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Second Advisor: Edan Dekel

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From *Poesaka* to *Pastiche*: *Max Havelaar* in Retelling and Translation

by

Anne-Sophie van Wingerden

Advisors: Janneke van de Stadt and Edan Dekel

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### Translator's Preface

The Canon of Dutch History, a government-sponsored selection of the fifty most influential people and objects in the history of the Netherlands, contains only two primarily literary works: the Bible and *Max Havelaar*. Multatuli (Latin for “I have borne/suffered much,” the pseudonym of Eduard Douwes Dekker, 1820-1887) wrote *Max Havelaar* over the course of one month in 1859, drawing upon his own experiences as a former civil servant in the Dutch East Indies to describe how the colonial administration facilitated the abuse of ordinary Javanese people by local rulers. He hoped that the novel's publication in 1860 would lead to sweeping reforms, including an end to forced labor and a more equitable judicial system in the colonies, and to his own appointment to a powerful post in the colonial administration. Due in part to efforts by Dutch government officials, however, *Max Havelaar* was published only in abridged form and was not made widely available until 1872. Multatuli himself, far from being granted the high political office he desired, was not reinstated in the civil service and spent the intervening years trying to regain the rights to his book, which had fallen into the hands of a politician intent on suppressing Multatuli's revolutionary views. Nevertheless, *Max Havelaar* gradually found an audience, first among young Dutch people who objected to their government's actions and later among Indonesians fighting for freedom from colonial rule. Today, *Max Havelaar* continues to be widely taught in secondary schools and is considered the foremost work of fiction in Dutch literary history.

According to Luc Bergmans, “the general public knows Multatuli as an anti-colonial author” (Bergmans 12). In reality, Multatuli's objections were directed not at the colonial system per se, but at the abuses perpetrated by Dutch administrators and indigenous rulers in the colonies and at the corrupt government that failed to protect its colonial subjects. Even among literary critics who recognize this distinction, however, the other goal that Multatuli hoped to achieve through his

writing, namely that of creating a *poesaka* (pronounced “poosàka”) for his children to inherit, has been “largely neglected” (Bergmans 11). *Poesakas*, sacred heirlooms often believed to have supernatural powers, are common to many Indonesian cultures and are passed down within families through generations, thereby connecting each successive owner to his or her ancestors. Despite the common perception of *Max Havelaar* as primarily a denunciation of a corrupt colonial power, Multatuli’s two aims are part of one overarching goal that he describes as “tweeledig” (“dual,” “in two parts”) and are therefore inseparable from each other:

Dit doel is tweeledig:

Ik wilde in de eerste plaats het aanzijn geven aan iets dat als heilige *poesaka* zal kunnen bewaard worden door kleinen Max en zijn zusje, als hun ouders zullen zijn omgekomen van ellende. [...]

En in de tweede plaats: *ik wil gelezen worden*.

This goal consists of two parts:

I wanted, in the first place, to bring into existence something that can be preserved as a holy *poesaka* by little Max and his sister, once their parents have died of misery. [...]

And in the second place: *I want to be read*. (Multatuli 235)

Multatuli does not elaborate on his hopes for his *poesaka*, continuing instead with a rant against Dutch society and a plea to the king to enact change in the colonies. When he later says that “if this goal is achieved, I will be satisfied,” it is therefore natural to assume that he is referring only to the part of the goal that he has been discussing for the last page or more, namely that of having his work read by a wide audience (236). This assumption, however, disregards the fact that his two aims, both personal and global, are tightly intertwined; one cannot be achieved without the other. In much the same way, an analysis that neglects *Max Havelaar*’s function as a *poesaka* in favor of a purely anticolonial reading fails to appreciate the connection that Multatuli saw between his own perceived mistreatment at the hands of the government and the abuses against the Javanese. *Max Havelaar* is certainly a political novel, but it is also a record of personal suffering intended to be handed down through generations.

*Max Havelaar*, like most *poesakas*, is characterized by structural intricacies that give the work a strong sense of cohesiveness. Typical *poesakas*, which often have great artistic as well as sentimental value, would be made by dyeing a piece of cloth with a complex pattern or blending different types of metal together. *Max Havelaar* achieves a similar result by alternating the voices of the two main narrators, Droogstoppel and Stern, and using them to tell a single story. For this method to be effective, both characters' voices must be distinct and independent from each other and from the author's. Accordingly, even after Multatuli reveals that Droogstoppel and Stern are his creations, he addresses them as beings on the same plane of existence as himself:

[Stern:] Havelaar wandered around, poor and abandoned. He sought...

[Multatuli:] Enough, my good Stern! I, Multatuli, take up the pen. You were not called to write Havelaar's life history. I called you into being [...] That's enough, Stern, you can go!

\*

[Droogstoppel:] That Sjaalman and his wife...

[Multatuli:] Halt, miserable product of foul covetousness and blasphemous false piety! I created you...you have grown into a monster under my pen...I am disgusted by my own creation: choke on coffee and begone! (235)

Multatuli may have brought his two narrators into being, but they have developed, literally "grown up" ("opgegroeid"), in ways beyond his control. Both Stern and Droogstoppel are subordinate to Multatuli (for instance, they are unable to respond or resist after he dismisses them), but the relationship is closer to that of a father and his children than to that of an author and his characters. All three narrators are present on the same plane of existence, and even though Multatuli dominates that plane, he cannot proceed with the book's conclusion until he has ensured that he will not be interrupted by the others. Moreover, because Stern and Droogstoppel have risen above the level of typical characters, each of them must be dismissed explicitly rather than simply cease to exist when the novel ends. This level of independence on the part of the alternating narrators recalls Mikhail Bakhtin's description of polyphony in literature:

[The novel] is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other; this interaction provides no support for the viewer who would objectify an entire event according to some ordinary monologic category (thematically, lyrically or cognitively) – and this consequently makes the viewer also a participant. (Bakhtin 18)

The role of “participant” takes on still greater importance when considering that *Max Havelaar* is a *poesaka* as well as a novel. A *poesaka* is intended to remain within its owner’s family indefinitely and is believed to form a connection between current and past generations; to sell a *poesaka*, as an impoverished Javanese farmer in the narrative is forced to do, is a last resort when faced with extreme hardship. By allowing and even encouraging outsiders to become enmeshed in the *poesaka* he has created, Multatuli acknowledges the desperate position in which he finds himself. Another, perhaps unintended, consequence is that *Max Havelaar* has come to provide a link between several generations of readers throughout its 160-year history; in this way, it is now a national *poesaka* in addition to a personal one.

