



Annual Report Erasmus Prize
Barbara Ehrenreich



Annual Report
Erasmus Prize
2018

The Power of
Investigative
Journalism



Colophon

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Jeroen van der Meyde, Ineke Oostveen

Illustrations

Reynoud Homan

Text

Praemium Erasmianum Foundation, Barbara Ehrenreich, H.M. the King

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Praemium Erasmianum Foundation
Jan van Goyenkade 5
1075 HN Amsterdam, The Netherlands
T + 31 (0)20 67 52 753
E spe@erasmusprijs.org
www.erasmusprijs.org

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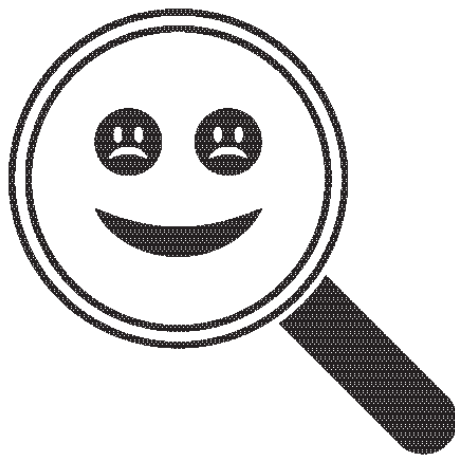
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Preface

The Erasmus Prize celebrated its sixtieth anniversary in 2018 with the theme 'The Power of Investigative Journalism'. Quality independent journalism is under pressure owing to the drop in circulation figures, the decline in reading, and growing competition from new media. Moreover, journalists themselves are increasingly targets of criticism, and in-depth, time-consuming investigative journalism is now endangered. At the same time, we see that online collaboration generates all sorts of new initiatives that lead to revelations, and the 'long read' is enjoying renewed appreciation. In a world of 'fake news', telling relevant stories is as valid as it ever was. To call attention to the importance of investigative journalism as a way of establishing the truth, the board of the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation chose this as the theme of its jubilee year.

The 2018 Erasmus Prize was awarded to the American journalist and writer Barbara Ehrenreich (1941). Ehrenreich is commended for her courage in putting herself on the line in her journalistic work. By leading the life of people in precarious situations, she gives a voice to groups in society that would otherwise remain unheard. She lets us see the world through other eyes. In her books and articles, she draws on various disciplines, uniting scientific analysis with literary elegance, and larding her focused writing style with dry humour.

The work of Barbara Ehrenreich received attention in an extensive programme of activities that not only honoured the writer herself but also provided a platform for a new generation of journalists. For example, Ehrenreich spoke with students about combining scholarship and activism. She also gave a master class for young journalists. Moreover, she appeared on stage at both De Duif and De Balie, where she was interviewed in front of a full house about her personal life, the profession of journalism, and her battle against positive thinking. A stimulating festival at De Balie explored the future of investigative journalism. And in a report competition held by De Groene Amsterdammer, three new writers enjoyed an opportunity to share their stories about poverty and inequality. In addition to all these public activities, Ehrenreich wrote the essay 'Beyond Humanism' (the twelfth in our series of Erasmus Essays), which was also published in full in Trouw newspaper. Ehrenreich also gave

interviews for television programmes such as Nieuwsuur and Buitenhof, and interviews and articles appeared in all national dailies.

In addition to the Erasmus Prize, the Foundation in 2018 awarded its annual Research Prizes for the thirtieth time to five young doctoral students who, in the eyes of the jury, had completed an excellent dissertation. The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences hosted the award ceremony.

Apart from all these activities and publications, the Foundation released the book 'Sixty years Erasmus Prize'. This lavishly illustrated work shines a light on all prize-winners from the past sixty years once again. We would like to extend our gratitude to the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds for its generous contribution to the production of this book.

The annual report contains a short account of all these activities. We thank all our partners who collaborated with us so enthusiastically, among them the University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht University, Spui25, Atlas Contact publishing house, De Balie, the University of Amsterdam, colleges of journalism in the Netherlands, De Groene Amsterdammer and the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds.

The programme of activities culminated in the festive Erasmus Prize award ceremony itself, held on 27 November 2018 at the Royal Palace in Amsterdam, in the presence of a large number of professional colleagues from the field of investigative journalism. To mark the sixtieth jubilee of the Foundation, His Majesty the King opened the ceremony with a speech about the history and importance of the Erasmus Prize. The award ceremony was attended not only by our Patron but also by Her Majesty the Queen and Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrix. We are extremely grateful to the Royal Family for their hospitality.

Jet de Ranitz, chair
Shanti van Dam, director

Opening speech by His Majesty the King

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is a very special edition of the Erasmus Prize. Today we're not only honouring a remarkable laureate, we're also celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the prize itself. As the patron of the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation I'd like to welcome you all and say how much I value your presence and involvement.

It was my grandfather who together with several others created the Erasmus Prize. He remained its patron until his death in 2004.

In its early years the Erasmus Prize chiefly had a European focus. But over time its objectives have gradually broadened. It's now awarded to a person or institution that has made an exceptional contribution to the humanities, the social sciences or the arts, in Europe and beyond.

It was clear from the very start in 1958 that this prize was no respecter of conventions. The first Erasmus Prize wasn't awarded to a person or an institute, but to the Austrian people. Former laureates have a standing invitation to attend the ceremony. But we're rather relieved that word of this doesn't seem to have got out in Austria!

Over the past sixty years many impressive individuals and institutes have been honoured. I cherish the memories I have of the laureates I was lucky enough to meet. Like Ian Buruma, who was awarded the fiftieth edition of the Erasmus Prize. The theme of that anniversary year was 'The New Cosmopolitan'. That was only ten years ago. Or Benjamin Ferencz, the driving force behind the establishment of the International Criminal Court. José Antonio Abreu, who introduced children from the slums of Venezuela to classical music. The young representatives of the Wikipedia community, who have made knowledge available to all. And A.S. Byatt, with her passionate plea for imagination.

