



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

“Making flowers”: the first English translation of a short story by Dutch modernist Carry van Bruggen

Clemens, R.A.

Citation

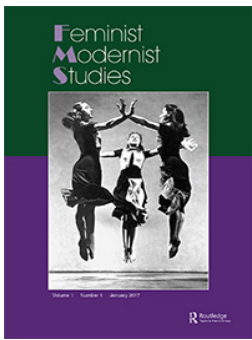
Clemens, R. A. (2018). “Making flowers”: the first English translation of a short story by Dutch modernist Carry van Bruggen. *Feminist Modernist Studies*, 1(3), 336-347.
doi:10.1080/24692921.2018.1504860

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3448291>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



“Making flowers”: the first English translation of a short story by Dutch modernist Carry van Bruggen

Ruth Alison Clemens

To cite this article: Ruth Alison Clemens (2018): “Making flowers”: the first English translation of a short story by Dutch modernist Carry van Bruggen, *Feminist Modernist Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/24692921.2018.1504860](https://doi.org/10.1080/24692921.2018.1504860)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/24692921.2018.1504860>



Published online: 10 Aug 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



“Making flowers”: the first English translation of a short story by Dutch modernist Carry van Bruggen

Ruth Alison Clemens  a,b

^aDepartment of English and Creative Writing, Leeds Trinity University, Leeds, UK; ^bInstitute for Cultural Inquiry, Utrecht University, Utrecht, Netherlands

Hoezeer “objectiviteit” een pretentie en een fictie is hopen we aan te toonen.

In 1919, the Dutch writer Carry Van Bruggen (1881–1932) published *Prometheus*, a philosophical essay in which she declared, “We hope to demonstrate how much of a pretence and a fiction ‘objectivity’ is.”¹ *Prometheus* proposed a philosophy of life that lauded the process of social “oneness” or unity through the acceptance of difference and individuality, rather than the authoritarian social uniformity of fixed identities. Van Bruggen, who was born to an Orthodox Jewish family in the Dutch town of Smilde, developed her philosophy of oneness over the course of an important but long-obscured intellectual and artistic career. After her first novel *De verlatene* (*The Abandoned*) appeared in 1910, she wrote prolifically for the next 17 years, publishing nine more works of fiction and non-fiction. Her last novel, *Eva* (1927),² is considered her finest and in 2002 earned her a place in the Canon van de Nederlandse letterkunde [Canon of Dutch Literature].³ Aspects of Van Bruggen’s feminist thought and aesthetics resemble Virginia Woolf’s, including: her critique of dominant models of epistemology and subjectivity; a desire to write women into history and literature while evincing skepticism toward the women’s movement; an intimate focus on the intensities of female relationships and domestic life; and her fiction’s narrative flow determined by multiple shifting perspectives. None of her writing has yet been translated into English in its entirety. Here I discuss Van Bruggen’s modernist mode of experimental aesthetics before offering my translation of the 1921 short story “Making Flowers” [“Bloemen maken”], a piece whose formal and thematic concerns illustrate the author’s work as a writer, essayist, and thinker. Van Bruggen’s diverse contributions to European modernism merit her inclusion within the expanding feminist modernist canon.

Throughout her writings, Van Bruggen attempts to represent and reconfigure female subjectivity, her experiences of anti-Semitism in the Dutch community, and provincialism in relation to class structures and the social milieu. Her 1925 book *Hedendaags fetisjisme* [*Contemporary Fetishism*] sets forth a theory of sociolinguistics celebrating the rebel-figure who critiques accepted epistemologies as well as received societal conventions. *Hedendaags fetisjisme* rejects the singular humanist subject defined by positivistic concepts of “Free Will, Immortality, Objectivity and Causality,” which, she argues, are “four sides of the same Delusion, of the I-delusion” [“Vrije Wil, Onsterfelijkheid, Objectiviteit en Causaliteit [...] vertonen zich hier als vier zijden van dezelfde Waan, van de Ik-waan”].⁴

She defines this delusion as “the belief in a self-I, a personal, separate, independent existence” [“Het geloven in een eigen-Ik, een persoonlijk, afzonderlijk, onafhankelijk bestaan”].⁵ According to her critics, this is a philosophy in which “skepticism about collective ideologies leads the skeptic to regard all boundaries as relative. What matters is to learn to see unity in diversity.”⁶ For Van Bruggen, in language, as in lived experience, multiple subjectivities are united in the freethinking individual’s flows of desire, “the immanent desire to understand and discern” [“De immanente drang, om te begrijpen en te onderscheiden”].⁷ As such, Van Bruggen’s decentering of the objective “I” anticipates the development of philosophies concerned with feminist subjectivity, phenomenology, and epistemology. Although she was a vocal critic of feminism and the contemporary women’s movement,⁸ we find affinities between her multifaceted critique of objectivity and later twentieth-century writings such as Adrienne Rich’s “Politics of Location,”⁹ Donna Haraway’s “Situated Knowledges,”¹⁰ and Rosi Braidotti’s “feminist nomad” whose task is “to conjugate the multilayered, multicultural perspective, with responsibility for and accountability to their gender.”¹¹