The concept of polyphony also greatly complicates the responsibilities of the translator. While the reader is a witness to the interaction among characters (and to some extent interacts with them as well, as I argue in the discussion about in-text “readers” below), the translator is tasked with disassembling and reconstructing the network of consciousnesses without objectifying them. Even though the *poesaka* is designed to incorporate the reader into its unified whole, the translator has to resist the instinct to become part of this structure, which would cause the resulting translation to be recast in his or her single consciousness. In *If This Be Treason: Translation and Its Dyscontents*, Gregory Rabassa writes that “a translator is essentially a reader and we all read differently, except that a translator’s reading remains in unchanging print” (Rabassa 89). Whatever concerns this raises about translation in general are multiplied in the case of a *poesaka*, a sacred object that was never intended to leave its owner’s family line. To preserve the *poesaka*’s integrity

for future readers and allow them to have their own interactions with the novel's characters, the translator has an obligation to distance him or herself from the work. In this way, the translator's and the reader's interactions with *Max Havelaar* are diametrically opposed to each other.

Reflecting on the early stages of this project, I realize that I initially approached the text from the perspective of a reader. This is perhaps not surprising, given that I first read *Max Havelaar* as a high-school student several years before I became interested in translation. My impression of the book was so memorable that I designed my thesis proposal around the version that had been assigned by my high school, a 2010 edition by Gijsbert van Es. Van Es attempted to update Multatuli's classic for a new generation of readers, modernizing the spelling and making the book shorter by removing references that he considered outdated. Rather than consulting linguistic experts, he gauged for himself which passages were "necessary" and which may be "inaccessible" to modern high-school students. The front cover summarized these changes with the words "hertaald en bewerkt," two concepts that are somewhat difficult to define in English. As opposed to "vertaling," the standard word for translation, "hertaling" is closer to "re-linguaging" or "putting into language again" and implies staying within the same language as the source text. Roman Jakobson describes this kind of "intralingual translation" as "rewording," adding that this type of translation at the word level "either uses another, more or less synonymous, word or resorts to a circumlocution" (Venuti 114). I use the term "retelling" instead because Van Es's edits rarely occur at the word level; while he occasionally replaced archaic vocabulary with synonyms, it was far more common for him simply to remove entire passages that he considered too difficult for his target audience (or perhaps too difficult for him to translate). The second descriptor, "bewerkt," also presents an obstacle. Although "edited" would be the usual choice in this context, "processed" seems more appropriate given the broad scope of Van Es's edits: in addition to modernizing the

language, he added a short summary at the beginning of each chapter and reduced the total word count by twenty percent.

Although I was aware that Van Es's version was *sui generis*, I wrote in my proposal that I had a desire to keep engaging with his text that I did not feel towards Multatuli's older edition, which I had never read. Because I (as a reader) had encountered Van Es's version first, my instinct when I began translating was to continue working with the text that was more familiar to me. Over time, however, the full and troubling extent of Van Es's edits became clear. After reading several existing translations of Multatuli's original text into English, I began selecting passages to translate based on similarities between Droogstoppel's and Stern's narration. For instance, when Droogstoppel first meets the wife of another central character, Sjaalman, he criticizes her dress and personal appearance; Stern's introduction of Havelaar's wife later in the text describes what is clearly the same clothing and hairstyle in a far more positive and culturally sensitive light. Droogstoppel's sections differ markedly from Stern's in tone and lexicon, with Droogstoppel frequently using vivid, somewhat inelegant idioms that contrast with the refined image he attempts to project. His first name, Batavus, refers to an ancient Germanic tribe said to be the forefathers of the modern Dutch people (and for whom Batavia, the capital of the Dutch Indies, was named), and he repeatedly displays his inability to distance himself from the narrow perspective of an Amsterdam native. In the above example, for instance, Droogstoppel tells the reader that Mrs. Sjaalman styles her hair "like a Chinese person," while Stern describes it more elegantly as "*à la Chinoise*" (Multatuli 32, 57). Furthermore, Droogstoppel's writing comes across as somewhat careless; his use of vague antecedents regularly leads to humorous misunderstandings, which he is then forced to clarify. This is in complete contrast to Stern, who includes the reader in his deliberations on how best to present his story.

Early in the translation process, I decided to select passages by Stern and Droogstoppel that described similar subject matter from each narrator's very different perspective. By doing so, I hoped to capture some of the details of Multatuli's craftsmanship and above all to draw attention to the interactions between the two seemingly disparate narrative strands, which I saw as fundamental to the book's structure. When I referred to these passages in Van Es's edition, however, I found that he had chosen to eliminate many of the details that made those subtle connections evident, apparently considering them irrelevant to the narrative (and likely not having noticed how fundamental they were to its cohesiveness). As I became increasingly convinced that *Max Havelaar* should be read as a *poesaka*, Van Es's choices began to seem haphazard and even irresponsible in the way they undermined the *poesaka*'s tight-knit structure, which he all but confirmed in a conversation with me (Appendix A). When I asked Van Es why he had removed most of the poems found in the original text, some of which Stern explicitly says he included to give a more complete picture of Havelaar's character, he did not remember that these poems existed and told me that he had eliminated Multatuli's original footnotes because "they made the book too complicated." Van Es also did not seem to regard his work as literature in its own right, calling it a "lightversie" ("diet" or "lo-cal version") in comparison to Multatuli's "real thing." Eventually, realizing that Van Es had destroyed the *poesaka* structure that I was hoping to investigate more closely, I abandoned the 2010 edition in favor of the nineteenth-century original.