The history of the Prize stretches back beyond my own. How I wish I could have met its earlier laureates too. Robert Schuman, Oskar Kokoschka, Martin Buber,

Charles Chaplin... Indeed, where were the women? I'm pleased to say that this gender imbalance has been redressed somewhat in recent years – and again today!

It's hard to describe what connects the laureates. They're people who aren't afraid to go against the flow. Undogmatic. Unconventional perhaps. They're the ones who pull us out of the rut and show us new paths. They move us. Inspire us. Challenge us. They all keep the spirit of Erasmus alive.

But what is that spirit, exactly? It's not so easy to define. Erasmus defies categories. He was a humanist freethinker. But also a devout Catholic. A model of temperance, harmony and tolerance. But also a fierce opponent. A thoughtful scholar. But also a restless wanderer. A serious man. But also a master of satire.

The Dutch are very proud of this famous son of Rotterdam. But Erasmus wasn't so complimentary about his fellow countrymen. He had his doubts about the intellect of the Dutch. I quote: 'Nowhere else does one find so many educated men. But one seldom encounters a truly great scholar.' A sober assessment of our ancestors, five hundred years ago.

The fact remains that Erasmus opened the door wide for free thinking and free research. The Dutch historian Johan Huizinga put it as follows: "Erasmus could not bear that a wall of bedazzlement, routine and unthinkingness prevented people from seeing things in their proper perspective."

Erasmus belonged to the first generation that grew up with the printing press. 'In many ways he was essentially a journalist,' Huizinga wrote. And so it's fitting that, in its sixtieth year, the prize which bears Erasmus' name has been awarded to an investigative journalist. Someone who brings the truth to light. Who shows us the world through different eyes and encourages us to think for ourselves. That ties in with the Erasmian tradition we keep up. And it's especially important now, at a time when critical and independent journalism – crucial in any free, democratic society – is in jeopardy in many parts of the world.

Erasmus was averse to extremes and ingrained opinions. “Let us” he wrote, “judge other men’s views fairly and not esteem our own as oracles.” No one has a monopoly on truth and wisdom. That simple message is Erasmus’ legacy to us. His appeal has lost none of its relevance. I’d like to share one last quote with you: “Let us resist, not by insults and threats, not by force of arms and injustice, but by simple discretion, by gentleness and tolerance.”

I’d like to thank all those at the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation who have helped keep this legacy alive. The Erasmus Prize is a tribute to those who believe in freedom, in open-minded research, creative expression and openness. I hope the Foundation will continue its good work for very many years to come.

Thank you.

Read by His Majesty the King



Citation

Article 2 of the Constitution of the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation reads as follows: “Within the context of the cultural traditions of Europe in general and the ideas of Erasmus in particular, the aim of the Foundation is to enhance the position of the humanities, the social sciences and the arts. The emphasis lies on tolerance, cultural diversity and non-dogmatic, critical thinking. The Foundation tries to achieve this aim by awarding prizes and by organizing events that draw attention to the work and vision of the laureates. A cash prize is awarded under the name of ‘Erasmus Prize’. In accordance with this article, the Board of the Foundation has decided to award the Erasmus Prize 2018 to the American writer and journalist Barbara Ehrenreich. The Prize is awarded to her on the following grounds:

As a pioneer in the genre of immersive journalism, she is commended for her courage in putting herself on the line in her journalistic work. By leading the life of people in precarious situations and reporting on what she calls ‘a world apart’ in a most lucid and penetrating way, she brings to the fore the concerns of groups in society whose voices would otherwise remain unheard.

As a writer, Ehrenreich unites scientific analysis with literary elegance and a sobering sense of humor. Her ability to give life to what would otherwise remain cold statistics, opens our eyes in a most thought-provoking manner.

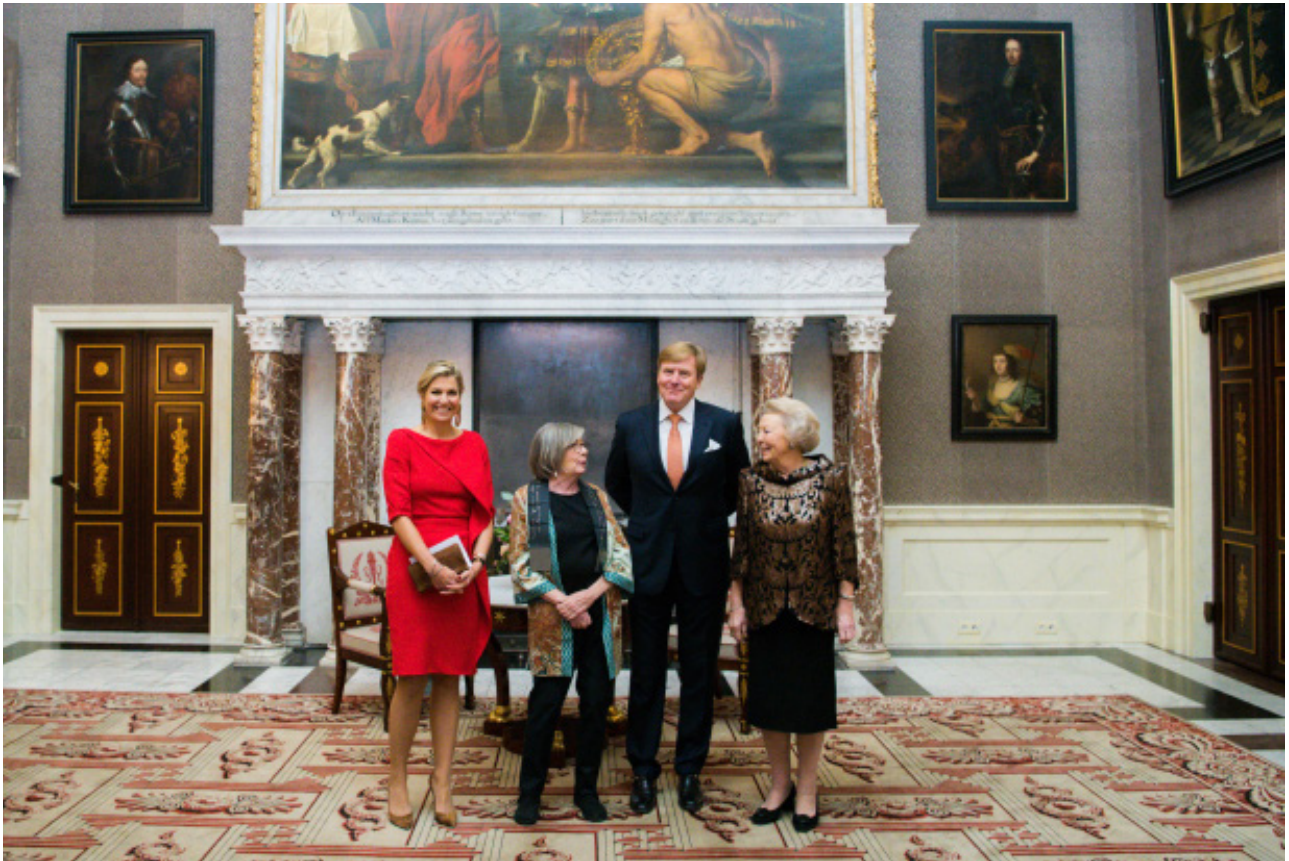
Whether dealing with the labor market, the healthcare system or the fragility of the middle class, she shows how myth making and positive thinking divert us from reality. In her work she points out that such an approach reduces structural societal problems to being the result of individual shortcomings. This message is also becoming ever more relevant in today’s Europe.