The philosophical disposition of Van Bruggen’s literary fiction echoes the author’s feminist claims in *Prometheus* and *Hedendaags fetisjisme*. The representation of women and other minorities begins to break away from the tradition of social realism that dominated early twentieth-century Dutch literature in her early novels such as *De verlatene* [*The Abandoned*] (1910), *Heleen* (1913), and *Een coquette vrouw* [*A Coquette*] (1915). Van Bruggen’s literary technique became more experimental as her thinking developed and deployed boldly unconventional narrative strategies in works such as *Uit het leven van een denkende vrouw* [*From the Life of a Thinking Woman*] (1920), *Avontuurtjes* [*Adventures*] (1922), *Vier jaargetijden* [*Four Seasons*] (1924), as well as her collection of short stories *Het huisje aan de sloot* [*The Little House on the Canal*] (1921), from which the translation below is taken. Van Bruggen’s distinctively modernist aesthetic prompted the linguist Frida Balk-Smit Duyzenkunst to declare in 1980 that “Carry van Bruggen has in common with other great thinkers that she is able to reveal the familiar as something utterly new” [“Carry van Bruggen heeft met andere groot denkers gemeen dat zij het vertrouwde als iets geheel nieuws kan laten zien”].¹² The defamiliarizing work of her modernism – her ability to “make it new” – allows her to represent the interior and subjective lives of women who seek emancipation from received ideas and traditional roles.¹³ As Jane Fenoulhet writes in her study of twentieth-century Dutch women writers, which includes the most comprehensive English-language study of Van Bruggen, the author made a “gradual move away from the dominant literary tradition as she sought to portray the female subject and assert her subjectivity through experimenting with ways of giving literary expression to it.”¹⁴

The following short story, “Bloemen maken,” or “Making Flowers,” first appeared in the collection *Het huisje aan de sloot* [*The Little House on the Canal*], published in Amsterdam in 1921. While *Het huisje aan de sloot* has been published in a Hebrew translation, and a selection of Van Bruggen’s other works have been translated into Spanish and German, “Making Flowers” marks the first published English translation of her work. The book contains 24 episodic – and semi-autobiographical – accounts of a childhood spent in a rural Dutch community from the point of view of a little girl from a poor Orthodox Jewish family. Each episode stands alone; read together, however, they form a dreamlike but unified narrative whole. As Fenoulhet observes,

Van Bruggen abandons the traditional novel for a new kind of prose work which is both short story and novel – a series of scenes which together amount to a deep and substantial evocation of the life of a child for whom the adult world is still a mystery.¹⁵

Het huisje aan de sloot offers a vivid a snapshot of Dutch anti-Semitism and the tensions within this multi-faith society in the years preceding Nazi occupation, the Holocaust, and the destruction and loss of Dutch-Jewish communities.

“Making Flowers” begins by plunging the reader into the drifting thoughts of a young female protagonist:

How delicious forgetting is! Without forgetting there would be far fewer surprises –, through forgetting life is always new. When in the autumn the trees are pruned, revealing the dovecote on the crossroads and the single distant windmill, usually in mist, and the narrow path of the gleaming canal, as if emerging from behind a closed curtain then, every autumn, you notice anew that the whole summer you haven’t once thought of the dovecote, the windmill, or the canal then you also realise how, in the spring, when the foliage was slowly growing thicker around you, you planned to keep thinking of the dovecote, the windmill, and the canal, loyal through the summer.

The girl grapples with the nature of knowing, the beauty of forgetting, and the changing of the seasons. At times the narrative slides into her thoughts and reactions as she struggles to comprehend the action in the story, and at other points her reported speech is embedded within the free flow of the narrative. This drifting stream of consciousness narrative exemplifies Van Bruggen’s style throughout *Het huisje aan de sloot*, a technique that renders the domestic familiarities of everyday life with the vitalistic newness of a child’s perception. Van Bruggen’s drive to represent the energy and flows of everyday Life – what Woolf called the “myriad impressions” of an “ordinary day”¹⁶ – is intimately tied to the author’s feminist ethics of representation.

