

“Challenges of giving characters voice in localised, colloquial English”

An Interview with Lisa de Nikolits

Interview conducted by Borka Richter

Kodolányi János University

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BR. So for those of you who don't know me I'm Borka Richter, one of the lecturers here at the Department of English at Kodolányi János University, and I'm going to be interviewing novelist Lisa de Nikolits today. Lisa is originally from South Africa, and she has also lived in Australia and Canada, and Britain. She writes in Canada, where she's now living in Toronto. All LitUp, a literary book channel, has hailed her as the Queen of Canadian speculative fiction. She has ten published novels – and has won several awards with them. The eleventh novel is due to come out this year in October. Her novels all incorporate some kind of crime theme; however, they all have a strong sociological message as their base. Her stories, short fiction and poetry have been published in various international anthologies and journals, and she was recently featured as a crime writer in the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's short documentary “*The Mesdames of Mayhem*”. Lisa is going to talk about some of her works and read excerpts from two of them. Many of you here in the audience are studying for a BA in English and Lisa has a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature and Philosophy. In our session today, she is going to talk about two short stories, which will shortly be published, so they're not available yet. They, too, are in the crime genre. So welcome, Lisa.

LdeN: Hello everybody, thank you very much for inviting me and may I say that my years as

a Bachelor of Arts student were among my happiest. I hope you will take the time to really enjoy this period in your life because the rest of it comes along and it is a lot of hard work. So, enjoying your Bachelor of Art days is very important. I loved it. I wanted to study philosophy for the rest of my life and lie under a tree. But the thing was, I actually had to get out there, to earn money and do things. It's very nice to meet everybody here today, albeit online. I was really hoping to come in person because that would have been fantastic, but you never know, perhaps it might happen one day.

BR: To start us off, I am going to list your books, in order of publication and ask you to say a few words about them.

The Hungry Mirror (2010); West of Wawa (2011); A Glittering Chaos (2013); The Witchdoctor's Bones (2014); Between The Cracks She Fell (2015); The Nearly Girl (2016); No Fury Like That (2017) (published in 2019 in Italian by Edizioni le Assassine as Una furia dell'altro mondo); Rotten Peaches (2018); (2019); The Occult Persuasion and The Anarchist's Solution (2019); The Rage Room (2020); Everything You Dream Is Real (forthcoming)

LdeN: Thank you. All my novels are very different, ranging from what is termed literary fiction to crime fiction to speculative fiction. The genre is shaped to fit the story and then the languages have to fit the story in the same way, which makes it a very interesting experience to write. Characterization and plot are extremely important to me, as well as a strong social message. For me, an idea comes to me of its own accord, completely out of my control, and then I'm the person who has to sit down and figure out how to turn that idea into a novel, which is really very interesting as a myriad things pop up along the way.

BR: You are joining us today from your home and we can see in the background that you have a very full and intriguing study. I take it that's where you write?

LdeN: Yes, it's a great creative space! Everything has a meaning or is a memento of something. For example, there is this doll, who is a great example of one of my treasures who has found her way into a book. I came across her on a trip in Namibia where I had the idea to write "*The Witchdoctor's Bones*". I looked at this little doll and I thought, *she needs to be in the story*. Everything that you see in my study will be or has been in one of my books, so they all have a meaning.

BR: That makes sense. But moving further back: when did you first know you wanted to become an author?

LdeN: I knew I was going to be an author from a very early age. I always loved reading, but I always knew that I wouldn't be only a reader, but a writer. When we used to go on family trips in the car, I would sit and think about names that I would write under. Because I thought Lisa de Nikolits was too difficult for people to say. However, I stuck with Lisa de Nikolits because I love it. A lot of people can't pronounce it, and whenever I go to book readings, invariably they say, "Lisa de Nicolai Tees". And I have to explain that there is no "tees". It's not that complicated a name! When I was eight years old, I didn't realize that coming up with names for yourself wasn't going to turn you into a writer. There's a whole lot of other stuff that has to go into it. And it's a lot harder than that.

BR: Your studies were part of the process I expect. You were still in South Africa at that point, right?