By the time I started working with Multatuli's original edition of *Max Havelaar*, I had begun to understand that my role would need to be different from that of a standard reader. One of my main objections to Van Es's version was that he allowed his editing process to be guided entirely by his personal interpretation of the novel as a political text. The explanation he gave me for deciding to modernize *Max Havelaar* in the first place was that he was inspired by its message

“against exploitation and slavery,” yet slavery was not common in the Dutch Indies in the mid-nineteenth century and is not mentioned in the original text. Van Es was apparently no longer able to separate the book’s actual message from the connections he had drawn to modern reality, and he applied his experience as a politically minded reader (and an editor at a prominent Dutch newspaper) to the retelling process, deliberately emphasizing portions of the text that supported his interpretation. He did not seem to consider this a problem, telling me: “What was important to me was mostly the historical significance and the still relevant significance, and not as much the literary significance. I think that it’s for real writers, shall I say, real scholars of literature, to modernize literature. I mostly modernized the pamphlet *Max Havelaar*, if you could make that distinction.” The printed copy of Van Es’s retelling contains no such explanation beyond the words “hertaald en bewerkt,” and most readers – myself included – would likely be shocked to learn that the editor deliberately sacrificed “literary significance” to make room for his own political reading.

With Van Es’s edition as an extreme example of what might happen if I allowed my personal interpretation to direct my translation, I tried to avoid imposing one particular reading on the text. In doing so, I found myself able to enjoy my work in a way that would not otherwise have been possible. For example, the inside cover of Van Es’s book contains a review from a high-school Dutch teacher that his publishers evidently considered high praise: “Even the most well-behaved student lost interest in the original version at the many deep contemplations of Max Havelaar and the digressions of that weird Droogstoppel. But this retold *Max Havelaar* is a [...] nice and readable novel.” Leaving aside the fact that the “deep contemplations” belong to Stern and not Havelaar, the characterization of Droogstoppel as “weird” and of his digressions as a source of boredom is questionable at best. Droogstoppel’s introductory chapter has been (in my opinion, rightly) described as among “the most humorous pages in Dutch literature” (Bergmans

12). His digressions are at first amusing and later offensive, but never boring. Readers like Van Es and this high-school teacher, who know how objectionable Droogstoppel eventually comes to be, may no longer be able to take pleasure in his more humorous early passages. While this was initially my experience as well, I found that I gained a greater appreciation of Droogstoppel's (unintentional) humor as I spent more time with the text – not as a reader, on the level of the entire novel, but as a translator, on the level of a few short paragraphs. In addition to making the translation process more enjoyable, this prevented me from imposing my once limited reading of Droogstoppel as a generally repugnant character onto passages where that reading was not warranted.

This is not to say that I was entirely successful in preventing my personal feelings about the text from influencing the translation process. In fact, it can be argued that a completely “objective” translation is impossible to achieve, since any translator is forced to make choices that will inevitably be influenced by his or her frame of reference. Simply by selecting passages based on their connection to the underlying *poesaka* structure, I was deciding on behalf of my readers which themes from the novel they would be exposed to, not entirely unlike Van Es's decision to translate “the pamphlet *Max Havelaar*.” Despite this, I would argue that my translation differs from Van Es's edition in several ways. Most importantly, Van Es seemed to believe that it was advisable or even necessary to eliminate what he saw as literary trimmings in order to emphasize the book's political theme. In his view, “literary significance” came at the expense of Multatuli's political message and therefore had to be removed. This approach is antithetical to the *poesaka* structure, in which disparate elements are combined to produce something greater than any individual component. Since I was not able to translate the entire novel, I tried to preserve the *poesaka* structure as much as possible in my selection of passages rather than choosing excerpts

that followed a single theme throughout the book. My aim in doing so was to highlight the text's fundamental unity and avoid sacrificing any particular narrative strand in order to bring attention to another, regardless of my personal interest in either of them. Despite the inevitable influence that my own reading of the text would have on the translation process, I hoped that this goal would help me keep the book's overarching structure in mind as I made choices on the level of words and sentences and that it would let me replicate the *poesaka* as faithfully as possible without translating the complete text.

After shifting my focus to Multatuli's original text, I continued to select passages by Droogstoppel and Stern in which the connections between the two narrative strands were most visible. I also chose a passage in which Droogstoppel interrupts Stern, afraid of real-world repercussions from his story, to show the extent to which the two strands begin to merge towards the end of the novel. Finally, I included the closing pages of the book to show the emergence of the third narrator, Multatuli, and the accompanying completion of the *poesaka*.

When I reread my high-school copy of *Max Havelaar* in preparation for writing this thesis, I was surprised to find that many of the questions I had written in the margins seven years previously were the same ones I had raised in my thesis proposal. Some of these questions became focal points of my thesis, while others will continue to provide inspiration for future projects. *Max Havelaar* is too complex to describe fully in a single paper, but that same quality makes the book rewarding to return to year after year. I hope that the translations included here will provide first-time readers with a sense of the original novel's brilliant craftsmanship and that readers already familiar with *Max Havelaar* will find a new perspective from which to engage with the text.