Van Bruggen consistently associated literary, linguistic, and epistemological objectivity with a fixed, homogenous, masculine humanist subject who authors and enforces constraining social systems. Against such fixity, she created individualistic characters who sacrifice identitarian self-preservation in order to comprehend and inhabit the world via immanent flows of understanding. In *Het huisje aan de sloot*, the narrator privileges childlike flows of intensity over the fixed or inflexible identities that Van Bruggen associates with adulthood. The little girl lies face down in the grass, her nose touching and smelling, but not disturbing, the first daisy of spring, so that she discerns “all kinds of gleams and movements, and they are all forgotten things, that are coming back in a long thread, and are now coming alive one by one.” This “vitalistic sensuality” of becoming-woman is attuned to the multiple flows of life that, to borrow from Rosi Braidotti, are “neither organicist nor essentialist but rather pragmatic and immanent.”¹⁷ These flows are materially embedded in the text: in “Making Flowers,” Van Bruggen’s distinctive punctuation invites readers to attune themselves rhythmically and bodily to the movement of the narrative.¹⁸ Take the last paragraph of the story, which traces the girls flowing thoughts:

Because now she suddenly knows why she was so brutal to mother It’s like this: if she had accepted that mother was right then she wouldn’t have been able to go and learn the daisy with Gerdien any more and she wanted it so much and also when everyone is false and hateful, it makes the world become so ugly So because of this you have to act like it’s not true

Here the ellipses suggest an indefinite deferral that is always gesturing elsewhere and outwards. Between ellipses, the perspective shifts from first to third person as the girl's thoughts relentlessly branch outwards, forming new relations and connections, and the reader must follow the threads between breaths. These ellipses are, to use Lauren Berlant's term, "infrastructures of relation."¹⁹ Thus a materialist, vitalist, and modernist portrayal emerges, containing a complex multiplicity of female subjectivities.

"Making Flowers" also sheds light on feminist and feminine economies of traditional crafts. We have witnessed a growing focus on the role of crafts and decorative arts in feminist modernist studies. Recent scholarship recovers lesser-known art practices and artists while also interrogating the gendered designation of these practices as "functional decoration," "low" culture, or less-than-art.²⁰ The title "Making Flowers" refers to a traditionally gendered craft – making paper flowers – that plays an important role in helping the little girl to build allegiances, manage conflicts, and develop intergenerational relationships with other women. The little girl knits to get to the coin that her mother has placed at the center of her ball of wool as a way of encouraging her daughter to knit herself a pair of stockings. The girl plans to give this money to her classmate Gerdien in exchange for learning how Gerdien makes decorative paper flowers. This exchange supplies a crucial source of narrative tension: the girl argues with her mother about how she will use her money, and Gerdien's own promise of knowledge-exchange is motivated by financial gain rather than friendship. However, the story ends with the revelation that the young girl's school teacher knows how to make paper flowers, and will teach the little girl how to make them "completely for free." The paper flower thus forms the locus of a gendered economy of knowledge and of female friendships for a character struggling to comprehend her position within pre-existing familial, social, and professional structures of womanhood.

Despite her artistic affinities with other modern writers, Carry van Bruggen remained largely peripheral to the modernist canon in her native Netherlands and, subsequently, has been almost completely absent from transnational readings of European modernisms. Van Bruggen's outsider position as a provincial middle-class woman from a Jewish background with socialist connections expressed itself in a modernist style that parted ways with her Dutch peers and predecessors; Fenoulhet describes Van Bruggen's 1913 novel *Heleen*, for example, as "so far ahead of the literary establishment as to be out on a limb."²¹ Van Bruggen's turn away from realism and her rejection of traditional social values prevented her from gaining critical favor early on in her career. Her subject matter was still too progressive for the world of Dutch letters, and a younger generation of intellectuals were "vehemently opposed to her leveling down of culture" they associated with the "increasing participation by women and the lower classes in social and cultural life."²² Consider the mixed reception of her novel *Een coquette vrouw*, which alienated readers who, expecting the flirtatious sensationalism suggested by the title, discovered instead a moving critique of traditional femininity told from the interior perspective of a woman.