LdeN: Yes, That was in South Africa and I remember very clearly having a lot of naps on the green lawn in the front of the main library. I am quite a daydreamer. I'm not much good at following rules to be honest. If I went back in time, I would apply myself more diligently, shall we say, and I would be less casual in my approach to my studies because it was a great opportunity and I didn't take full advantage of it.

BR: I hope my students in the audience take on the part about being diligent and focussed!

LdeN: What I'm trying to say to them is that now is the time to learn. There are so many things that I had to learn the hard way by myself because I was sleeping on the library lawns. So don't sleep on the library lawns! Work hard at university and life will be much easier for you down the line if you want to be a writer.

BR: The idea of becoming a writer was already there by that time. When did you first get some feedback about that idea?

LdeN: Did I talk to anybody about it? Yes, and I attended workshops. Many of my English

lecturers said I was very talented, but that was very damaging because then I thought, *well there you go then, I'm a writer, I have nothing to learn*. Not so!

To illustrate this point, I'm going to mention a little book that I wrote. It's called "*Single Girls Go Mad Sooner*". This book is not available anywhere in the world. Thank heavens – because it is terrible. This was me when I thought I was a writer but all it was, was me gathering experiences and thinking that I was an interesting person.

I think that probably the first thing I had to realize when it came to writing was that I am not interesting! People always say "write what you know" but that's not the same as saying write about yourself. I don't want to break anybody's heart, but diaries are not interesting. Journals are not interesting. Stream of consciousness about the things you've observed in a day are not interesting to other readers. What is interesting is if you can take a snippet of something that you saw, and then you weave it into a fictional tale, and it becomes interesting.

"*West of Wawa*" was one of my first really successful books. The first draft was based on me and I sent it to a publisher and the thing came back saying the character is banal; she showed no character development and it wasn't an interesting story. On the one level, I was quite depressed because I thought I was fascinating, but more importantly, I realized I wasn't going to get a book published this way, and that's when I asked myself, what makes for a successful book?

That's when I went off and decided to study the craft of novel writing, which is very different to studying English literature or appreciation of English literature. There are a lot of technicalities. The plot point arcs that you need to hit, things like that. There are all sorts of lessons you need to learn about characterization and dialogue, and I didn't even know that dialogue was a thing. I gave a short story to a critic and he said, "Well, it's got lots of great ideas but where's the dialogue?" Which made me realise that I hadn't even thought about dialogue. From all my studies I hadn't even internalized that I needed to write dialogue. The learning curve has been extreme. I've embraced it because I also realized exactly what it was that I didn't know and that was important.

BR: By this time you had made it to Canada and "*West of Wawa*" is set in Canada.

LdeN: I based it on a cross-Canada bus trip that I took. I decided to go to from the one end of Canada to the other, on a bus. People couldn't understand why I wanted to get on a bus. I don't like the trains and now my book is quite historical because the buses are all gone and I don't know if anybody will ever be able to take that trip again.

I did the trip and I wrote the whole way. I mapped it out and had it all set out and then, as I say, I wrote the book about me and my travels, and had to throw all of it out the window. There was that moment of devastation because when someone rejects your work, you have a terrible fear that you have nothing else. You think, *I'm not a writer and I never will be*. Then I thought, *Just try and imagine somebody else. Try to imagine anybody else who might have been on the bus*. That's when I discovered one of my greatest pleasures in life, which is imagining characters and friends. They become my imaginary friends and I get to hang out with people that are just fascinating. I don't want to sound mystical, but if you kind of open your mind and shove yourself out the way, and then ask yourself, *Who is this character that would be on a bus, what would she be thinking and feeling?*, the whole thing changes. She starts behaving in certain ways which lead her to meet other people. After "*West of Wawa*" I was never afraid of making up characters. In fact, I have too many people in my head.

BR: I have noticed that in conversation you often refer to them as if they were real, with their own independent existence. Thinking about the books that I have read, I have to say some of your people are weird.

LdeN: Very!

BR: And some of them, perhaps because of the crimes they commit, are really not nice.

