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Voor 't gewone leven ongeschikt. Een biografie van Clare Lennart
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Summary

This dissertation, *Voor 't gewone leven ongeschikt. A biography of Clare Lennart*, is a literary and historical biography of author Clare Lennart. Lennart was the pen name used by Clara Helena van den Boogaard-Klaver (1889-1972). Her work contains many elements which can be linked to events in her life and which are, in some cases, recognisably autobiographical. Elements from Clare's youth are regularly featured in her work. An extensive overview of the life of this 'forgotten author' is the basis for this biography.

Biography

Clara Klaver received a liberal upbringing in an artistic family in the rurally located Oldenbroek. Her father, the painter Luite Klaver, ran a nursery called De Ekelenburg, a country estate. Clara, her sister Eveline (1901-1988) and her brother Dick (1904-1978) loved playing in the extensive gardens. It is at this time that she developed a passion for the outdoors, flowers and animals. She read a lot and grew into an intelligent, critical and reserved young lady with a lively imagination. Her parents' marriage was an unhappy one and Clara's anxiety became more pronounced due to the family's (financial) issues. The nursery went bankrupt by the time Clara was ten. Clara experienced the loss of the 'green garden' as a catastrophe. The family moved to a smaller house in Epe, where Clara attended the village school and the so-called French School, which was a *mulo*. [More advanced primary education].

Clara moved in with her aunt Saar Doyer in Deventer in August 1913. This is where she prepared herself to take the entrance exam for the *Rijkskweekschool* [teacher training] for girls in Apeldoorn. Clara passed the exam in April 1914 and was admitted to the prestigious school. She endured four years of homesickness and troubles with the 'matron' of the small boarding school she lived in. Clara's much admired and beloved mother, Da Doyer, passed away from tuberculosis in December 1915.

Clara, who was shy and obstinate, had trouble fitting in with the demanding sorority mentality, prevalent at the *Rijkskweekschool*. However, she had no issues with the subject matter. She received her diploma in the spring of 1918. She worked as a teacher in small villages in Drenthe and Overijssel until 1926. During this time she also earned certificates to teach French and English. She accepted a job in Utrecht in the summer of 1926.

Clara met her lover Wim van den Boogaard, a calm, uncomplicated, working class soldier, in her first year in Utrecht. However, Wim was already married and had seven children. Their affair was met with opposition from Clara's employer, the Utrecht City Council. Clara broke with tradition and chose Wim. She quit working as a teacher in 1927. Clara opened a boarding house because her lover was unable to get a divorce or take care of her financially. She started writing in 1931 to earn money to supplement

her low rental income. In the evenings she wrote stories about her time as a teacher and wrote two children's books. Her childhood memories were also a huge source of inspiration. The publication of the novella called '*Liefde en logica*' [Love and Logic] in *Groot Nederland* in 1932 gave Clara's career as a writer a literary twist. *Groot Nederland* editor and critic Frans Coenen helped Clara get her stories published and stimulated her to write novels. The prepublication of her first novel *Mallemolen* [Merry-go-round], in 1934, was under a pen name as Clara used her paying guests as a recognisable source of inspiration. She used the name Clare Lennart to publish a series of six novels in quick succession, a book for girls and a fairy tale for adults. Looking back at the beginning of her literary career she wrote: '*I still ask myself if I ever would have done something other than think stories if I hadn't needed the money so desperately at the time.*'

Clara started a passionate affair with Frans Coenen in the summer of 1932. Their regular correspondence shows that Clara was strongly influenced by Coenen both emotionally and in her writing. She looked after Coenen when he became ill in the spring of 1936 and continued to do so until his death in June 1936. She also had a short and fiery affair with Alexander Voormolen, a flamboyant composer, in the autumn of 1936. Clara's relationship with Wim van den Boogaard, who continued to play an important role in her life during her affair with Coenen, continued in 1938. She followed Wim to Rotterdam during the mobilisation. She barely survived the bombing of Rotterdam in 1940 and opened another boarding house at the Zuilenstraat 10bis following her return to Utrecht. Clara took in Jewish adults and children there on behalf of the *Utrechts Kindercomité* (Utrecht Children's Committee) during the war. She prepared several translations during the war, but didn't publish anything as she was not a member of the Kultuurkamer. She continued to generate income as a translator after 1945 and translated works by the likes of Truman Capote, Pearl S. Buck, Colette and Anne Philipe.