Carry van Bruggen's precarious literary status in her own lifetime has made her nearly invisible to twenty-first-century readers and scholars. The project of transnational modernist recovery has been further complicated by the fact that Dutch literatures – and the Dutch language – have not yet crossed cultural borders with the same facility as other European languages. For the last century, the languages of the Netherlands have occupied a minor position within the majoritarian geographical space of Europe and the cultural-

institutional space of the European Union. Unlike Dutch art and visual culture, which from the Golden Age through impressionism to the expressionism and neo-plasticism of Dutch modernism has travelled well and shaped international artistic discourses, the literature of the Low Countries struggles to move beyond the periphery. Furthermore, the most internationally “successful” Dutch modernisms such as *De Stijl* tend to be more immediately recognizable as avant-garde. By contrast, Van Bruggen’s gendered and domestic world has been considered too experimental for Dutch realism and not cosmopolitan enough for European modernism. There are a number of Dutch Holocaust literatures that have gained international renown – especially *The Diary of A Young Girl* by Anne Frank and *An Interrupted Life* by Etty Hillesum – but outside of the Netherlands these works understandably tend to be read within a Jewish rather than a Dutch cultural framework or as a way of figuring the trauma of Europe following the Third Reich. The twentieth-century picture of Dutch modernisms both within and outside of the Netherlands was thus a limited and often exclusionary one.

Carry van Bruggen’s career offers a rich opportunity to map another literary modernism that emerged in the Netherlands, one that does not fit with the internationalism of the European avant-garde or with the patriotic and domestic naturalism of early twentieth-century Dutch literature. As Jessica Berman writes in the first issue of *Feminist Modernist Studies*, feminist recovery plays an invaluable part in practising transnational or planetary scholarship: “We must reconsider modernism through a lens that is both feminist and transnational, even when exploring writers from the global North, asking questions about the many contexts of writers’ identities and performances and heeding the call to re-read our canons in multiple non-static directions.”²³ In translating and recovering Van Bruggen’s work, I hope to broaden our understanding of the multiple locations and manifestations of Dutch literary modernism.

“Making Flowers”
from *Het huisje aan de sloot* (1921)
by Carry van Bruggen (1881–1932)

How delicious forgetting is! Without forgetting there would be far fewer surprises –, through forgetting life is always new. When in the autumn the trees are pruned, revealing the dovecote on the crossroads and the single distant windmill, usually in mist, and the narrow path of the gleaming canal, as if emerging from behind a closed curtain.... then, every autumn, you notice anew that the whole summer you haven’t once thought of the dovecote, the windmill, or the canal.... then you also realize how, in the spring, when the foliage was slowly growing thicker around you, you planned to keep thinking of the dovecote, the windmill, and the canal, loyal through the summer. It did not help anyone – not even eight days after the curtain had closed you had forgotten everything that was behind it.... but not a week after it opened, and you yourself can no longer comprehend that it ever hung before the dovecote and the windmill and the canal in the distance. It belongs again, it is no longer impossible to imagine.... and that is, of course, exactly how forgetting happens.... that everything always seems to have to be this way, just as it is. In the winter the winter seems to be self-evident, and in the summer the summer, and as long as the fire burns in the kitchen you have trouble imagining the kitchen without it, and when the fire has died you can barely believe that it will ever

burn again. It is a strange history, this forgetting of what you could once remember best and this disbelief of what you once knew beyond all doubt – that the winter always returns after the summer and in the kitchen you will once again feel the warmth of the fire But it is also delicious to forget it, because now the entire year runs through from one surprise to the other.

If sometimes, late in February, it has frozen hard and solid and steadfast so that the world has no smell and no color any more and at last the air becomes soft and dewy now the sovereignty of frost shall surely come to an end, now you may finally believe you are safe now it is all over, spring is coming. You can feel it, it makes you blissful, then you yourself are soft and dewy, but you do not yet understand what it means But on one day on your way to school you come across the small slice of field nestled beneath the built-up dike, with the resting boatmen alongside their brown barges, the children have white-blond hair, there is always a gray Keeshond standing with his bushy tail erect, barking on the deck, and they live there so happily, half on their ship and half on that field what is that in grass at your feet? A white daisy the first after the winter, the first one you have seen. Flat against the ground, almost without a stalk, as the first ones always are. You did not know this anymore, which is a surprise. Or not of course you knew, just like if the master in school had asked you what bloomed in the fields in the spring, then of course you would have said “daisies” but that is a completely different sort of knowing! And oh, the scent of a first small daisy. You do not pluck it, nor would you have anything to do with plucking it either. You lie down with it in the grass, your nose on top of it, your eyes closed and then you remember more forgotten things you know that right now the cows are going into the country and that there, by the canal, a yellow flower blossoms and you see, as long as you lie there in the grass, with your nose on the daisy and your eyes closed, all kinds of gleams and movements, and they are all forgotten things, that are coming back in a long thread, and are now coming alive one by one. Right now you live only in spring.