### Summary

*Max Havelaar or the Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company* opens with an apology by Batavus Droogstoppel (“Drystubble”), the narrator. Droogstoppel, an Amsterdam coffee broker, explains that he would ordinarily never stoop to the foolishness of writing a novel, but that he has received information that he feels he must share with his fellow coffee brokers and, in fact, with all Dutch citizens. Droogstoppel has recently had a chance meeting with a former classmate whom he calls Sjaalman (a derogatory nickname based on the scarf, “sjaal,” that his classmate wears for lack of a winter coat), who has returned from the Dutch Indies and is now impoverished and unemployed. Sjaalman asks for Droogstoppel’s assistance in publishing a packet of texts that he has written, including poems, short stories, and essays on an extensive list of topics. Although Droogstoppel is initially reluctant to help, he finds a number of essays on coffee in the packet and decides to write a book called *The Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company*. Daunted by the size of this task, he assigns a young German intern, Ernest Stern, to summarize the relevant information from Sjaalman’s packet; this has the added benefit of bringing Droogstoppel closer to Ernest’s father Ludwig, a major coffee trader. Droogstoppel signs a contract with Ernest Stern, agreeing to write the occasional chapter to give the book more respectability but leaving Stern a great deal of freedom to write his own chapters as he pleases. Droogstoppel later comes to regret this arrangement, often interrupting Stern to complain about Stern’s writing and to expound his own views on the colonial system and Dutch society at large.

Stern’s narrative, which is written in a more formal and polished style than Droogstoppel’s, describes Max Havelaar’s tenure as assistant resident (an administrative rank) of the Javanese province of Lebak. It soon becomes clear to the reader that Havelaar and Sjaalman are the same person, although this is never made explicit. Stern alternates Havelaar’s storyline with reflections

on the situation in the colonies and includes multiple poems and short stories that he has found in Sjaalman's packet. The most notable of these is the Saïdjah story, which follows a Javanese boy called Saïdjah whose family is reduced to poverty by a corrupt indigenous ruler; Saïdjah and his beloved Adinda eventually join a rebellion and are killed by Dutch military forces. Upon his arrival in Lebak, Havelaar is already aware of widespread abuse of the local population by the Adipati, an indigenous ruler. In particular, Havelaar is determined to end the practice of forced labor, which is strictly regulated under colonial law but which is still widely employed by the indigenous and Dutch elite. Despite Havelaar's immense efforts, the Adipati and his extended family continue to mistreat their subjects. Finally, after discovering that his own predecessor was likely murdered on the Adipati's orders for attempting to carry out similar reforms, Havelaar has no choice but to submit a formal accusation against the Adipati. Instead of investigating these claims, Havelaar's immediate superior, Slijmering (whose name is a reference to his "slimy" and bureaucratic speaking style), reports him for insubordination, causing Havelaar to be reassigned to another post. Havelaar instead chooses to leave the civil service and seeks an audience with the Governor-General, the highest authority in the colonies, who refuses to see him. In the absence of justice, Havelaar is forced to wander aimlessly.

Without warning, a third narrator emerges at the end of the novel and dismisses Stern and Droogstoppel in short succession. The narrator identifies himself as Multatuli, revealing that he has merely been using the other characters to achieve his personal goals for his book. Firstly, he wishes to create a *poesaka* or sacred heirloom for his two children; secondly, he wants his work to be read and thereby to raise awareness for the plight of the Javanese. Multatuli closes his book with an address to King Willem III, threatening violent revolution if no steps are taken to improve the wellbeing of the king's Javanese subjects.

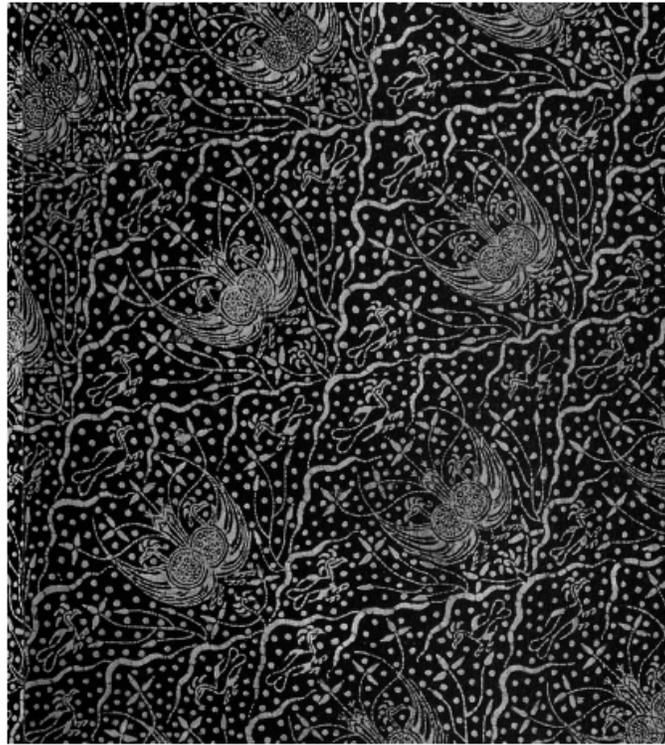
### *Max Havelaar as Poesaka*

When Multatuli identifies *Max Havelaar* as a *poesaka* towards the end of his novel, he uses a borrowed term with which many contemporary Dutch readers would not have been familiar. The word occurs only a few times elsewhere in the text, namely when Stern describes how Saïdjah's father is forced to sell his family's *poesakas* to buy a new water buffalo. In that passage, Multatuli explains in a footnote that the *poesaka* is an "heirloom," adding that it is "here – as often – taken in a pious sense." To understand the connotations of this designation and the consequences it has for Multatuli's text, a closer examination of the *poesaka* in Indonesian culture is necessary.

The *poesaka*, a sacred heirloom handed down through generations, occupies a central place in Indonesian history. *Poesakas* are valued by a large number of different cultural groups, many of which are separated by geography or ethnic background, which suggests that the practice of creating and handing down *poesakas* has ancient origins. The fact that these diverse groups use similar terms for these objects also indicates a common Malay or Austroasiatic root dating back to ancient times. Bergmans notes that "the etymology of the word *poesaka* is very difficult, but as is noted in *Art of Indonesia*: 'the sense is even harder to pin down'" (Bergmans 17). He offers three definitions, drawn from the two major reference dictionaries of Indonesian: first, an object that one inherits from a deceased person (an inheritance); second, an object that has been passed down from one's ancestors (an heirloom); third, an inheritance that has a special value for a community and that is passed down based on birth into a particular group (Bergmans suggests "patrimony" as the most appropriate term). Above all, a *poesaka* is believed to have supernatural powers to "protect, heal and avenge" (Soebadio 15).