LdeN: Definitely not nice! We all go about our days and for the most part things are so ordinary, but if you take the train home and you sit there and imagine what that person might be thinking, sitting across from you - maybe they've got somebody locked up in their cellar for example. Why would they have somebody locked up in their cellar? The possibilities are endless, and it makes life very, very entertaining.

BR: I'll try that the next time I'm on the train. Coming back to Toronto, where is the study you are sitting in? My internal image of Toronto is downtown and suburbia.

LdeN: My location is very different, in an eclectic neighbourhood known as The Beaches. In fact I never wanted to live that far east of downtown, on the shores of Lake Ontario. But then my husband and I were looking for houses and I fell in love with this one. We've been here for 15 years, and it is an idyllic place because it's 9 minutes down to the lake, which I always

want to call the sea because it is so big. It's icy cold. You can't paddle in it. It's ridiculously cold, but The Beaches is very pretty, and it has a huge writing community. Someone once said you can't turn over a rock without finding a writer underneath it. The writing community is the real reason why I stayed in Canada. I had come on a complete whim. I was at one of those points in my life where I wasn't sure what to do with myself, I was 35. I came to Canada and then I discovered the rich writing community.

I'd written my whole life. In South Africa I had posted off these massive manuscripts all around the world, to no avail, of course. Understandably, they didn't succeed because they were poor. It was very bad writing. Then I went to live in Australia and I felt I couldn't be a writer there because they were very Australian-centric and very closed. Then I came to Canada and Canada is genuinely diverse. There are so many communities and I realized I might be able to fulfil my dream of becoming a writer. That is the main reason I've stayed, and now I've been here 22 years.

BR: One of your communities is related to writing about murder and crime.

LdeN: Oh, my fabulous community. We're called the Mesdames of Mayhem and we're a collection of ladies of various ages who have been together for seven or eight years. In fact, we have our fifth anthology coming out very shortly, "*In the Spirit of Thirteen*"¹. My story there, "In the Land of Fear and Denial", is one of the short stories that I'm going to read from today. The CBC, which is the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, did a documentary which you can find it on YouTube if you are interested. It's called the "Mesdames of Mayhem, Women Who Love Crime". From that you could see that we are a bunch of little old ladies, but we have these devious minds. It brings me great joy to publish with them and work with them; to be a part of the collective. They are very helpful, because, for example, one of the stories I'm going to read to you I sent to one of the Mesdames and she came back with good feedback. Sometimes you write to a brief, and sometimes you just have a flight of fantasy, and these are very different. The Mesdames of Mayhem have a mandate, a theme and they like what are known as 'cozy mysteries'. There may be a sort of substrata of darkness and death that runs below it, but they like it couched in a happy, casual kind of way. This changes when I'm writing a South African story. I can write with a darker tone right from the outset because South Africans are less offended by in-your-face bluntness. Canadians don't like it if you are too direct with language

¹ *In the Spirit of Thirteen* has since been released by Carrick Publishing

or direct with plot, or character. They don't like characters. It's a matter of listening to what the brief is. For example, I publish with a very feminist press, Inanna Publications, and happily our philosophies about social justice and the message we want to put out into the world align wonderfully well. You have to find your community and you have to find your publisher who is aligned with your vision of what you're trying to say.

BR: You have mentioned novels set in South Africa and in Canada. There is one book where you have both: "*Rotten Peaches*".

LdeN: Yes, "*Rotten Peaches*". And I could say "*Rotten Peaches*" is one of my favourite novels - although they are all my favourites. After all, they are, you know, the closest thing I have to children and this one was so interesting because of the characters. There were two women protagonists, the one was set in Canada and the other one was set in South Africa, and so to write from those different perspectives was truly fascinating, because I had to change completely. The personality of each of them was very, very, very different. And, of course, the language was very different. I had a run in with an editor fairly recently with one of my South African stories because his thinking was that if people don't understand immediately what the story is saying, then, you have to change it, rewrite it so every reader can understand it immediately. And I said to him, "I'm sorry, but I think that's absolutely ridiculous because I read books and if I don't understand a thing it makes me go and look up what it means." I'm willing to explore a story and accept that I won't understand what everything means and for me, that's okay. I don't think people should be treated like children. Books are there to be read and to challenge you and to take you into different worlds. And that's what I try and do. I try and transport you into different worlds.

