific aspect makes sense, of course, as poetry tattoos are always language based, while many

other types of tattoos are illustrations and thus visually oriented. Poetry tattoos often consist of a quote, or a whole poem, which the person uses as a kind of aspirational idea of who they want to be, of who they want to become, how they want to live their lives, but also as a reminder to themselves. A “note to self,” but “on the self.” What lots of people told me — and this is not unique for poetry tattoos — is that they often touch the tattoo to remind themselves of something. Because poetry tattoos are often life mottos or philosophies, I believe they are often a kind of celebration. People celebrate who they are or who they have become.

**FRAME:**

*Does the body add any value to the reminder?*

**Van der Starre:**

Yes, some people told me that, for example, they want the tattoo to be near their heart, because it is about who they are or about someone they love. The heart can be a symbol for loads of things. The same goes for the wrist area, which people may associate with mental health. Some people find it important that you can see the tattoo or cannot see the tattoo and that also makes a difference, of course, for where it is on your body. So the placement of the tattoo on the body has meaning. I end that chapter with a material reading of a poetry tattoo in which I consider the location on the body, the nearby moles, one of which really looks like a punctuation mark. The carrier of this poetry tattoo hadn't really realised that and the important thing is that that is not important in a material reading. It's not about intention — neither the author's intention, nor anyone else's intention — it's about the effect of materiality. The body is also a very interesting carrier, because bodies change. Skin changes colour, it can start to sag, it's just a very interesting materiality.

**FRAME:**

*In the conclusion of your dissertation, you also go into the debate between, on the one hand, postmodern ideas about the limits of language, and on the other hand, the idea that poetry can grasp the unsayable or the sublime. We were wondering, especially as you also focus on spoken word poetry and other oral forms of poetry, which seem to naturally suggest a message is being conveyed, do you think that poetry can say the unsayable?*

**Van der Starre:**

Whether poetry can say the unsayable is always something that the user can decide. I would say it's never in the poem itself. A user can feel: "This poem says things that I wanted to say and I couldn't find the words for." Or a user can think: "I don't understand this poem, but it is speaking to me." Those can be paradoxical experiences: I understand the poem, but I don't understand the words. The fact that language can do this is fascinating, because we often feel that it's not what language is supposed to do: we mainly use language to communicate, in which we want to stay away from vagueness or ambiguity. Poetry, however, often specifically uses those aspects.

**FRAME:**

*In connection to that, and specifically when it comes to performing poetry — although we think spoken silences are also reflected in written poetry in, for example, white spaces — why is silence so important to poetry and especially to oral poetry? Wherein lies the power of the unspoken or of the space left in between words, and, in contrast, what does the absence of silence imply or convey?*

**Van der Starre:**

I love these questions. I'm actually also working on breath and poetry at the moment, which often takes place in the silent part of the performance, but there isn't any actual silence because you can sometimes hear someone breathe and through their breath you can follow their rhythm. We know about the link between

breath and rhythm from dance and music and performance studies. I'm really interested in that. I wrote one of my master's dissertations, years ago, on poetry on sound carriers like CDs and stuff back in the day, and I became interested in breath. Sometimes you can hear the breath of the poet or performer. In audio recordings you obviously don't see these performers, but sometimes users will say: "It really sounds like that poet is in my living room!" I find that very interesting, because it makes poetry come alive through the silence and the breath, and you can hear the body even though you can't see it, but also because there is meaning in silence. We need a temporal dimension to reflect on the meaning of words. Silence seems to have a function. It also creates ambiguity and layered interpretations, for which we also need time, and that time is also found in the silence.

Yra van Dijk wrote a book on white space in poetry and connects it to silence, among other things. She writes about written poetry, which is of course different from performed poetry. However, that does not mean we can't also talk about performed white space, for example, in Paul van Ostaijen's *Bezette Stad* (1921). We call it white, but the paper could also be green; green space. Paul van Ostaijen used to say you should view his poetry as a kind of music score, it's something that should be performed.

**FRAME:**

*Do you think that silence has a specific meaning in poetry readings on celebratory events and commemoration? Listening to someone read aloud a poem or recite it, what kind of communication occurs in the silences, and between whom?*

**Van der Starre:**

Silence is connected to emotion. It's very interesting actually that there's commemoration, remembrance, respect, and emotion in silence, such as when we are silent for a few minutes to remember a person or event. And you often encounter, during poetry

performances that can be very emotional or very personal, silences that are absolutely silent. When audiences are touched, it feels like they don't even want to move or they don't even want to breathe — you can hear a pin drop, that kind of silence. So silence has meaning, it's part of the materiality, funnily enough, even though it's no sound.

**FRAME:**

*Do you think that more experimental forms of poetry carry different social functions, to go back to an earlier point, than other forms of poetry we've talked about?*

**Van der Starre:**

Yes, because in lots of experimental poetry, we might say that meaning exists through the poetical function of language, much more than via the referential function of language. This is something that can be very confusing for users, as we are used to language using the referential function to communicate meaning. We also know that the poetic function is not solely used in literary texts. Poetic functions also exist in advertisement language and in political speeches, for example. I love poetry that makes me think a lot about different functions of language. Astrid Lampe's experimental poetry is a good example of that. Together with the other jury members of the P.C. Hooftprijs (2024), we decided to award her that big prestigious prize. I hope many people are now reading and listening to her poetry and are puzzled by how she mixes up the language functions.

**FRAME:**

*Last question, how should we celebrate poetry?*

**Van der Starre:**

In any way that makes you happy. I love sharing poetry with others. I think we can celebrate poetry by helping others find the right poems for their big and small moments. Sometimes people

contact me saying: “I can’t really find good poems anywhere. Where should I look?” And then I recommend them anthologies, online performances, Instagram poetry and much more. That is how we can celebrate poetry, by sharing our knowledge and love with others. There is so much out there! Maybe because of their school education, many people assume poetry is one certain thing, and they most probably don’t know that there’s also punk poetry, and Hip Hop, and opera, and light verse, and experimental poems, and visual poems and protest poetry, and so much more. There are so many poems out there, and that’s also a celebration in itself.

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## Biography

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