Just as a *poesaka* connects its owner to his or her ancestors, the *poesaka* itself is often made of disparate materials that have been permanently fused but can still be recognized as distinct. For

instance, batik (an entire piece of cloth that has been dyed with the same pattern) often combines multiple design elements to produce a coherent image. Bergmans cites the following example, which represents the “semen universe” using elements such as birds, vine tendrils, leaves, and other themes from nature, all of which are held together by an underlying structure intended to resemble a mountain range (Bergmans 24).



*Figure 1: A section of batik cloth.*

Weaponry is another common category of *poesaka*, especially a type of short, asymmetrical dagger known as a *kris* or *keris*. A *kris* can be believed to have supernatural powers and demands particular respect even when it is not identified as a *poesaka*; for instance, when displaying a *kris* to another person, it is essential to withdraw the blade from the sheath completely to avoid attracting misfortune. Similarly to batik, a metalworking technique called damascening is used to create weapons that serve as *poesakas* by combining different metals to produce an intricate design, as seen below. While the multiple elements of the *kris* can be visually distinguished from

each other, they also form a cohesive whole that can no longer be separated. Bergmans draws a connection between the physical structure of these *poesakas* and their purpose as sacred heirlooms, noting that “everything is done in these artistic *poesakas* to symbolize that which is permanently united despite the passing of time and generations” (Bergmans 25).



Figure 2: A kris with damascened blade and sheath.

Although *poesakas* are usually tangible objects, this is not always the case. For instance, a song called “Indonesia Pusaka” is often sung in Indonesia on national holidays:

*Indonesia (tanah) pusaka* is a romantic patriotic song. It belongs to a class of songs popular in certain circles and sung spontaneously on occasions which are of national importance. Though some may find it difficult to believe – the patriotic songs are also known as *lagu wajib*, compulsory songs, indicating that schoolchildren are obliged to sing them – a number of the patriotic songs are imbued with a high emotional content. This is especially true for songs created just before and during the 1945-1950 struggle for independence [*Indonesia pusaka* was composed in 1944]. Patriotic songs may be sung by members of the political elite to highlight patriotic campaigns, but also by demonstrators telling that same political elite that they have lost all sense of patriotism and social justice, that they had become selfish, greedy and oppressive. (Barendregt 295)

Patriotic songs like *Indonesia pusaka* fall under Bergmans’s translation of *poesaka* as “patrimony,” illustrating how shared cultural experiences can be used to unite groups of people, but they also demonstrate the *poesaka*’s power to defend those same groups against perceived attacks from

external forces (in this case, the political elite). *Max Havelaar*, which champions the rights of the mistreated Javanese against a colonial elite portrayed as “selfish, greedy and oppressive,” can certainly be considered a *poesaka* of this type.

Although many English-language texts use the spelling “*pusaka*” to describe these objects, I have chosen to maintain Multatuli’s own transliteration because of the significant role the *poesaka* has come to play in Dutch culture since the end of the colonial period. For many Dutch people who relocated from Indonesia to the Netherlands after the Second World War, especially for those who were Indo (now the standard term for people of mixed Dutch and Indonesian descent), the concept of a *poesaka* came to apply to the few objects they were able to take with them, reminding them of their former home and, for some, their birthplace. *De Lange Reis van de Poesaka: Indische Tastbare Herinneringen (The Long Journey of the Poesaka: Tangible Memories of the Dutch Indies)*, published in 2018, is a project by two Indo artists who interviewed and photographed several dozen such people with their chosen *poesakas*. Some of these objects might be considered traditional *poesakas*, including Javanese artwork, while others are a modern reimagining of the concept, such as a photograph of the owner with elderly family members who passed away in Indonesia.

*Poesakas* have also made their way into Dutch popular culture, for instance in the 1977-1978 television series *De Kris Pusaka*, about a Dutch researcher who buys a *kris* that is later stolen; the researcher travels to Indonesia, where he discovers that the *kris* is a *poesaka* with supernatural powers. Finally, *Max Havelaar* itself, while it replicates certain structural elements of traditional *poesakas*, expands the definition of which physical objects can serve as *poesakas* to suit the needs of the author and his Dutch audience. In fact, while Multatuli states that his book is intended as a *poesaka* for his children according to the first and second definitions given by Bergmans, the

reception of his work means that it now meets the third definition as well. The place that *Max Havelaar* occupies in Dutch literary history makes it an object of immense cultural value for modern Dutch readers, whether or not they have a personal connection to the Dutch Indies. In light of the new meaning that the concept of a *poesaka* has taken on in Dutch culture, it seems appropriate to retain the typically Dutch spelling throughout this discussion.

*Max Havelaar*'s resemblance to a *poesaka* is most evident in its physical structure, in which Droogstoppel's and Stern's interwoven narrative strands serve as a substitute for the damascened metals or batik of more traditional *poesakas*. A.L. Sötemann argues that this polyphonic narration serves to guide the reader to a "correct" interpretation by describing the same characters and events from opposing perspectives. Over the course of the book, Droogstoppel's hypocritical and unsympathetic commentary on Sjaalman's situation forms such a stark contrast with Stern's presentation of Havelaar that the reader is eventually forced to choose a side. Even within each narrative strand, other characters contribute to this effect by offering additional perspectives that illuminate various aspects of Havelaar/Sjaalman. According to Sötemann, these secondary characters enable "the illumination of the center from different perspectives. Their primary, for some in fact the *sole*, function is that they make various facets of the Havelaar-Sjaalman-Multatuli gemstone light up all the more radiantly, more than once in an indirect manner" (Sötemann 72). The inclusion of characters who are unsympathetic to Havelaar in Stern's chapters, such as Slijmering, and of Sjaalman's supporters in Droogstoppel's passages, such as Sjaalman's wife and Stern, bridges the gap between the two narrative strands and tightens the *poesaka* structure. Finally, both strands are brought to an end at the same time, with Multatuli's tirade completing the *poesaka*:

It is of course a clever bit of construction skill that both of the simultaneously presented, chronologically sequential life phases: "Havelaar" and "Sjaalman," are interwoven in such

a way that they also reach their end point in the work simultaneously and can be broken off to make room for the “Multatuli”-persona of the concluding phase. (Sötemann 71)

Stern and Droogstoppel form the backbone of the *poesaka* structure, but it is Multatuli who completes the project and imbues it with meaning.

