

10-31-2023

"In memoriam", Victoria Maria Clara van Groenendael

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Recommended Citation

Meij, Dick van der (2023) ""In memoriam", Victoria Maria Clara van Groenendael," *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia*: Vol. 24: No. 3, Article 14.

DOI: 10.17510/wacana.v24i3.1687

Available at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/wacana/vol24/iss3/14>

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Obituary

In memoriam, Victoria Maria Clara van Groenendael
Brussels, 26 August, 1935 – Amsterdam, 3 April, 2023



Victoria in the reading room of the special collections in Leiden University Libraries in 2022 (photograph by Dick van der Meij).

Dick van der Meij

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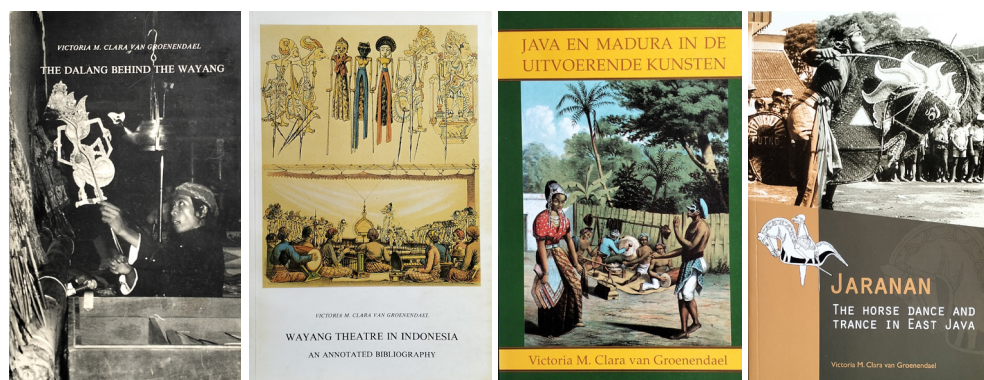
Victoria Clara van Groenendael passed away in Amsterdam on 3 April, 2023 at the advanced age of 87. With her passing, the international scholarly community of Java has lost yet another expert. After the passing of Clara Brakel (b. 1942), who was an expert on Javanese dance, in 2022, and Rens Heringa (b. 1932), who was an expert on batik textiles, also in 2022, we have now lost an expert on Javanese shadow theatre (*wayang*) and other Javanese performing arts.

Victoria wrote her PhD thesis on the *dalang*, the puppeteer of the Javanese shadow theatre. She spent years in the field interviewing *dalang* and recording *wayang* performances. This was in the nineteen seventies when making recordings required cumbersome tape-recorders and enormous batteries to make them work, a hell of a job. She could tell the most hilarious stories about how this worked in practice. Her stories about her last fieldwork in Kediri in East Java, she was fond of telling, were lively, amusing, to the point, and unforgettable.

She spent much of her youth after the Second World War in Jakarta where her mother was librarian at the library of the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen and because of this she had a wide circle of friends in the Javanese international scholarly community.

She defended her PhD thesis, entitled “Er zit een Dalang achter de Wayang”, on 16 September, 1982, at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. She looked at the *dalang*, their families, and networks and finally gave them the

attention they had never been given before. The English translation of this thesis, *The Dalang behind the Wayang; The role of the Surakarta and the Yogyakarta Dalang in Indonesian-Javanese society* was published as KITLV *Verhandeling* number 114 in 1985. Her other books are *Wayang theatre in Indonesia; An annotated bibliography* which was published by KITLV Press in 1987 as Bibliographical Series 16; *Java en Madura in de uitvoerende kunsten; Th.G.Th. Pigeauds Javaanse volksvoertoningen en latere studies: 1818-1995* which was published as *Werkdocumenten* 7 by KITLV Press in 1995, and finally her book *Jaranan; The horse dance and trance in East Java* which was published yet again by as KITLV *Verhandeling* number 252 in 2008.



Some selected works of her publications (source: <https://bit.ly/claravangroenendael>).

Her approach to her scholarly work was practical and descriptive rather than theoretical. As an anthropologist, she put people centre stage. During her fieldwork trips, she ensured that her informants were comfortable with her questioning and they trusted her, and she always became good friends with them. She respected everybody she met during her field trips and often stayed in touch with them long after the end of her fieldwork. She was especially fond of her "Ibutje", her personal helper (*pembantu*) who made sure she was kept well fed and organized during her many field trips. Victoria wanted to write a book about Indonesian developments through the eyes of her *pembantu* but unfortunately this never materialized.

Victoria loved reading, the theatre, classical music, and opera, and she remained active in all these fields when her health still allowed her to do so. As so often happens, in her later years she became less mobile which greatly hindered her and the Covid pandemic also presented a great obstacle. Well into her eighties, she continued to come to Leiden University Library to consult manuscripts in Javanese script, and she often found things of interest in them which might have escaped other scholars. She was always in a good mood and she could tell of her own life and her many adventures in Java with great humour.

She will be greatly missed.