Later when, in the beautiful gardens belonging to the wealthy people, the red geraniums suddenly appear, and they sparkle so brightly in your eye, so that for a long time you still see spots of green, dipped in light, floating before you through the air – then you know what summer is again. When it was so nourishingly warm and above the brown fence by the town hall the thick purple bunches of lilacs filled the air with the most delicious smell, then you sincerely believed that it was summer, that it was properly summer. But actually there was something missing, – this! And the ripe corn growing outside that glows so fiercely under the blue sky, almost as ruddy as the flicker of a distant fire, it sometimes seems like its brightness is evaporating into the air. This is what summer is and you know it yet again every time you see it, through that strange forgetting and you think back to the lilacs and to the warmth of then, which now seems so pale and cool, like moonlight in sunlight, like a sky blue ribbon beside the deep blue of a flag You try to hold onto this forever, but you always forget it again and forgetting is wonderful, because it makes life forever new

In this way the little girl stands musing in the springtime sun, and at times she interrupts her daydreaming to worry so fleetingly about the width and depth of things, without words in mind, wondering, so that she suddenly knows she forgets and knows what she forgets. Is it perhaps because of the wind that is murmuring across her temples, which in passing leaves behind with her some smells, of water, grass, and manure, that it is

carrying away or is it because of the sun that caresses her so lusciously on her back, just between the shoulders from this far corner of the playground you can spy life on the farm next to the school so pleasantly, smell the laundry, and the coffee at eleven o'clock, and you can hear the chickens making noises in the warm sand, as if they were purring a little in their sleep. And it looks like something from a book or a print, because you see it from the playground at school time. Here she has hidden herself to no, not to gush about what is known and what has been forgotten, but to knit with fierce diligence so that her tangled ball of wool could now finally start to get smaller! She could feel a pull on the yarn that certainly would have tossed the ball of wool onto the ground, if she kept it somewhere other than tucked safe in her pinafore. How bothersome it was, that daydream, now five minutes of her free half-hour had definitely passed. And o, that burlked knot of a tightly wound ball no, don't check again by inspecting it now and giving it a squeeze, of course it cannot be getting any smaller by itself. Hè,²⁴ how her hands already feel like they are burning through that rough worsted yarn and if she does it for much longer, then inevitably such a tiresome pain always creeps up into her shoulders and neck. Why shouldn't she give it another pinch, a really hard one? Maybe she could feel an edge ! The knitted work folded between arm and body, her hand in the stiffly tied pinafore, ready to take out the tangled ball of wool – but be careful of what sits in the other corner! – now she squeezes, as hard as she can squeeze. Still nothing. ... she can feel nothing of what is nestled deep inside the ball, wool wrapped around like the pit of a fruit, a silver pit –, a ten cent coin, a *dubbeltje*! Mother wound the wool around it, and when the ball is completely unravelled she may have it, all of it, yes she may do what she wants with the whole dubbeltje – and she knows what already! – and by then she would have knitted the stocking, mother had calculated, past the heel and almost to the toe!

She looks at the rough black ball in her hand: somewhere deep inside sits the shiny pit, and she almost wanted, though she wasn't sure because if she were to see it appear unexpectedly, now that would be something First there would be a very small glint between the threads then knit, knit to get to it – because, what could it be?! – and then finally no, but what is that? A dubbeltje! A dubbeltje for me, mother? Yes, for her! That would be the most wonderful surprise but would she ever, if she did not know about the hidden coin, get to the toe of the stocking? And would she still be able to do it, if she simply pretended she didn't know? O no, was it not because of something else besides the tangled ball of wool she kept in the tight pinafore just take a quick look the hand warily in the pocket and then underneath it, lifting out the rustling tissue paper O, it is just so beautiful! On its long stalk of thin, supple iron wire, fretted with green paper so pretty and stiff, the little sky-blue flower with the yellow heart-stone, isn't it just a perfectly real-looking forget-me-not? Actually more beautiful than if it were real, because it's homemade, completely self-made from what used to be a piece of blue paper and a piece of green paper and a piece of iron wire and one of a bunch of small yellow thinly-pitted seeds and now a flower, a forget-me-not.

All the girls at school had made the most beautiful flowers, roses, daisies, snowdrops, they made them for a long time until all together they had a whole bouquet.