The reader also plays a key role in bringing together the two strands of the *poesaka*. Just as the reader is guided to a “correct” understanding of the narrated events by exposure to a variety of perspectives, his or her reaction to those events is deliberately shaped by the ways Droogstoppel and Stern address their imagined readers throughout the book. Droogstoppel in particular reveals much of his own character by confiding in his reader, whom he expects to be sympathetic. Initially, the actual reader will have little objection to this; Droogstoppel comes across as odd but harmless, and while the reader may disagree with his views on poetry and theater, there is nothing particularly offensive about them. Likewise, when Droogstoppel expects the reader to share in his disapproval of Stern’s story, the contrast between the in-text “reader” he addresses and the person actually reading the book is a source of humor. His assumption that his feelings are universally shared (“*everyone* will therefore be able to understand how dissatisfied I was with Stern’s work,” Multatuli 94; “the reader can feel what I suffered again when I heard those last chapters,” 180) contributes to his image as a self-centered businessman with little appreciation for art and literature. Over time, however, Droogstoppel develops into a much more sinister character, and the role of his “reader” becomes repugnant. After he inspects a private letter addressed to Sjaalman’s wife, he sanctimoniously declares that “not even in church could you find more encouragement than in that letter” (213). The reader, who is by now aware of the circumstances behind Sjaalman’s behavior as described in the letter, will have a more sympathetic or even indignant reaction on his behalf. By the time Droogstoppel celebrates having spattered Sjaalman’s face with mud while riding past in his carriage, his hypocrisy and cruelty are on full display. It is no longer possible for

the real-life reader to condone Droogstoppel's behavior by playing along with the role of "reader" that he has created.

Stern's chapters also directly address an in-text "reader," and the development of this role follows a similar pattern to that in Droogstoppel's sections. A notable difference is that Stern's "reader" is constantly included in the author's deliberations on how best to shape his text. Stern first addresses the "reader" to explain that he will refrain from long digressions near the beginning of his story to avoid alienating his audience. Only "when I sense that he has been won over for me" will Stern test the "reader's" patience by pausing the sequence of events to indulge in detailed descriptions of the story's backdrop (37). Later, when Stern includes a poem that Havelaar once wrote while separated from his family, he justifies this decision based on the overarching intentions that he has for his protagonist and his "reader": "Yes, at the risk of seeming eclectic, I included those lines here. I do not wish to waste any opportunity to make the man known who plays the main role in my story, so that he might arouse some concern in the reader when later dark clouds gather together over his head" (160). Stern also makes repeated references to the selections he has made from the packet of documents available to him.

This transparency about the book's goal helps the actual reader (at least initially) to identify more strongly with Stern's "reader" than with Droogstoppel's. Most importantly, it reinforces the idea that while the form of Stern's book is artificial, the events it describes are based closely on reality; if they were fictional, there would be no need to be so concerned with the format chosen to relay them. Stern uses this awareness of artificiality to challenge the "reader's" reaction to the content he describes, often resorting to sarcasm and hyperbole: "If you are not touched by the mute awkwardness of a corpse lying over there, there is room in my story for a victim who's still convulsing and screaming! If you did not weep at the mother searching fruitlessly for her

child...very well, I will show you a different mother who sees her child drawn and quartered!” (134). The only possible reaction on the part of the actual reader is to resist this characterization and adopt the “correct” stance with regard to both Havelaar’s predicament and the mistreatment of the Javanese people.

The dual in-text “readers” thus serve to channel the real-life reader’s response to the text in the desired direction. This also serves to bring the reader into the structure of the *poesaka*, transforming him or her from viewer to participant in the polyphonic narrative. In this way, the reader is partially responsible for helping to complete the *poesaka*, first by interacting with Stern and Droogstoppel and resisting the assigned role of in-text “reader,” then by bearing witness to Multatuli’s suffering and anger after the other narrators have been dismissed. Just as a traditional *poesaka* must be carefully preserved by successive generations if they are to benefit from its supernatural protection, *Max Havelaar* can reach its full potential – as a record of personal hardship and as a weapon against tyranny – only in the possession of a real-world reader.

### **Reality and Fiction in the Play-World**

In the same way that Stern’s and Droogstoppel’s narratives are intertwined, the threads of reality and fiction alternate throughout *Max Havelaar*. Sötemann analyzes a section of the book’s foreword (a play in which a character is unfairly sentenced to death) through the lens of Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*, a study of the “play-element” in culture. Based on Huizinga’s understanding of literature as a type of play, Sötemann argues that “the reader participates in two realities at the same time, of which the ‘real’ one is typically marginal while reading (that is, so long as one is playing), the fictional one dominant” (Sötemann 30). This causes a confrontation between the two realities that Multatuli is able to manipulate as an element of his literary “game.”

The result is to force the reader to consider the fictional situation in the context of real-world ethics, leading not to a refutation of the truthfulness of the text, but to a realization that the real world does not always align with the reader's ethical code. An analysis of the rest of the novel according to the same theory reveals the success with which Multatuli is able to manipulate the two strands of fiction-in-text and reality-in-text, and to connect both to the reader's reality.