She proves to be an inspiration to other journalists in both content and method. Having created the tools for future generations of journalists, she has also actively committed herself to mentoring and supporting them by founding her ‘Economic Hardship Reporting Project’.

Ehrenreich proves to be an advocate of critical thinking and fact-finding, at the same time motivated by empathy and social activism. She thus embodies the Erasmian ideals championed by the Foundation.

Read by Shanti van Dam, director

“As a writer, Ehrenreich unites scientific analysis with literary elegance and a sobering sense of humor.”



H.M. the Queen, Barbara Ehrenreich, H.M. the King and H.R.H. Princess Beatrix after the ceremony in Royal Palace Amsterdam.



H.M. the King, Barbara Ehrenreich, Xandra Schutte and Jet de Ranitz while the audience applauds the laureate.

Laudatio

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

On Monday May first, 2006, Timothy J. Bowers robbed a bank in Columbus, Ohio. He made off with 80 dollars, handed the money to a security guard and calmly waited for the police to come and arrest him. In court, he pleaded guilty and told the judge he would like a three-year sentence – just enough time to get him to the age of eligibility for social security benefits. Timothy Bowers was 65 years old — too old to find work in a labor market looking for young, cheap workers — not old enough to receive any support from the government.

The case of Timothy Bowers is discussed by Barbara Ehrenreich in her book *This Land is Their Land. Reports from a Divided Nation*, in which she points out that he's by far not the only person who has chosen incarceration as an answer to poverty. For the vast majority of the American prison population comes from the lowest income groups.

Such an anecdote about a man who sees prison as his escape from poverty is typical of Ehrenreich. In her work she not only portrays people living on the fringes of society but also casts a critical eye on the absurdities to which poverty can lead.

For her journalistic masterpiece *Nickel & Dimed. On (Not) Getting By in America*, she plunged into the world of the working poor. She presented herself as a single mother without qualifications or work experience, and tried to survive on what she could earn from unskilled work. So she waited on tables and became a maid in Florida, she cleaned homes and fed nursing home residents in Maine, and she worked shifts at Walmart in Minnesota.

Very quickly she discovered that you need quite a bit of money to be poor. For it's almost impossible to rent a home if you don't earn enough to pay a deposit and a month's rent in advance. And if you are forced to live in a cheap motel, you won't be able to eat affordable or healthy food because you cannot cook there. Since you can't live off one low-paid job, many of her colleagues

worked two or more jobs. And anyway, noted Ehrenreich, who has a doctorate in biochemistry, there's no such thing as 'unskilled' work. Such work actually demands a high level of skill.

Barbara Ehrenreich demonstrates where investigative journalism – the theme of the Erasmus Prize this year – can lead. Investigative journalism draws attention to hitherto unknown realities and evils. It exposes what lies hidden. It sets out to redress the version of reality presented by those in positions of power. Hers is an indispensable countervailing force. She directs that force by following flows of money and revealing scandals, financial or otherwise, and also by engaging in more social investigative journalism and in-depth reporting. That's what Ehrenreich did in her book *Nickel & Dimed*, and again in *Bait and Switch. The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream*, in which she became a job seeker and showed the difficult plight of the middle class. Even with the right qualifications and an office job, its members are mercilessly dumped on the scrapheap after mergers and takeovers.

Both of those books are fine examples of investigative journalism in which the method itself is exposed. Ehrenreich sets to work as a sort of empirical journalist, immersing herself in an unfamiliar world and putting herself on the line. It is her way of making what she has termed 'a world apart' not only visible but also palpable. It's what we now also call immersive journalism: living something fully in order to report on it. Or as she once put it: 'Affluent people can read it and have me as a guide. They're looking through my eyes.' Barbara Ehrenreich is the grand old lady of this genre and has inspired many followers.

Ehrenreich has an impressive body of work to her name, with over twenty books and numerous articles in publications such as *The Nation*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and *Time Magazine*. If you were to pick out a common thread in her wide-ranging writing, it would be the deceptive nature of the American dream. No wonder she has called herself 'a myth buster by trade'.