This was then laid against a palm leaf, a stiff-dried leaf, for sale in the shop, with an ethereal bow of pink or blue silk! Or, for on a cabinet, they took a drinking glass full of clean sand, covered with a specially crocheted basket, moss green, with a wide, wavy

pink edge and a small green border alongside it – and the flowers set loosely in the sand. Annebet made one for her mother’s copper wedding anniversary and Margo as a preparation for when her big sister gets married and Griet already crocheted the basket and Willemien is saving up for a fan, they also cost twelve cents, how do they get the bows so ethereal and sturdy at the same time and the flowers a little slanted, loose but not messy, just as they should be? She never thought that she could learn and now Gerdien has taught her the forget-me-not. She taught it her in exchange for a dubbeltje. And for fifteen cents she will teach her the daisy! And this is why now in her free half-hour she knits so hard, so hard that her reddening hands burn under the rough abrasions of the wool and her shoulders and neck begin to hurt. Because soon she’ll have the coin and then that’ll be for Gerdien together with the five cents she has coaxed from mother and then she may go home with her and into the top room and then Gerdien will teach her the daisy. How much would she have to have for Gerdien to teach her the rose?

Now the knitting is still and silent in her fingers, she is staring into the distance, but she sees nothing, she thinks of mother, about what happened at home this morning. She was so bold to mother about Gerdien. Mother said it was a scandal first of all that Gerdien had asked for a dubbeltje for the forget-me-not and now it’s fifteen cents for the daisy and this while she always gets everything she wants from them and then she got madly angry with mother and rude and she cried and she doesn’t really like Gerdien and she loves mother so much, o so much So what does any of that mean? And it was true, now that she had defended Gerdien to mother, she likes her even less than usual. She does not have to look at her to picture her, that fat, red face with the ginger hair, the big, blood-red mouth, always open and half-wet and ready to disagree the bossiest, shrewdest of the whole class and quite a few are bossy and shrewd already. No, she doesn’t like Gerdien but then why was she so angry at mother, so angry that she could have bitten mother when she said that Gerdien would laugh at her in the bargain? Could mother actually be right? Yes, mother was right. It took Gerdien less than three minutes to teach her the forget-me-not. As soon as it was ready she held out her hand for the shiny ten cent coin. She didn’t go home straight away, she did not want to let mother know that it had taken so little time. But why anyway? She doesn’t understand anything about it, she gets all hot and tight inside when she thinks about it.

“What is that what do we have here? Are you here to spend your free half hour knitting?”

Hè,²⁵ now that made her jump! Yes, miss, she stands here knitting, in her free half hour, because nested in her ball of wool is a whole dubbeltje and it is for her and then she’ll make it all the way to the toe and then she’ll have three five-cent coins and then Gerdien will teach her the daisy!

“Is Gerdien going to teach you the daisy for fifteen cents?”

Yes, Gerdien will teach her the daisy for fifteen cents –, she’s already taught her the forget-me-not for a dubbeltje She has it here in her apron does miss want to see it?

How the blue still seems so beautiful through the tissue paper! Yes, she can see it clearly, her teacher also finds the forget-me-not quite beautiful! You can bend the stalk, so, without its green cocoon tearing Hush, hear the chickens having a nice grumble and cackle in the dry sand they are not happy with spring either they are talking in their sleep so that it makes you sleepy her teacher stands in the sun, she

always smells nice and her wide brown skirt shines like satin. Yes, of course she may give the ball of wool a squeeze, quite preferably –, could it be that miss can feel something already? No, she cannot feel anything of the dubbeltje either.

“You’ll have to knit very hard to get to it.”

Funny That sounded like she had wanted to say something else. But there goes the bell and now she says nothing more. For a moment they all shout as loudly as they can, then they sprint over the square, up the high veranda, and, suddenly more slowly, through the wide-open doors. She walks with the teacher –, and the big lad on the veranda who looks out for latecomers with a slate in his hand to write down their name must not close the doors before she is inside because she walks with the teacher. For a moment she looks back, now so silent again in the younger foliage of the young trees the wind makes a sound, just as if you were to let sand fall onto a piece of paper from the hole of your hand, such a small trickle downwards becoming a broad flow, it can shimmer so joyfully one minute and then it is as if it is windy and raining, and everything is in miniature.

No, now that’s just too stupid, that apprehension because just now the teacher told her that she must wait for her after twelve o’clock, but then again, yes, “wait behind after class” also rarely means anything pleasant. Like now maybe no now certainly. But what?