Huizinga identifies adherence to rules as a key component of play; without it, the play-world collapses. He makes a distinction, however, between the cheat and the spoilsport. While the cheat seeks to gain an advantage by circumventing the rules, this very action supports the play-world's existence, since cheating confers an advantage only within the play-world. For example, stealing play money during a board game is cheating, but the cheat is ascribing value to pieces of paper that are worthless outside the context of the game. Moreover, the cheat is still trying to win according to the rule that hands victory to the player with the most play money at the end of the game. The spoilsport, on the other hand, walks away from the board entirely. While the cheat "pretends to be playing the game and, on the face of it, still acknowledges the magic circle," the spoilsport "shatters the play-world itself. By withdrawing from the game he reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world in which he had temporarily shut himself with others" (Huizinga 11).

At first glance, Stern appears to violate Huizinga's requirements on multiple occasions. Novels require readers to agree to enter the play-world, to accept at face value the fictional realities they are presented with and to play along with what the narrator tells them, with the understanding that it will cease to be true whenever they choose to close the book and walk away. According to Huizinga's theory, a narrator would become a spoilsport by acknowledging the artificiality of his or her role and revealing the narrative as a lie. Yet Stern does precisely this at the conclusion of

the Saïdjah story, using the same language of truth and lies that Droogstoppel often uses to defend the truthfulness of his own narrative. Stern gives a detailed overview of his writing process, describing his initial plan for how to tell the story and why he eventually changed his mind while writing (“gaandeweg”; “along the way,” Multatuli 203). He then makes a confession (“bekentenis”) to the reader that he does not know whether his characters actually existed as individuals, but argues that “*what is fiction in one case becomes truth in general*” (203).

The words Stern uses to describe his story emphasize a lack of absolute certainty regarding the narrated events (“schets,” “gissen”; “sketch,” “guess”), but they do not sink to the level of outright lies. In fact, Stern never quite applies the word “lie” to his own writing in this passage. It first occurs when he asks rhetorically whether there is “logen” (“falsehood”) in the story of the Good Samaritan or the parable of the sower because those accounts might contain elements of fiction. He comes closest to suggesting that he has lied when he asks, with reference to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, “is it her fault – or mine – that the truth, to gain entry, must so often wear the clothes of falsehood?” (204). Even here, however, Stern continues to identify his version of Saïdjah’s story as fundamentally true; any small falsehoods do not change the essence of the narrative. In this way, the conclusion of the Saïdjah story parallels Multatuli’s tirade at the end of *Max Havelaar*. Multatuli insists that “*wederlegging der HOOFDSTREKKING van mijn werk is onmogelijk*” (“*denial of the MAIN POINT of my work is impossible*”) and, like Stern, dismisses criticism of his story’s structure as irrelevant to the underlying truth he is trying to convey (236). Similarly, Stern repeatedly focuses attention on the “hoofdzaak” (“main issue,” virtually identical in meaning to “hoofdstrekking”) rather than the details, going so far as to challenge his readers to question his version of the story: “Oh, if only I were called upon to give evidence for what I wrote [...] I would have proven that I am no slanderer” (204). Douwes Dekker

often expressed the same sentiment in his letters to his wife and in his endnotes to later editions of the book, complaining that the public never asked him to provide proof for his allegations in spite of his book's commercial success. The similarities between these two passages by Stern and Multatuli, not to mention Douwes Dekker's personal hopes for his work, reveal the extent to which Stern's narration can be considered reliable despite containing some fictionalized elements.

In this respect, Stern is the opposite of Droogstoppel, who fixates on details at the expense of the big picture, starting by listing his occupation and address in the first sentence. While Stern uses fiction to present general truths, Droogstoppel frequently draws conclusions about the state of the world based on anecdotal personal experiences. In the first chapter, for instance, he insists that romantic poetry is "all madness and lies" because he and his wife live comfortably without the kind of "crazy love" it describes; later, he argues that since he met a few seemingly content people in The Hague twenty years previously, there could not possibly be any unrest in the government. The obvious flaws in his reasoning undermine his credibility and encourage the reader to be wary of any conclusions he draws. Droogstoppel's hypocrisy soon emerges despite his best efforts to the contrary. Immediately after insisting that "undercutting isn't something I do," he writes a letter to Ludwig Stern that is a clear attempt to undercut his competition, interrupting himself no fewer than six times to tell the reader that what he writes is "the pure truth" (9). Similarly, after opening Sjaalman's packet, he claims he would never deny having read its contents "because I love the truth so much," only to let slip the real reason: "Also, I wasn't able to close it again in such a way that there was no sign it had been opened" (27). In this light, Stern's admission that parts of his story are not strictly factual actually supports his broader credibility. After all, a liar like Droogstoppel would never admit to having stretched the truth regarding even a minor detail. By distancing himself temporarily from his play-world and revealing the process of its

creation to the reader, Stern establishes himself as a reliable guide in distinguishing its fictional elements from reality.

The presentation of Stern's story as fiction within Droogstoppel's reality means that Stern exists not only as a narrator but also as a character in a higher level of the multilayered *poesaka* structure. He is therefore able to withdraw from and comment on the play-world that he has created without falling under Huizinga's definition of a spoilsport. In fact, the existence of the play-world in which Droogstoppel is narrator demands a certain awareness of the artificiality of Stern's chapters. The reader cannot accept both play-worlds at face value to the same extent, since to raise Stern's story to the level of fictional reality at which Droogstoppel exists would undermine the reader's agreement to play along with Droogstoppel's version of events (in which Stern is already a character). Instead, Stern's narrative exists as an artificial "play-world," which can be acknowledged as such, within Droogstoppel's play-world, which cannot.