Whether she's writing about the job market, the health sector or the fragile existence of the middle class: time and again, Ehrenreich shows that the meritocratic ideal of the American dream is a fiction that leaves people to fend for themselves. In her book *Smile or Die: How Positive Thinking Fooled America & The World*, again with a personal slant, she paints a hilarious yet shocking picture of the pink and infantile world in which people with breast cancer find themselves. Yet all those pink ribbons and teddy bears do nothing but deceive patients into believing that cancer and other calamities can be 'conquered' through positive thinking. The implication being that if you do not make a successful recovery, you simply weren't optimistic enough. Ehrenreich the scientist knows only too well that the misery caused by cancer occurs at the level of the human cell. She knows that recovery or illness is simply a matter of luck, good or bad. The American dream and the dogma of positive thinking are both myths that individualize problems instead of identifying their structural causes.

Barbara Ehrenreich is much more than a versatile writer. For she also wields a sensitive pen and her writing, often laden with irony, can be both empathetic and extremely funny. Her journalism always goes hand in hand with incisive, even provocative analyses. Such as the following: "When someone works for less pay than she can live on (...) she has made a great sacrifice for you. The "working poor" (...) are in fact the major philanthropists of our society. They neglect their own children so that the children of others will be cared for; they live in substandard housing so that other homes will be shiny and perfect; they endure privation so that inflation will be low and stock prices high. To be a member of the working poor is to be an anonymous donor, a nameless benefactor, to everyone."

Above all, her constant social engagement merits high praise. Ehrenreich was writing about the widening gap between rich and poor, about the working poor and the middle-class fear of losing its comfortable existence, about all of these subjects when they were hardly on the political agenda. She truly did make the invisible visible. And she is still committed to doing that, most recently by founding the Economic Hardship Reporting Project, in

which she supports young journalists, many of whom find themselves in precarious situations, in telling their stories and offering them to established media outlets.

Barbara Ehrenreich, through your courage in putting yourself on the line, your insatiable curiosity for the unknown, your compassion for the 'ordinary' people you write about, and your sharp insights, through all this you uphold for the values of Erasmus. It is therefore a great honour to congratulate you, on behalf of the Foundation, with the Erasmus Prize.

Read by Xandra Schutte, on behalf of the Board

"She truly did make the invisible visible."



Director Shanti van Dam reading the Citation.



Welcome by Chair Jet de Ranitz.

Acceptance speech by Barbara Ehrenreich

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Wow. Amsterdam is completely disorienting to an American. I've been here for more than a week and haven't heard a single gunshot. Even the dignitaries, like the king and queen, are warm, kind people. When I met the Dutch ambassador to the US last spring, in connection with this prize, he was so pleasant and jolly that I had to question his credentials.

And now this: For me, this is like a fairy tale come true. We're in the royal palace! With the king and queen! And I'm here with everyone I love including all the people who have enabled me and inspired me for so many years! Thank you so much to all the Dutch people not only for the Erasmus Prize but for this unforgettable moment!

Well of course I'm saying all these nice things about The Netherlands in the hope that you will, when necessary, grant me refugee status. Me, my family and friends, that is.

One thing about this country that is strange, even exotic, to an American is that you seem to lack the steep class divisions that are so visible almost everywhere in my country. You may eventually get to the same divided condition as my country – this is the way most industrialized countries are trending – but at least for now, the Dutch welfare state remains strong enough to prevent that from happening. In the US, by contrast, we have virtually no welfare state to protect the poor and downwardly mobile, and the results are visible even to tourists.

Take Manhattan, that once-beautiful island that, according to legend, the Dutch bought from the Indians for \$24 – and that's a real estate deal that even Trump would have to admire. Today, Manhattan land sells for \$1000/sq. foot, so \$24 would get you a few square inches.

One sad consequence of the current prices is that only the super-rich can afford to live in the upper story apartments where the sun still shines. Walk around on the sidewalks of Manhattan today and you will be in the perpetual shade of the sky-scrapers housing American –

and Russian and Chinese –billionaires. Actually, you'll be in the shade of the empty apartments of the super-rich – because when you have 6 or 7 homes you can't be in any one of them much of the time.

I have spent a lot of time in that shade. I was born into the relative poverty of a working class family in Montana and spent a good portion of my adult life struggling economically. Partly because I chose to be a writer and a journalist. This seemed like a good fit for me because I'd been educated as a scientist and journalists have the same goal – finding the truth and getting people to pay attention to it.

At the beginning of my career, I could earn enough to support my family, at however minimal a level. But starting in the 90s that began to change. Newspapers and other news outlets were taken over by large corporations that were concerned only about the bottom line. They cut their staffs, including journalists, and closed those magazines and newspapers that weren't making enough money, at least by the standards of their new owners, with the result that, today, writers aren't paid well when they're paid at all.

To make things worse, I often chose to write about poverty – about all the people who are left out of America's fabulous wealth, who try to get by on about \$10/hr while raising children and paying exorbitant prices for rent and medical care. This seems so unfair to me, so easily fixable. Why not, for example, open up the empty sky-high apartments of the super-rich as squats for the homeless while their super-rich owners are off in London or the Caribbean?

But this of course is not the kind of thing that the new super-rich owners of the media business want to hear. I found the demand for my kinds of stories diminishing. Editors urged me to write less about economic inequality and more about "feminine" topics like the first lady's fashion choices and the secrets of success of female CEOs. I could no longer make a living in journalism, and had to find other ways to support myself.

What is worse, I could not be sure I was actually making a difference. I had started in the 80s doing the conventional type of journalism: interviewing people and getting their stories published. This was my way of debunking the common prejudice that the poor are only poor because they want to be – because they don't make an effort, or because somewhere along the way they forgot to get an education for a high-paying career.

