Reflections on 'Medusa' By Nikita Gill - Marielle Matthee

The instapoem 'Medusa' by Nikita Gill received 19.729 over a period of 7 months. Not yet in the league of Rupi Kaur whose average poem gets 350,000 'likes' within a day. Still, this number of readers is an almost impossible dream for most poets. But is a poem like 'Medusa' really a poem?

Anyone who has ever attended a poetry workshop knows how many don't's have been introduced over time. In the old days, poetry included metre, rhyme, stanza form. Although no longer required, there are still many unwritten rules that a good poem must satisfy. One of them is that the language is specific, a rule related to 'don't tell but show'. The poem 'Medusa' is full of generalities like 'words cut deeper than a knife'. Sentences that contain a clear message; a message that can also be expressed in another way though, a more concrete and at the same time more implicit way.

The purpose of instapoetry has a great influence on its content: it must be readable and consumable.[[1]](#footnote-1) And much of Medusa resembles slogans, or statements that encourage a large group of women: 'women did not get to write your story, Medusa./Because if they did, a very different tale would be told'. Statements that express a kind of wishful thinking that is not always based on reality. Statements that are aimed at creating a feel-good mood among readers and thus receive more likes. South African poet Antjie Krog sometimes called these poems 'fire in my belly' poems, referring to the direct emotions they contain.

But is that right? Can poems like 'Medusa' be classified as pulp poetry or do they reflect an indication of a shift within poetry? What strikes me is that in general poems are becoming more political again, more outspoken. I am thinking, for example, of the Flemish poet Jens Meijen, who won the Dutch debut prize in 2020. His poems show a strong political commitment against climate change. More political therefore, but not necessarily more accessible. Meijen, as well as several other contemporary poets, uses the technique of stream of consciousness that shows a fragmented train of thought, perhaps fragmented by the fast-paced information world. Form still adds a dimension to contemporary poems.

The question that Instapoetry thus raises is whether contemporary poetry is not too inaccessible. Where is the balance between the art of the implicit and accessibility?

1. Niels Penke, ‘#instapoetry, Populäre Lyrik auf Instagram und ihre Affordanzen‘ *Z Literaturwiss Linguistik* (2019) 49: 461. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)