On the floorboards above her head the masters walk so hurriedly that their steps boom through the ceiling, they shout “bonjour” through the doors of the classrooms; on the stairs their steps sound different and when they stand by the door their comical, short shadows fall just inside the threshold. Those whose turn it was this week have already left the craft class, but miss is still there with one child alone. There are not many afternoon pupils today, the corridor is very empty, the doors wide open at both ends, through one comes the sun, through the other wind. Funny right by the entrance to class four they meet each other, you see it so clearly – the wooden roller of the map of the Netherlands clatters softly against the wall there and right there on the threshold lies a shaky puddle of color, red, yellow, blue, woven through each other. That always happens when the sun shines through the upper arch, made of narrow pieces of stained glass. The sun and the wind will carry on playing in the vast empty corridor, in the wide open classrooms, there they have complete sovereignty for a couple of hours – then back come the children and masters and the teachers, and they are chased away again, each one out the door through which he entered.

“Why aren’t you knitting now?”

Why yes why isn’t she knitting now! The teacher is quite right This way she’ll never make it to the dubbeltje. As soon as she thinks this to herself, miss says it.

“This way you’ll never get to your coin!”

They go outside, walking through the sun-filled door. The veranda is almost white-blue and whenever a white-scrubbed drinking can is passed between the ruddy men it flickers fiercely in your eyes. All men smoke everything is *gezellig*,²⁶ just as it should be. And now no but, she stops still, standing on the pavement could it truly happen, is it actually going to happen? Can the teacher also make flowers? How her teeth glitter now when she laughs! After all, she can make the forget-me-not, the daisy and the poppy and also those beautiful, fat dahlias for hanging underneath lamps and the snow-drop she can do these too! And she will teach her all of them, for nothing, completely for free, she doesn’t even have to bring any seeds or stalks or paper herself, and she may

come to the teacher's house, tomorrow afternoon! And that 10 cent coin in the center of the ball of wool is now just for her

"But then you really have to make sure that you get to the toe of your stocking!"

You bet! And if she knits now, she will knit harder than she ever has before! Is miss laughing at her about it? Maybe she doesn't believe her?

Where the brown ships lie with their shiny, round little bellies, spots of light dance across the water, which is still far bluer than the sky on the green field the women have spread out the wet, white sheets, the children with their white hair are playing between them and the gray Keeshond watches them and barks, their lives there are so real, so *gezellig*! The field is speckled white with daisies, but she cannot pluck them, she is in too much of a hurry. To mother to tell her everything about the teacher, about what she's going to do with the ten cents now about all the flowers that the teacher will teach her to make o, how will she ever manage to tell all of these things before afternoon school, when she's already so late. It pushes against her stomach, it almost makes her sore, so full as she is, of everything that she needs to tell mother And then that business this morning! Because now she suddenly knows why she was so brutal to mother It's like this: if she had accepted that mother was right then she wouldn't have been able to go and learn the daisy with Gerdien any more and she wanted it so much and also when everyone is false and hateful, it makes the world become so ugly So because of this you have to act like it's not true But now the teacher has been so dreadfully good and kind to her o, and now here comes that pressure on her stomach again, it almost makes her sore and now she is finally allowed to confess to herself and to mother that Gerdien is an unpleasantness yes, a hateful false monster Wonderfully buoyed by this, and not at all bothered by it anymore the world is now much, much more beautiful than yesterday and she will learn to make all of the flowers

Notes

1. Van Bruggen, *Prometheus*, 132–3, original in epigraph (Translation my own, as are all following translations unless stated otherwise).
2. In 2019 UCL Press will publish *Eva* in an English translation by Jane Fenoulhet.
3. René van Stipriaan, "De Nederlandse klassieken," a survey of a hundred writers compiled by the Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde [Society of Dutch Literature], no. 46.
4. Van Bruggen, *Hedendaags fetisijsme*, 18–19.
5. *Ibid.*, 17.
6. Anbeek, Musschoot, and Goedegebuure, "Renewal and Reaction," 547.
7. Van Bruggen, *Hedendaags fetisijsme*, 213.
8. As Anbeek, Musschoot, and Goedegebuure write, "[Van Bruggen] believed that women, given their level of intellectual development, were not yet ready for reflective and abstract thought extending beyond emotion and fantasy." "Renewal and Reaction," 549.
9. Rich, "A Politics of Location," 210–31.
10. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 183–201.
11. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 32.
12. Balk-Smit Duyzenkunst, "Hedendaags fetisijsme." 275. Translation in Fenoulhet, *Making the Personal Political*, 48.
13. A more comprehensive discussion of the themes of emancipation in van Bruggen's fiction can be found in Fenoulhet, *Making the Personal Political*, 49–61.
14. Fenoulhet, *Making the Personal Political*, 49.