I got some praise for “giving a voice to the voiceless” but nothing changed. In fact, things were only getting worse: Wages started going down relative to the cost of living; the welfare state began to disappear; unions were becoming weaker.

So I decided to turn things up a notch, to try “immersion journalism,” in the style of the German journalist Gunter Wallraff who went undercover to report on the lives of Turkish guest workers (I had not heard of him at the time.) I left home, found the cheapest housing I could, and took the best paying jobs I could find – as a waitress, a hotel housekeeper, a cleaning lady, a nursing home aide and a WalMart employee. I didn't deliberately select these jobs: They selected me. These are the only kinds of jobs I could get without using my actual credentials. (Not that my credentials would have helped, since I never did see a job advertisement for a political essayist, especially not a sarcastic feminist political essayist.)

To my utter surprise, the book that I wrote about my experiences became a bestseller, and helped reinforce the ongoing movement for higher wages. To my even greater surprise, many people praised me for my bravery for having done this – to which I could only say: Millions of people do this kind of work every day for their entire lives – haven't you noticed them?

And I learned a very important lesson: I never use the word “unskilled” any more to refer to anyone's work. I learned the hard way that every job takes skill, intelligence and concentration – and should be paid accordingly.

Now I'm in my third and final phase of my personal campaign for social justice. Six years ago, it struck me

that people living in poverty (or near poverty) don't need someone to “give them a voice.” They have voices and they know what they want to say. They just need some help, some support to allow them to write and help them get published.

So I created something called the Economic Hardship Reporting Project for exactly that purpose. In our 6 years of existence, we have raised money from philanthropists to help support over 100 people – factory workers, house cleaners, and many professional journalists who have fallen on hard times.

We've turned some lives around. We've called attention to issues no one was thinking about – like the plasma business, which pays poor people for their vital blood proteins, at considerable cost to their health. Or the growing number of childcare centers that operate 24 hours a day, because their parents have to work pretty much around the clock ... about homeless Americans who live year-round in tents ... and about the epidemic of suicides among American farmers.

We are very proud of what we do. Some of our people have won prizes and awards. All of them have had their work published in widely read media outlets. A few have gotten book contracts or actual paying jobs. We like to think that we're making a difference.

And maybe we are. But it's a tiny difference compared to what needs to happen. And I guess that's the story of my life as a journalist: You try and try to bring attention to what is really happening and to all the unnecessary pain in the world. Most of the time you fail. You don't change the world. You may not even get paid for your work.

But once in a while, very rarely, you are recognized and applauded for what you are trying to do. This is one of those moments – and not only for me. I am encouraged and emboldened to work even harder for a just and equitable society, as are my many friends and colleagues and loved ones. I thank you on behalf of all of them.

Read by Barbara Ehrenreich

*“I never use the word ‘unskilled’
any more to refer to anyone’s work.
I learned the hard way that every
job takes skill, intelligence and
concentration - and should be paid
accordingly.”*



H.M. the Queen, H.M. the Queen, Ben Ehrenreich, H.R.H. Princess Beatrix and director Shanti van Dam, listening to the acceptance speech

Biography Barbara Ehrenreich

Barbara Ehrenreich (b. 1941) is a pioneer in the genre of investigative journalism. Her international breakthrough came in 2001 with her book *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, for which she spent months trying to survive on her earnings from what society calls 'unskilled work'. In her subsequent work she often applied this technique of 'immersion journalism', as it is now known, for instance to highlight the obstacles encountered by the American middle class in scaling the social ladder.

A common thread running through her impressive body of work is the deceptive myth of the American dream. Recurring themes in her essays and books are: the labor

market, healthcare, poverty, and the position of women. Such themes are now more important than ever. Among her most important works are: *Nickel and Dimed, On (Not) Getting By in America* (2001); *Bait and Switch: The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream* (2005); and *Smile or Die* (2009), on the dangers of 'positive thinking' at the expense of, among other things, adequate healthcare.

In her most recent book *Natural Causes* (2018), she describes the senseless resistance to growing old. Through her choice of subject and working methods, Ehrenreich is an inspiring example for journalists all over the world.



Activities

Barbara Ehrenreich on Humanism

20 November, University of Humanistics, Utrecht

'In atheism and the realization that no higher power is coming along to feed the hungry or lift the fallen, mercy is left entirely to us.'

Barbara Ehrenreich speaks about the role of humanism in Western society today. The discussion centres on her diagnosis of the current state of America. Does a humanistic world view still offer a solution?

Ehrenreich was interviewed on stage at Utrecht University by Professor Trudie Knijn before answering questions from students.

i.c.w. University of Humanistics and Utrecht University

Barbara Ehrenreich on Optimism

21 November, De Duif, Amsterdam

'There is a vast difference between positive thinking and existential courage.'

Barbara Ehrenreich debunks the myth of positive thinking in ironic fashion. She views it as a delusion that needs to be exposed. Positive thinking, as she herself discovered, plays an important role in medical care, as she tellingly describes in her celebrated book *Smile or Die*. In her most recent book *Natural Causes*, she describes the senseless resistance to growing old. The consequences of positive thinking feed into other aspects of society, such as climbing the social ladder or escaping from poverty. Humour and a sense of perspective are her weapons in attacking the culture of positive thinking. Interviewer Raoul Heertje talked to her about optimism and realism.

i.c.w. SPUI25

Barbara Ehrenreich on Journalism

23 November, De Balie, Amsterdam

'Much of my rebelliousness starts with indifference to what is urgently important to others.'