Wim's wife died in 1944. He moved in with Clara and they got married in 1947. The practical support provided by her husband resulted in Clare Lennart flourishing in the 1950s. She received national acclaim for the autobiographic novella called *Twee negerpopjes* [Two negro dolls], the *Boekenweekgeschenk* in 1949. The novel titled *Serenade uit de verte* [A serenade from afar], published in 1951 by literary publishers A.A.M. Stols received critical acclaim. *Stad met rose huizen* [The City with Pink Houses] (1954) and *De ogen van Roosje* [Roosje's Eyes] (1957) cemented her status as a literary writer with deep psychological insight. Poet J.C. Bloem compared her to Katherine Mansfield. Her work often focussed on the relationship between reality and the imagination. Her readings, radio appearances and articles constantly proved that she was able to draw on a wealth of experiences of the 'pastoral' which was part of her youth.

Clare Lennart was able to live off her writing and stopped letting rooms in 1954. She was working as a journalist for *Het Parool* and as a critic for *Elseviers Weekblad*. Her short stories were featured in a variety of publications, both literary magazines and family ones.

She also wrote non-fiction books to order. Her confidence grew and she became less shy. Her position in the Dutch literary scene grew as she became a member of the *Vereniging van Letterkundigen* [The Dutch Men of Letter's Association], PEN international and *Zeister Literaire Kring* [the Zeist Literary Circle]. She was an active member of the *Tollensfonds* and the *Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde* [Association for Dutch Writers] and acted as a literary judge. She maintained a professional, and sometimes friendly, relationship with authors like Harriët Freezer, Ton van Oudwijk, Ina Boudier-Bakker and Wim Hora Adema. She was very fond of Utrecht and she successfully participated in preventing the filling in of the characteristic canals.

Clare Lennart struggled to combine housework and writing following the death of her husband in February 1960. She only wrote one novel, *Twintig ramen aan de straat* [Twenty windows facing the street] during the next decade. She found comfort in her beloved cats and in writing her fortnightly column '*Van tijd tot tijd*' [From time to time] for the *Utrechts Nieuwsblad*. Clare Lennart was reborn during the final years of her life. Her book of nostalgic family memories *Weleer* [Before] (1971) was a success. She also took pleasure in writing children's books and playful poems about cats. Just before her unexpected death, in December 1972, Lennart was working on a collection of literary stories about cats with her friend Dolf Verroen. Her sister, Eveline Klaver, finished the uncompleted sequel to *Weleer*.

Structure and themes

Voor 't gewone leven ongeschikt is a *critical and interpretive biography*. In addition to the factual life of the writer, I also provide my vision of Clare Lennart's position in her time and deal with the facets which made her unique. Most chapters more or less chronologically follow Clara Klaver's life. The turning point in her life, the change from Clara Klaver to Clare Lennart, is dealt with in chapter 7. The context of Clare Lennart's authorship and her position as an author of (children's) books is dealt with in the more thematic chapters (7, 12, 14 and 16).

A large part of my research focussed on the question of how Clare Lennart gained an economic position as a woman of letters. I compare her position with other (female) authors. I will show that Clare Lennart was a representative of the sociological type of 'women authors' who had to write for their daily bread. She would never have published her stories without financial motivation. Her personal quirks, especially her choice of a much less developed life partner who looked after her like a 'house man' avant la lettre, were leading factors in the life path she chose to follow. Her path was certainly an unusual one for her time and a revolutionary one for a woman. Clare Lennart, however, did not seem to be aware of this.

This biography also demonstrates the way in which Clare Lennart's mentor Frans Coenen, who is seen as a 'mediocre' member of the canon, played an important role in the

production of literature by women between 1914 and 1936. He acted a 'literary jack-of-all-trades' and used various literary strategies to ensure that female authors got published. In turn, Clare Lennart invested in helping her colleagues publish in the fifties and sixties.

A second research question will focus on the concepts of posture and self-fashioning. I will demonstrate that Clare Lennart was aware of her image as a 'poetic nature lover' and how she openly presented herself as a hack writer. She was business-like and self-assured in her contact with publishers. I will also discuss how Clare Lennart connected with her audience both publicly and in her work. She had a loyal group of readers who appreciated her work for its view of the world and the returning theme of the 'pastoral'. Clare Lennart's poetic and descriptive style nowadays seems more dated than the more sober language used by contemporary authors, like Anna Blaman or Harry Mulisch. Nevertheless, she had a large audience between 1945 and 1972. Her critical reception was nearly always positive and her post-war novels were in wide circulation. Clare Lennart publicised her positive vision of life and this resulted in it being a part of the debate about 'hopeful literature' versus the bleak realism of young writers in the fifties. Clare Lennart's work has its own, instantly recognisable, voice; one which was quickly silenced after her death. Her critical and popular success did not result in standing and her work can now, retrospectively, be viewed as 'middlebrow'. I discuss the contemporary reception of Clare Lennart's work in detail in the chronological chapters. The epilogue will focus on the reasons why Clare Lennart's work is omitted from the Dutch canon.