BR: Okay, let's move back to the present. What are you going to read to us?

LdeN: An excerpt from the short story "Somewhere near Sudbury". Sudbury is a place nobody wants to go to, but invariably everybody ends up there and that's why I used it. Everybody in Canada knows it and it's like "Who wants to go to Sudbury?" Anyway, I'm pretty fond of Sudbury. I'm going to read to a passage from "Somewhere Near Sudbury" and, just to contextualize, we have a suburban mum. It's very important that I establish that right at the start.
Excerpt:

Somewhere Near Sudbury²

Peace at last! I shut the front door and waved to my kids through the glass. They climbed on the yellow school bus without a backward glance, and I turned away with a sigh of relief. I loved the little munchkins more than life itself but that didn't mean I wasn't down for some solo time.

This was my favourite moment of the day. Sunshine poured through the bay window and my domain was my own except for Snoodles, our French poodle, and Popsicle, our ginger cat. Popsicle was nowhere to be seen and Snoodles was napping in her basket, worn out from barking during breakfast and begging for scraps. I really needed to get that dog some training but, what with Kayley's hockey and Ian's trumpet-playing, who had time for anything?

I started by cleaning the kitchen. I tuned into Sirius XM, Classic Rock, and danced and sang tunelessly at the top of my lungs while I cleaned.

I was humming along happily to "If You Could Read My Mind" with my yellow rubber gloves immersed in hot soapy water when Snoodles woke up and had a barking fit. I swung around and from the kitchen window, I saw a police car parked at the end of our driveway. Oh, my word! A police car!

I dived onto the floor and hid behind the kitchen island. Snoodles was going crazy but I could make out the "Für Elise" doorbell, although my heart was pounding so hard in my ears that it sounded like a fire alarm.

I crept around the kitchen island on my hands and knees. Snoodles licked my face but didn't pause in her yapping. "Sssh!" I hissed at her. "Be quiet." She wagged her tail and barked louder. I inched my way across the floor and peeked into the hallway. Two police officers were at the door. I knew exactly why they were there. I'd been dreading this day for the past fifteen years.

BR: Well, the story has just begun and your character is under the table terrified out of her mind because the police arrived. How do we know this is happening in Canada?

LdeN: Many things. The yellow bus. Referring to the children as munchkins. The dog, a very trendy breed. Kayley's hockey, which is ice hockey. Being a hockey mom is very big in Canada. The music channel. The song "If you read my mind" was written by Gordon Lightfoot, an iconic Canadian singer, so I worked him in. I peppered the story with Canadianisms throughout. They make sense anywhere, but if you are reading it in Canada, you know that it is in Canada. Sometimes these are more clearly local, for example, TimBit cereal, which I mention a couple of lines later. If you are familiar with Canada, that brings a whole series of associations, but if you are not, cereal makes sense and is prototypically North American.

² In *Cold Canadian Crime* (Crime Writers of Canada)

BR: And then, there is the other story we want to look at. “*In a Land of Fear and Denial*”, is that right? After carefree suburbia in Canada that jolts into fear, we are going to Johannesburg. In this story you also establish fear at the beginning but in a different way.

LdeN: You will immediately recognise that South Africa is so different and the 1980s there seem a lifetime away. These are different worlds. For this anthology, they wanted us to write about spirits, of any kind. The mandate was very broad. The apartheid world had been weighing on my mind, and I had been wanting to write about that. It is something that to my mind, should not just be forgotten because such it was a terrible, terrible time. And so, if we don't write about things, don't remind people of past injustices, then they forget. My short story is set in the 1980's, from the perspective of a 12-year-old girl called Tracey. I wanted to write this story to try and not just sweep something under the rug, but to show the world that as it was.

Excerpt:

Johannesburg, South Africa, 1980s³

What are you most afraid of?