One-day journalism festival in honour of Barbara Ehrenreich. The festival illuminated Ehrenreich's work and offered insight into current developments in investigative journalism. Highlights: a masterclass for students of journalism headed by Barbara Ehrenreich and her British counterpart James Bloodworth; a panel on best practices in current investigative journalism and new forms of journalistic networks; an in-depth interview by Joris Luyendijk about the current state of journalism. On the

basis of images of decisive moments in Ehrenreich's life, Luyendijk will talk to her about her personal motives and journalistic choices.

i.c.w. De Balie

Reporting competition

Barbara Ehrenreich Reporting competition

A competition for young journalists was launched in spring. The Barbara Ehrenreich Reporting Competition was inspired not only by her attention to the life 'at the bottom', but also by an influential project founded by Ehrenreich: the Economic Hardship Reporting Project. It supports stories – financially and with editorial supervision – that give a human face to poverty and inequality. The three winners – Hadjar Benmiloud, Mirjam Pool and Marleen Kruithof – were rewarded with a sum of money and a publication of their reporting in *De Groene Amsterdammer* in the week of the Erasmus Prize award.

www.groene.nl/series/barbara-ehrenreich-reportage-wedstrijd



Barbara Ehrenreich in conversation with Raoul Heertje in De Duif, Amsterdam.



Joris Luyendijk interviews Barbara Ehrenreich in De Balie, Amsterdam.

Publications

Jubilee Book

To mark its sixtieth jubilee this year, the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation released the book *Sixty years of the Erasmus Prize*.

This jubilee publication has been made possible by the Prince Bernhard Culture Fund.

Atlas Contact

To mark the 2018 Erasmus Prize award for Barbara Ehrenreich, Atlas Contact Publishers released a Dutch translation of *Nickel and Dimed*, her most influential book, entitled 'De achterkant van de Amerikaanse droom'. Earlier this year, a Dutch edition of her most recent book *Natural Causes*, entitled 'Oud genoeg om dood te gaan', appeared in the Netherlands.

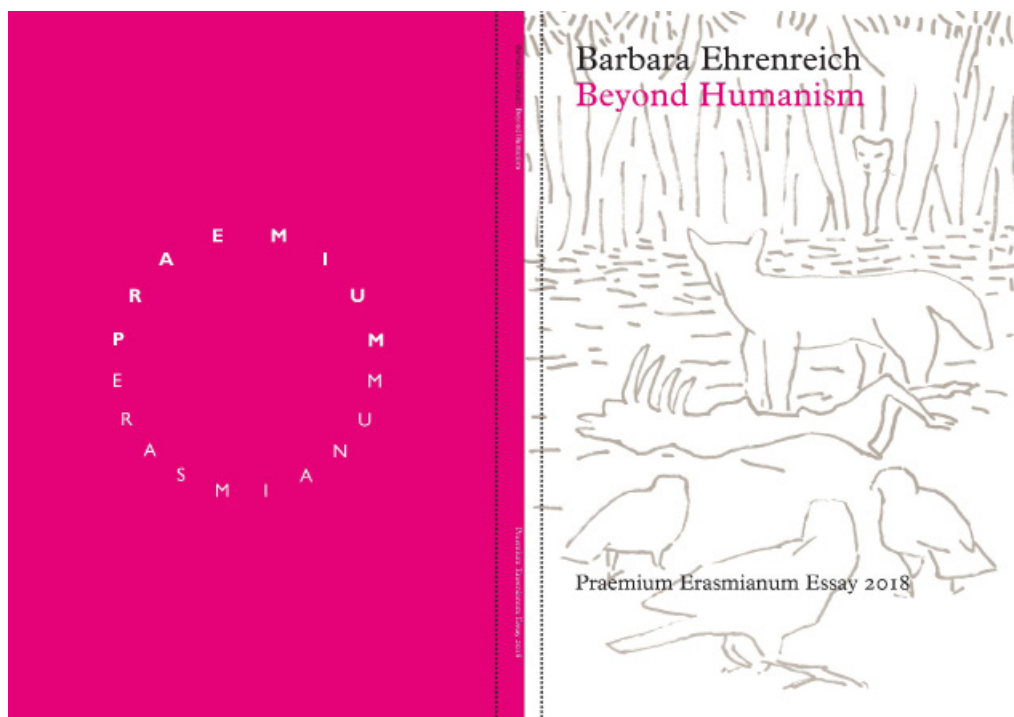
Erasmus Essay by Barbara Ehrenreich 'Beyond Humanism'

In the series of Erasmus Essays of the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation, on the occasion of the Erasmus Prize 2018.

Media

Appearances in newspapers and television

Interviews with Barbara Ehrenreich in newspapers, magazines and on television, including appearances on the current affairs programmes Buitenhof and Nieuwsuur. Interviews with Ehrenreich also appeared in Trouw, De Groene Amsterdammer en Volkskrant.





Barbara Ehrenreich in Buitenhof.



Barbara Ehrenreich in Nieuwsuur.

Research Prizes

Since 1988, the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation awards annual Research Prizes. Five prizes of € 3,000 each are awarded to young academic researchers in the humanities and social sciences, who have written a PhD dissertation of outstanding quality at a university in the Netherlands. Important criteria for the award are the broad, case transcending treatment of the subject and the wider relevance of the book for other disciplines. This year's selection committee was formed by dr. Barnita Bagchi, prof.dr. Bas ter Haar, Jos de Mul, dr. mr. Max Drenth, prof. dr. Naomi Ellemers and prof. dr. Rick Lawson

The Research Prizes award ceremony took place on Wednesday 16 May 2018 at the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in Amsterdam.

The winning dissertations of 2018:

Else Vogel

Subjects of care: Living with overweight in the Netherlands.

Eva Meijer

Political animal voices.

Joost van Driessche

Muishond. Techno-wetenschappelijke, literaire en ethische bewegingen van taal.

Maaïke Matelski

Constructing civil society in Myanmar: Struggles for local change and global recognition.

Pepijn Corduwener

The problem of democracy in Europe. Conflicting and converging conceptions of democracy in France, West Germany and Italy, 1945-1989.



