

*If thou must love me, let it be for nought.* Primo Piano Scala c July interview with Maarten Van Aalderen, keeps on echoing in our mind the magnificent lines of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnet. A love story, that's all about Van Aalderen and his longtime love-affairs with Italy. Sonnet XIV by Barret Browning is about love for love's sake, not for beauty or anything else. *For these things in themselves, Beloved, may Be changed, or change for thee-and love, so wrought, May be unwrought too.* Everything changes, everything may change and therefore love may dissolve. Only a love that is unconditional may grow. *But love me for love's sake, that evermore Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity!* Van Aalderen, in his charming book, seems fascinated by the new Goddess of magic Circe, Italy, without any reason (as in Barrett Browning's sonnet), but he can't get over it. Thus he desperately looks for one reason, or more, for such a love: to whom does he turn? His

colleagues, the bureau chiefs for Italy of many foreign media, of course! Who, better than them may, with no conflict of interest, give unfiltered visions of Italy? Some examples: "creativity, the capacity to adapt and the cultural flexibility of the Italians," the German Udo Gumpel says, whereas Elena Pouchkarskaia revisits Loro Piana story, which she deeply studied, underlining its everlasting products and his owner's vision. The Spanish Rossend Domènech seems really excited by the Slow Food experience, whereas the Algerian journalist Nacéra Benali focuses on widespread charity work. Polish journalist Agnieszka Zakrzewicz points out contemporary art- being a real passionate expert- as a strength of our Country, and Colombian Carmen Cordoba, champions the cause of contemporary Italian cinema. How get rid of football? Chinese journalist Ma Sai say that there are one hundred and fifty million Milan fans in China: and what about politics? Few words

are spent about it, but in a very up to date manner: the Le Figaro journalist, Richard Heuze, is a Renzi supporter, showing how much credibility our Prime Minister still has among the foreign press. Whereas the Greek journalist and author Teodoro Andreadis Syngellakis, picked Berlinguer for the prophetic modernity of his political thinking in today's Greece. "The communist leader is inspiring Alexis Tsipras. The theme of the Left and Europe is decisive". However our interview is not merely about the book, actually about much more. It's about life and culture... and a bit about weddings. For love's sake, of course!

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P.S. what does Dutch Italianate mean?

VAN AALDEREN

## A REAL DUTCH ITALIANATE

“After ideologies collapsed, what's left in politics is more superficial, like tweets, and quick quips in TV. It's the same everywhere in Europe. Even in The Netherlands.”

**Telos:** When you've asked people what they like about Italy, some say our films. Some contemporary art. Still others say they envy us the island of Stromboli. Everyone has given positive, but very varied replies. What exactly inspired your book "*Il bello dell'Italia - il Belpaese visto dai corrispondenti della stampa estera*"?

**Maarten Van Aalderen:** Several things. Firstly, I believe that criticism is crucial in journalism, but it's not enough. When Italy, a Country I love dearly, finds itself on its knees for various reasons, then it's more than just my duty to find out what's wrong. Of course, it's the right thing to do, but that goes without saying. As far as I'm concerned I think a new, more creative ethics exists for a journalist: the duty to say what does work and what are the country's strong points, the ones it can use to jump start its engine. It's very easy to criticise, but helping to rebuild a Country is a much more difficult but nobler task. I'm really interested in Italy, I feel involved with it because twenty-five years ago I decided to live here. That's what prompted my decision to write the book. I've always seen Italy battling to try and improve. Foreigners often love Italy more than the Italians. You should be aware of this. So this is why I wrote the book. I asked twenty-five journalists from all over the world, but all living in Rome, to choose one thing they liked about Italy and talk about it. All their comments are in *Il Bello dell'Italia*.

You've spent nearly half your life in Italy. So, let's be frank, you've seen more than your fair share of good and bad. Over the years how has Italy changed (if indeed it has!) and how have the Italians changed (if indeed they have!)?

Tuscany, Calabria and Rome are the regions and places I know best. Twenty-five years ago I lived in Sesto Fiorentino in Tuscany for nine years. At the time the whole town supported the Italian communist party (PCI). As a Dutchman I found this very unusual. But now the party has very little influence in the life of the town. Twenty-five years ago in Calabria, everything revolved around the family. Now family ties are weaker, even if they are still strong. In Rome pollution is not as bad as it used to be thanks to several municipal policies. Does anyone remember that piazza del Popolo was once a parking area? Even piazza San Silvestro is now a pedestrian area. If you look at Fellini's film, *Roma*, you'll see just how much pollution there was! Obviously, mass immigration has caused