I stared out the window, chewing on my Bic pen. The plastic orange end was splintered, and I nibbled on the frayed spikes, knowing I'd be in trouble if Mom saw me.

“Ruining your teeth,” she'd say. “There's no money to fix them, either. Come on, Tracey girl, you know better than that.” She was right, I did.

I stared at the see-through piggy bank that Dad had got me, wondering if I should raid it for a soft-serve ice cream from the shop up the street. I could see the coins piled up behind the blue Standard Bank logo. I was annoyed that I'd have to break it to get the money, because that would make Dad mad, which was never a good idea. Dad only got the piggy bank because he was friends with the bank manager—which was how he managed to pay my school fees at the convent for a little while longer.

“Every term I can keep you in private school is a good step in your education,” he'd say, without fail, every time a payment was due.

“Ja, well, God knows why you're so hung up on that stupid school,” Doryce retorted with equal consistency.

Dorrie is my big sister. She's 14, and got expelled from the convent school. Man, was Dad ever angry about that.

³ In: *In The Spirit of Thirteen* (Carrick Publishing)

LdeN: I'm just going to jump forward a bit to introduce the scary element that Tracy is afraid of.

Excerpt:

Mom and Dad had given my bedroom to Auntie Sue. I'd liked sharing with Dorrie until very recently. I knew she hadn't been excited to have me bunk with her, but she'd mostly been okay about it. It's funny how she was happy to help me out with the cheese, but not with the thing that I was most afraid of. When I tried to talk to her about that thing, she shut me down.

"I want to put my bed on bricks like Anna does," I had told her while she brushed her long red hair at her dressing table.

My sister had magnificent hair. Mine was like pale fine straw. Mom kept it short—a pudding bowl cut, she called it—so I could manage it, but no matter what I did, it stuck up in all directions. "Anna says that keeps the tokoloshes away."

Dorrie had laughed at me. "Trace, you've got a mattress on the floor! No way can you put it on bricks! Anyway, I love Anna too, but I won't let crazy superstitions rule my life. Tokoloshes don't exist. Trust me, they're just African folklore, like we've got poltergeists." "Tokoloshes do exist", I'd told her, "And one of them lives in our cupboard."

BR: So we have a 12-year-old girl who thinks there's a tokoloshe in her cupboard. I think we do need to discuss what a tokoloshe is. Do we know what they look like?

LdeN: That's the great thing about evil spirits, they look very unique to each person! It is our fear that drives our imagination.

BR: In South Africa, a lot of people are afraid of tokoloshes and have some conception of what they are like. Why does Tracey want to put her bed on bricks?

LdeN: Because the tokoloshe can't reach if you're sleeping on an elevated bed.

BR: I can see the audience is laughing. But I was a little girl in South Africa, I knew there were tokoloshes, and I really was scared of them. I slept on a high bed. It wasn't on bricks, but it was high. It's a sort of unnamed dread of things that can get you in the night.

LdeN: Dread, yes, it's an unnamed dread. More specifically, it is an evil spirit or demon who

enters through your orifices while you are sleeping and possesses you. I covered them as well in *“The Witchdoctor’s Bones”*. When I was doing research for that novel, I came across a lot of horrific things which might explain why I have all my protective angels and saints in my study. There’s a lot of African folklore that is terrifying. Tokoloshes possess you and the point is, these are not things of the past, they are still being considered evil entities today. *“The Witchdoctor’s Bones”* is about muti murders, black magic where you use body parts to cast spells to vanquish an enemy. The very sobering fact, which breaks my heart and makes me want to write a sequel, is that there are a lot of children missing and they may have been murdered for muti. Muti medicine is not a light topic. There’s a lot of darkness in the world and I think that’s why I choose to write darkness because I see it and maybe I see too much of it. It’s like I have a radar for the really bad stuff that goes on, a radar for people whose hearts have been broken, and people whose lives are not going well, and I empathize with them in a way that may not be good for me. The boundaries between me and those who are suffering get blurred because I feel so much for them. But then I write them into my books and then I hope that in some way I’m paying homage to them, recognising their pain. This is true even for *“Rotten Peaches”*. In apartheid South Africa, it was common to have housekeepers, though they weren’t called housekeepers at the time. They were called maids or servants, and they lived in the back rooms. We had a fantastic housekeeper, who was one of the most special people in my life. Her name was Betty and such was the situation that I never even knew what Betty’s last name was; that’s how it was back then. When I wrote the book, I dedicated it to Betty. I think that as a writer, one of the most important things that one can do is try and address injustices, to try and bring them to the fore. Things that people might not have known about. You try and apologize to people that you might have hurt in your life. Of course, the other side of it is that if somebody or something really annoys you, then you can just write about it, transform your anger and put it into a book.