F.l.t.r.: Else Vogel, Pepijn Corduwener, Shanti van Dam, Eva Meijer, Maaïke Matelski, Joost van Driessche

Else Vogel

Subjects of care: Living with overweight in The Netherlands.

Supervisor	Prof. dr.A. Mol
Co-supervisor	Prof. dr.A.J. Pols
Nomination	University of Amsterdam, Faculty of Social Sciences

Biography

In 2016, Else Vogel defended her PhD dissertation *Subjects of Care: Living with overweight in the Netherlands cum laude* at the University of Amsterdam (UvA). For this research she conducted ethnographic fieldwork in practices through which practitioners and people care for bodily weight. They do this by means as diverse as dietary recommendations, exercise regimes, meditation, tasting, diet shakes and surgery. Since overweight is a major public health concern, individuals are often admonished to take control of their weight. But such calls are notoriously unsuccessful.

In her research, Else Vogel articulates alternatives to the ideal of bodily discipline. She shows how various 'forms of care' enact bodily desires, health and subjectivity in different ways. Previously, Else Vogel studied psychology and philosophy at Groningen University and received a master's degree in psychology (cum laude). She also graduated from the research master Social Sciences at the UvA (cum laude). After her PhD she did research at the UvA on obesity prevention in Amsterdam neighbourhoods. Currently she is working as a postdoc at the University of Linköping, Sweden. Here she is conducting research on how rehabilitation clinics teach people suffering from persistent pain and fatigue to live well with their restrictions.

Report of the Selection Committee

'Subjects of care' combines philosophical reflection with ethnographic research into care for overweight people in a unique way. The researcher joined dietitians, psychologists and surgeons, and carefully studied people who undergo treatment in clinics, sports schools and mindfulness training. In this way Else Vogel sought alternatives to the standard approach that sees overweight as the result of too much food and too little exercise. Her analysis makes it plausible that this standard approach has political implications too. The mechanistic view of overweight as a purely physical problem leads to forms of care aimed at responsibility and self-control.

This research charts alternative approaches that focus on the broader context in which overweight is experienced as a problem, and the way in which people approach life. The perspective outlined is therefore applicable not only to the issue of obesity, but also to other efforts at so-called 'human or citizen improvement'.

In 'Subjects of Care' the jury recognizes the hand of an independent researcher who conducts fieldwork, argues her case and adopts a position. Moreover, the author does not shy away from her own role as researcher, an aspect appreciated by the jury.

Eva Meijer

Political animal voices.

Supervisor Prof. dr. H.Y.M. Jansen
Co-supervisor Dr. R. Celikates
Nomination University of Amsterdam, Faculty of Humanities

Biography

Eva Meijer is an artist, novelist, philosopher and singer-songwriter. She recently defended her PhD-thesis at the University of Amsterdam, titled 'Political Animal Voices'. She teaches (animal) philosophy at the University of Amsterdam and is the chair of the Dutch study group for Animal Ethics, as well as a founding member of Minding Animals The Netherlands. Recent publications include a book on nonhuman animal languages and the question of what language is, Animal languages, and a fictional biography of bird scientist Len Howard, Bird Cottage. More information can be found on her website: www.evameijer.nl.

Report of the Selection Committee

This book analyses how we can place the animal in the field of politics today, using not only cultural analysis but also linguistic, political and behavioural-observation methods. Animal language and 'animal politics' are topical subjects and much literature has appeared on both, but the connection between the two subjects makes this dissertation highly original.

It is also a very rich thesis in the way it connects different themes and approaches to different perspectives – linguistics and language philosophy, ethology, political theory, participatory research (communication between humans and other animals). The case studies are also provocative (especially 'Worm politics', with a big wink to Frans de Waal's 'Chimp politics'). Her plea for goose/human deliberations at Schiphol is fascinating, while the case of the writer's relationship with a Romanian stray dog opens up unsettling questions from a familiar area.

The dissertation is a treasure trove: it frames animal language in language game framing, discusses animal agency and politics à la Kymlicka and Donaldson, and ends with nothing less than an argument for multispecies deliberation.

The jury deems this dissertation to be highly original, internationally significant and well written. The book goes beyond a case by reframing habitual language in a way that will appeal to non-specialists. The book shows the daring and flair of its writer. It tickles us, bites and barks at us. The jury also praises it for its exceptional balance between the creative and the analytical.

Joost van Driessche

Muishond. Techno-wetenschappelijke, literaire en etnische bewegingen van taal.

Supervisors Prof. dr. L.W. Nauta, Prof. dr. R.W. Boomkens
Co-supervisor Dr. J.A. Harbers
Nomination University of Groningen, Faculty of Philosophy

Biography

Joost Van Driessche has studied architecture in Ghent and Brussels, and philosophy in Groningen. Also at Groningen University he obtained his doctorate with a thesis on the quality of the relation between techno-scientific language and artistic literary language. The commercial edition of his dissertation, *Muishond. Techno-wetenschappelijke, literaire en etnische bewegingen van taal*, has been published by Klement as part of the series Philosophical Newcomers.

The dissertation's attempt to restore faith in science and ethics, without resorting to strict dichotomies such as that between 'fact' and 'fiction', makes this a challenging and provocative book, lending it – in the eyes of the jury – an Erasmian character.

Report of the Selection Committee

Although the theme of this book – the dichotomic relation between techno-scientific and literary-aesthetic language practices – has a long history that extends back to Plato's condemnation of the poets in *The State*, the approach taken by Van Driessche in *Muishond* is highly original. Inspired by such thinkers as Bakhtin, Derrida, Latour and Levinas, the author explores the space between these various language practices, and in his analysis he considers language practice not only in literature and science but also in law, politics and religion. Without doubt, the style of the book also contributes to its originality: the author has sought to express his subject in an ethnographic and thus unavoidably literary style. That makes the reading experience so special.