**Maarten Van Aalderen**, Dutch journalist, has been the bureau chief for Italy of the De Telegraaf (Netherlands leading newspaper) for the last eighteen years. His remit also takes in Turkey and the Balkans. He has been President twice of the Foreign Press Association in Italy (March 2009 - March 2011 and March 2013 - March 2015). A graduate in philosophy at the University of Utrecht he then got his doctorate in Florence on Gentile's philosophy of religion. The Gentile's studies started his passionate love affairs with Italy. Moreover Maarten had published in 2005 "A conservative revolutionary" about Paul John Paul II. But there's more. In 2015 came the icing on the cake with "The beauty of Italy" where he incorporates the enthusiasm of other foreign journalists on all which is good about Italy. An act of love for Italy signed by somebody who tells about it every day. The soul of his book is contained in his phrase "Who does not see anything good in Italy either has to change glasses or country. Italy needs hope and vitality. Italians have problems but also great resources. They must therefore be more optimistic about their future". Director of the course on Global journalism at the telematics University UniNettuno, Van Aalderen also collaborates with the television program "Italiani di Carta", by Paolo Mieli, broadcast on San Marino RTV - State Radio and Television of the Republic of San Marino. He received major journalism awards: *premio Sicilia Madre Mediterranea* (2008), *premio internazionale per la Cultura Santa Margherita Ligure* (2009). Just turned fifty, Van Aalderen is married, of course, to an Italian woman who "put up with me for 20 years" - says ironically - with a marriage celebrated in Calabria with "only" 150 participants and a snack of ... 10 courses!

another huge change in the city. And as far as national politics is concerned, reforms are still a priority, just like they were twenty-five years ago. That hasn't changed.

Let's talk about politics, or better still, the role of Italian politicians. Lots of water has passed under the bridge since the days of Andreotti. Only in the nineties was there a change of political leadership. The consensus sought by Italian politicians seems to have gradually shifted, it's no longer based on ideology, but on personal appreciation. What are your thoughts on this issue?

It's true. But it's the same everywhere, not just in Italy. All over Europe ideologies are a thing of the past. The Left wanted social justice and instead there's a widening gap between rich and poor, greater exploitation and youth unemployment; the Right defended the country they believed was threatened by mass immigration and meddling by Brussels; centrists in Italy were Catholic, but despite the Pope's popularity they find it very difficult to make headway in today's modern, individualistic world. Don't forget Pope Benedict XVI and his cogent defeat. After ideologies collapsed, what's left in politics is more superficial, like tweets, and quick quips in TV. It's the same everywhere in Europe. Even in The Netherlands. Unfortunately the Italians have zero trust in politicians. But we need politics, and someone has to assume this responsibility and get the job done.

You have a PhD in philosophy at the University of Florence. The subject of your dissertation was Giovanni Gentile's concept of religion. You've written a book on John Paul II and have won several prizes and awards in journalism (all in Italy). Please tell us about this part of your life.

Italian professors never understood why a Dutchman wanted to study Gentile, but I've always been fascinated by the philosophy of idealism and I'd studied Hegel extensively. I was interested in and curious about the link between idealism and fascism, about which I knew very little (it was the Nazis who occupied The Netherlands). But that subject was a complete taboo. Today it's easy to criticise Gentile and his support of fascism, but I think he acted in good faith and I'm convinced he loved his country. But so did the partisans who fought against the Nazi and fascist barbarians. Although your history is fascinating, it's very different to ours. I wrote the book about John Paul II ten years ago. By sheer chance it came out a day before he died. I'd written extensively about his relationship with other religions and Churches, but I'd also focused on his very interesting encyclicals. Ultimately I'll always be a philosopher interested in ideas. Today, when we've lost all our certainties, philosophy should become interesting again. But the way we study the history of western philosophy has always focused on questions rather than answers; on the limits of our knowledge. Western philosophy questions certainties, it doesn't provide them. It tries to discourage all dogmatisms. Finally, I'd like to say that I've always felt a close but difficult bond with Germany. One of my grandfathers was Jewish and the other taught German. I think that explains it. And of course The Netherlands has an ambiguous relationship with Germany; competitive on the one hand, and close on the other. I love classical German poetry and literature, but the rivalry remains. Instead I am in two minds towards Italy: I really love the Country, but still feel a little foreign. When I left The Netherlands to come to Italy a friend of mine gave me a book. In the inside cover he wrote: *To a Dutchman with his head in Germany and his heart in Italy*. I like it here. I love the South of Italy, even though I'm aware of all its problems. I'm very glad that I've received invitations from all over Italy to present my book. And obviously I remember all the cities and people who invited me.