BR: That gives us an insight into how the writing process works for you. Another thing that interests me about this is how a story changes even after it is written. The tokoloshe story is only coming out later this year, so I read the preprint. Today I noticed that you have changed a couple of words. Do you edit and modify your work even after you have ‘completed’ it?

LdeN: Indeed, I do. I totally change things and if I were to read it again, I’d probably change something else. I think it was Charles Dickens who rushed into the printing house to change

things as it was on the press! Some writers are notorious, and I rewrite books constantly.

BR: The excerpts today were from stories in the crime genre and you could highlight the Canadian and South African elements in them. In the introduction you mentioned that you have now gone into writing speculative literature. As a reader of your books, I have to admit that I found "*No Fury Like That*" viciously funny. You seem to have found a vein of nasty humour that resonates with readers. So this new speculative direction brings with it a shift in style and perspective. I will be interested to see if this is true for the book I am about to read, "*The Rage Room*". Can we look at these novels briefly?

LdeN: Well, the reason I wrote "*No Fury Like That*" was that I got let go from my job that I'd been in for many years and I was angry, very angry: I missed all my friends and I myself felt like I was in a state of purgatory because I was locked out of the building that I'd gone to for well-nigh eight or nine years. and consequently, the book itself is set in purgatory. It my first work of magical realism and speculative fiction, and I was rather hesitant to write it because all of my previous books had been rooted in real time, with real characters, and real events. In this one, I had this this purgatorial situation where you have a woman who might have died, might not have died; who is in between worlds and dealing with a lot of things. I thought nobody is going to read this book and to my amazement people really loved it. To my further amazement, people love the protagonist, Julia. I had thought that she was consumed with fury and that people would find her to be quite off-putting. I wish I could control more the characters that come up. However, the characters that emerge seem to exist in an alternate dimension, and I bring them into this. These books and people are out there, and then they - much like the tokoloshe - permeate my head and take over my brain and then I end up writing the book that wants to be written. After "*No Fury Like That*". I had an idea for a book called "*The Rage Room*" and the reason was that I felt we live in a world of social media, where we should all be friends with each other and getting on and there should be positivity. Instead, there is so much negativity – people love to write negative comments and there's so much hatred and so much anger. Increasingly technology is taking over things. We're becoming addicted to staring at our phones wherever we go. I'm not criticizing people; I do the same thing. So, I wanted to find out what would really happen if that process just unfolded. I had this character, Sharps, and in a nutshell, he kills his family, but then he regrets his actions and he decides to time travel. I never wanted to write time travel. Time travel is the hardest thing I have ever written because there

are very strict scientific constraints on what you're allowed to do and what you're not allowed to do. *"The Rage Room"* was one of the most challenging books to write because of the back-and-forth between times and realities. I loved writing it. What was fabulous was that I got to create the world as a completely different world, a world that is comprised of plastic, where we control the weather. I do think it's quite funny. Somebody said, "a pulse-pounding thriller, set in a troubled future that might just be ours, mind-bending and yet all too believable". That comment was written by Terry Fallis, who has won awards for comedy in Canada. Sometimes people like the comedy in my work and sometimes they get turned off by it. Sometimes I say to them, "Well, try it when you're in a different mood".

BR: We are coming to the end of our time, Lisa, but if you could say a sentence or two about the book that I haven't seen before, the sunshine looking one.