The theme of this dissertation is of vital importance at a time when scientific objectivity is coming under fire and 'alternative facts' and 'fake news' are rampant. Although the author describes sciences and technologies in a radical-constructivist manner, he emphatically takes a stance against the accusation that this might lead to a moral deficit or to the impossibility of adopting a normative standpoint.

Maaïke Matelski

Constructing civil society in Myanmar: Struggles for local change and global recognition.

Supervisor Prof. dr. H. Schulte Nordholt
Co-supervisor Dr. F. Colombijn
Nomination VU University Amsterdam, Faculty of Social Sciences

Biography

Maaïke Matelski obtained degrees in Social Psychology and International Development at the University of Amsterdam (2005), and Human Rights at the London School of Economics and Political Science (2007). In 2016 she defended her PhD thesis 'Constructing civil society in Myanmar: struggles for local change and global recognition', which she wrote at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Based on frequent fieldwork episodes between 2010 and 2015, her thesis discusses the changing role of civil society organisations and their relationship with western donors during Myanmar's political transition period.

Maaïke has worked for organisations on topics including discrimination, international justice, and refugee rights, and served as a board member of the Dutch Foundation for Peace Studies. She has taught various courses in Anthropology and Social Sciences in Amsterdam, and currently works as a postdoctoral researcher at Radboud University Nijmegen. She is part of a project funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which aims to scrutinize the assumptions underlying its civil society policy framework 'Dialogue and Dissent' (www.includeplatform.net). Maaïke uses an interdisciplinary approach to examine the theory and practice of human rights and development in various contexts.

Report of the Selection Committee

When we embarked upon reading the PhD thesis of Dr Matelski, we were expecting something different. In a new book about Myanmar/Burma one expects a description of the terrible plight – if not genocide – of the Rohingya and an analysis of the root causes of this tragedy. But, as we quickly discovered, this is not what the book is about.

Partly because the thesis was defended in 2016, before the repression of the Rohingya escalated, and partly because Dr Matelski had a different focus. And, as it turned out: a very interesting focus.

Dr Matelski describes how people in Myanmar organised under the banner of civil society during a period of cautious and unprecedented political transition from military to civilian rule. The findings suggest a great diversity of Burmese civil society actors rather than a coherent, single-minded group of actors seeking to democratize the country by overthrowing the government. Dr Matelski also shows that international images and expectations – of human rights NGOs and developmental agencies – were often very different from the ideas and ideals of local organisations. This led to all sorts of interesting interactions. Some local actors simply rejected the universal values promoted by the international community. Others carefully framed their positions towards an international audience in order to ensure foreign support. Yet others were simply overlooked by the international community, because their activities were not recognized as relevant.

The book delineates processes, contestations, and fault lines around civil society work during a highly important transitional period in Myanmar. But Dr. Matelski's study also contains valuable lessons of more general application, relating for instance to universality of human rights and donor impact. The jury praises the sharp and light pen with which this in depth research of very serious material was brought to life.

Pepijn Corduwener

The problem of democracy in Europe. Conflicting and converging conceptions of democracy in France, West Germany and Italy, 1945-1989.

Supervisor Prof. dr. I. de Haan
Nomination Utrecht University, Faculty of Humanities

Biography

Pepijn Corduwener (Amersfoort, 1986) studied history and European Studies at the universities of Utrecht and Amsterdam, as well as at University College London. He gained his PhD at Utrecht University in 2016, based on a dissertation that investigated and compared how political elites in post-war France, Germany and Italy re-invented democracy after the crisis of the Interwar era. It was published by Routledge that same year under the title *The Problem of Democracy in Postwar Europe*. He has been working as an Assistant Professor at the section of Political History at Utrecht University since 2016. In 2017, he won a grant of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research for a comparative research project on the rise and fall of the people's parties in Europe in the twentieth century.

Corduwener's knowledge of the sources is impressive. Moreover, this is a very clear and readable book, even for non-specialists. It does of course cover a vast array of details, but the thread of the discourse remains crystal clear throughout, and no links in the argumentation are overlooked or irrelevant facts introduced. Thanks to strong analyses and a sure sense of main and side issues, this has resulted in a fine and mature historical narrative.

Report of the Selection Committee

This research into conceptions of democracy after World War II in three countries – Italy, France and West Germany – is of clear international relevance. The strength and originality of the book lies in this new comparative perspective. Although a lot of research has been carried out in each country, little or no systematic comparative research on this scale has been conducted up to now. Corduwener had the courage to take on this task, and, in the eyes of the jury, did so very successfully.

The author is the first to show that conceptions of democracy in the three countries differed starkly immediately after the war, despite the fact that all three seemed to advocate more or less the same thing. He therefore adjusts the classic image of post-war democracy in an extremely clear manner. Many current concerns turn out to have deep roots, and that makes this book so relevant today.

Origin and aim of the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation

On 23 June 1958, His Royal Highness Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands founded the Praemium Erasmianum. The aim of the organisation, as described in article 2 of its constitution, is to enhance the position of the humanities, the social sciences and the arts and to promote appreciation of these fields within society, within the context of the cultural traditions of Europe in general and the ideas of Erasmus in particular. The emphasis is on tolerance, cultural multiformity and undogmatic critical thinking.

The Erasmus Prize consists of €150,000 and adornments. The Board is composed of leading members of the Dutch cultural, scholarly and business communities.



The adornments are designed by Bruno Ninaber van Eyben. The adornments consist of a harmonica folded ribbon with a titanium plate at both ends. In closed form it is a booklet; when opened a ribbon with a text in Erasmus' handwriting. This text, taken from a letter to Jean de Carondelet (Basel 5 January 1523), is characteristic of Erasmus' thinking:

Diverse are the gifts of men of genius and many are the different kinds of ages. let each one reveal the scope of his competence and let no one be envious of another who in keeping with his own ability and style tries to make a useful contribution to the education of all.

Erasmus to Jean de Carondelet
Basel, 5 January 1523

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