15. Ibid., 51.
16. Woolf, “Modern Fiction,” 160.
17. Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 214.
18. Fenoulhet, “Signs of Life,” 11.
19. Berlant, “Lauren Berlant discusses,” para. 6.
20. For example, a 2017 conference at Queen Mary University of London, *Decorating Dissidence*, was dedicated to reclaiming these practices.
21. Fenoulhet, *Making the Personal Political*, 41.
22. Ibid., 61.
23. Berman, “Practising Transnational Feminist Recovery Today,” 10.
24. Here, “Oh dear.” *Hè* is an informal interjection common in Dutch speech, which can express surprise, puzzlement, disappointment, and is also used at the end of a statement to anticipate the listener’s agreement.
25. Here, “Hey!”
26. *Gezellig* is a very common Dutch term that expresses a wholesome, simple, and upbeat attitude to life. It has no direct equivalent in English, but it can mean pleasant, amiable, cozy, or companionable.

Acknowledgements

I extend my gratitude to Jane Fenoulhet, professor emeritus of Dutch Studies at University College London, whose kind edits, suggestions, and expertise were of the utmost help during the composition of this essay and the following translation.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Ruth Alison Clemens is a writer and translator based in between the Netherlands and the UK. She is in the final year of her funded PhD candidature at Leeds Trinity University and the University of Leeds, and her research focuses on the “nomadic” materialism of multilingual literary paratexts by Virginia Woolf, Hope Mirrlees, and T. S. Eliot. She is postgraduate representative for the British Association of Modernist Studies, and from 2017 to 2018 she was a visiting research fellow in critical theory at Utrecht University under the supervision of Prof. Rosi Braidotti. Ruth is interested in the languages and culture of the Low Countries, and she received the 2015 Association for Low Countries Studies Essay Prize.

ORCID

Ruth Alison Clemens  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3937-4627>

Bibliography

- Anbeek, Ton, Anne Marie Musschoot, and Jaap Goedegebuure. “Renewal and Reaction, 1880–1940.” In *A Literary History of the Low Countries*, edited by Theo Hermans, 463–572. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009.
- Balk-Smit Duyzentkunst, Frida. “*Hedendaags Fetisjisme: Een nieuwe weg voor de taalwetenschap*” [Contemporary Fetishism: A New Way for Linguistics]. *Forum der Letteren* [Forum for the Literary Arts] 22 (1981): 275–79. DBNL 2010. http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_for004198101_01/colofon.php

- Berlant, Lauren. "Lauren Berlant Discusses 'Reading with' and Her Recent Work." Interview with Andy Campbell. *Artforum*. Jan. 30, 2014. <https://www.artforum.com/interviews/lauren-berlant-discusses-reading-with-and-her-recent-work-45109>.
- Berman, Jessica. "Practising Transnational Feminist Recovery Today." *Feminist Modernist Studies* 1, no. 1–2 (Nov. 2017), 9–21. doi:10.1080/24692921.2017.1382968.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
- Fenoulhet, Jane. *Making the Personal Political: Dutch Women Writers 1919–1970*. London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2007.
- Fenoulhet, Jane. "Signs of Life. Vitalising Literary Studies." *Journal of Dutch Literature* 8, no. 2 (2017): 1–13.
- Haraway, Donna J. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." Chap. 9 in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Notes Toward a Politics of Location." 1984. Reprinted in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979–85*. New York: Norton, 1986.
- Van Bruggen, Carry. *Eva*. Translated by Jane Fenoulhet. London: UCL Press, Forthcoming.
- Van Bruggen, Carry. *Hedendaags fetisjisme* [Contemporary Fetishism]. 1925. 3rd ed. Amsterdam: Em. Querido's Uitgeverij B.V., 1980.
- Van Bruggen, Carry. *Het huisje aan de sloot* [The Little House on the Canal]. Amsterdam: Maatschappij voor goede en goedkoope lectuur, 1921. DBNL 2006. http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/brug004huis01_01/colofon.php.
- Van Bruggen, Carry. *Prometheus*. Rotterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar's Uitgevers-maatschappij, 1919. DBNL 2002. http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/brug004prom01_01/colofon.htm.
- Van Stipriaan, René, ed. "De Nederlandse klassieken anno 2002: een enquête naar de canon onder de leden van de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde" [The Dutch Classics Anno 2002: A Survey of the Canon Among the Members of the Society for Dutch Literature]. June 2002. DBNL 2002. http://www.dbnl.org/letterkunde/enquete/enquete_dbnlmnl_21062002.htm.
- Woolf, Virginia. "Modern Fiction." In *The Essays of Virginia Woolf. Volume 4: 1925 to 1928*, edited by Andrew McNeillie, 157–165. London: The Hogarth Press, 1984.