LdeN: This one is *"Everything You Dream is Real"* (it will be really real on October 17th, www.inanna.ca) and it is a sequel to *"The Rage Room"* but can be read as a standalone. It's set in 2062. There was the dystopia, the apocalyptic meltdown at the end of *"The Rage Room"* but I myself was curious. What is the future mankind could create if they started from scratch? And I wanted to allow a happy story. I also wanted a multi-generational love story. Everybody can fall in love, with no matter what age you are. If the world were starting anew, what could happen? I cannot believe that we are limited to this corporeal world, yet writing sci-fi and fantasy is, to me, an exploration of other possible worlds. I truly believe that everything I dream could indeed be real, and all my imaginings find their way into my books, which does make them real in this world. I admit that it's a very strange book. One of Canada's top writers, Lynn Crosbie, gave it an endorsement. She said it was, "Witty, elegant, dorky and weird. A fantastically riveting book loaded with strange delights, scary caprices, and an infinity of comic twists and turns." But I must add a caveat: dark twists and turns.

BR: OK, so in other words it is a sunshiny book, but there's going to be some blood and guts in there as well.

LdeN: Not so much blood and guts as the extremely unexpected, strange stuff. So strange that I surprised myself. It was quite fascinating to write!

BR: Then that is something to look forward to. We have come to the end of our time and before we thank you for being with us today. I'd like to say that we got a lot of insight into what it's like to be a writer and into how to create characters with quite specific identities. And as to writing, what you say is that it's not that easy to be a writer, but you must keep on trying. What is the secret?

LdeN: You do need talent; you do need luck - luck is an uncontrollable factor – and you do need to work hard. Of these, the hardest is hard work. You must commit to it, and it is a long-term commitment. As a writer you must have a very thick skin, because sometimes people will like your work and sometimes, they won't. Also, the industry itself is changing and so the way it used to work even two years ago, before COVID, is very different in terms of how your books will be reviewed. This means you must be extremely flexible. It's like being in a circus, I think, a crazy, intellectual world circus.

BR: We look forward to your new books and would like to thank you very much for being with us today.

LdeN: Thank you so much for having me today.

Originally from South Africa, **Lisa de Nikolits** is a multiple Independent Publisher Book Award winner and the author of ten published novels. She has a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and Philosophy and has also lived in the U.S.A., Australia and Britain. Since 2000, she has lived in Canada. She has appeared on recommended reading lists for both Open Book Toronto and the 49th Shelf, as well as being chosen as a Chatelaine Editor's Pick and a Canadian Living Magazine Must Read. Her latest novel, *The Rage Room*, was a finalist in the International Book Awards, while *The Occult Persuasion* and *The Anarchist's Solution*, was longlisted for a Sunburst Award for Excellence in Canadian Literature of The Fantastic. Other works include *The Hungry Mirror*, *West of Wawa*, *A Glittering Chaos*, *Witchdoctor's Bones*; *Between The Cracks She Fell*, *The Nearly Girl*, *No Fury Like That* (published in Italian, under the title *Una furia dell'altro mondo*, in 2019), *Rotten Peaches*, *The Occult Persuasion* and *The Anarchist's Solution* and *The Rage Room*. *Everything You Dream Is Real* is coming out on 18th October. Her website: <https://www.lisawriter.com/>

Borka Richter is currently full college professor at the Department of English Language and Literature at Kodolányi János University, Budapest, Hungary, where she has been teaching since 2002. Her two BA Honours degrees (English and Political Science) are from what is now the University of Johannesburg. She subsequently did a Diploma in Translation through UNISA, followed by an MA and Ph.D in Applied Linguistics (University of Pécs). Her research interests stem from her personal interest in bilingualism, both societal and individual, and the global spread of English in its various forms. Translation theory and training form a second

area of academic interest. As for her teaching focus, the need for BA students of English to do well on the job market supports the need for teaching business skills to these students and she has been involved in developing and delivering KJE's business-related module of subjects (Presentations Skills, HR, Intercultural Communication and Business English).
borka.richter@kodolanyi.hu

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