Droogstoppel himself takes every opportunity to remind the reader that Stern's sections of the book are fiction, starting with the contract that determines the conditions under which Stern is allowed to write. By stipulating that Droogstoppel's son, Frits, will correct Stern's grammatical errors, the contract eliminates some of the artificiality introduced by the fact that Stern, who recently arrived from Germany, writes in perfectly idiomatic Dutch. However, its overall effect is to mark Stern's chapters as existing on a lower plane than Droogstoppel's, preventing them from being seen as a novel in their own right. At several points, Droogstoppel encourages his in-text "reader" to skip Stern's chapters altogether, contrasting a reader's right to exit the play-world by abandoning a written text with his own social obligation to listen to Stern reading his work aloud: "You are not at the Rosemeyers' soirée, reader, and are therefore more fortunate than I, who have to listen to everything. You're free to skip the chapters that reek of German overexcitement, and

to pay attention only to what has been written by me, a distinguished man, and a coffee broker” (95).

According to Huizinga, places that are set aside for play (including religious spaces used for performing rituals) must be kept separate from the sphere of daily life. This allows dangerous or normally inappropriate impulses to be expressed in the play-world without negatively affecting everyday activities. At first, the Stern-Droogstoppel boundary seems to meet this criterion; while Droogstoppel can freely criticize Stern’s writing, their contract prevents him from editing it, and Stern’s chapters are clearly marked as fictional in the overarching storyline. Over time, however, Stern’s narrative begins to permeate Droogstoppel’s “reality.” While Stern does not directly respond to Droogstoppel’s complaints about him, he often satirizes particular aspects of Droogstoppel’s life. Eventually, these subtle critiques become blunt enough for the somewhat dense Droogstoppel to notice them, but by this point, the consequences of Stern’s story are making themselves felt throughout Droogstoppel’s household. In his introduction to the Saïdjah story, Stern speaks passionately against people who are unmoved by the suffering that he is about to describe, ending with several pointed attacks on people like Droogstoppel: “Don’t you need your costly tears for more serious matters than...but what more do I have to say! Wasn’t it slack at the stock exchange yesterday, and didn’t a slight surplus threaten the coffee market with falling prices?” (Multatuli 180). Droogstoppel cuts Stern off, afraid of real-world repercussions. For the first time, Droogstoppel suspects that his criticism of Stern’s book is a two-way street, and he realizes that Sjaalman’s packet is disrupting the discipline of his household and his business. If Stern sends a copy of his (supposedly) fictional story to his father, the elder Stern might believe that coffee stocks are falling and decide not to place a large order with Droogstoppel’s firm. Like a “Trojan horse,” Stern’s story has crossed the border of fiction and begun to affect Droogstoppel’s daily life

in ways beyond his control (95). Faced with an increasingly permeable play-reality boundary, Droogstoppel chooses to avoid the Rosemeyers' gatherings rather than risk being confronted with criticism.

The hierarchy of the novel within a novel is preserved even in Multatuli's dismissal of the two narrators. Stern must be dismissed first because he exists on Droogstoppel's level of the narrative as well; to put an end to Droogstoppel before addressing Stern would be impossible. Multatuli's later reference to Havelaar in the present tense, however, suggests that Havelaar is more than merely a character in Stern's chapters ("I am no poet who saves flies, no soft-hearted dreamer, like the downtrodden Havelaar, who did his duty with the courage of a lion, and suffers hunger with the patience of a marmot in the winter" (237). Similarly, after Multatuli dismisses Stern and Droogstoppel as his creations ("I called you into being," "I created you,"), his comment to Stern that "you were not called to write Havelaar's life history" implies that Havelaar and his life story are "real" in a sense that the other two characters are not (235). Stern's story, which was first presented as fiction within Droogstoppel's reality, is revealed to have been reality within fiction within Multatuli's (and the reader's) reality. This inversion of the Droogstoppel-Stern hierarchy is also reflected in the book's double title: Droogstoppel's contract with Stern stipulates that their book will be called *The Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company*, which is relegated to a subtitle in the work's final form.

The apparent artificiality of Stern's narrative thus emerges as a feature rather than a flaw. Once the reader has accepted that Stern's story is fundamentally true, there can be no doubt as to which elements are strictly factual and which are not. In particular, the letters between Havelaar and his superiors, which Stern repeatedly claims to be copying verbatim, are revealed as the factual centerpiece of the narrative. In a letter to his wife from the period when he was working on *Max*

*Havelaar*, Douwes Dekker wrote: “Since nobody takes the trouble to read official correspondence, my book must be the vehicle by which it is administered like a medicinal drink so that it now has all the attraction of a novel only to hear along the way for the first time that all of this really happened” (Deel 3 brief X). By constructing a multilayered novel with multiple narrators, Multatuli is able to manipulate the strands of reality and fiction without ever alerting the reader to the play-world’s fragility. As a result, when the play-world finally collapses at Multatuli’s command, the reader’s shock and indignation are correspondingly greater.

After Multatuli reveals Stern and Droogstoppel as his creations, the reader is faced with the realization that if what Stern describes is actually true, then the indignation the reader was led to feel at supposedly fictional events actually has a place in the real world. The question is now whether these sentiments will persist when the subject can no longer be thought of as fictional, and, if so, whether they will be channeled into action of the type Multatuli describes. Bergmans argues that “the literary *poesaka* that Multatuli has created can transform itself into a weapon of vengeance [...] The idea of a use that is ultimately violent, retributory and protective of the community is therefore not at all surprising at the moment when Multatuli identifies his work as a *poesaka*” (Bergmans 18-19). In the hands of the reader, *Max Havelaar* has the power to avenge Multatuli’s family and protect the Javanese people, but only if the reader agrees to bridge the gap between what first appeared to be fiction and reality. In this way, the proper use of the *poesaka* is, to some extent, dependent on the individual reader.

### **The Proper Use of the *Poesaka***

Readers’ interactions with the text become more complicated when considering readership on a larger scale. According to the author himself, Multatuli created *Max Havelaar* primarily as a

sacred object intended to be passed down from parent to child, and only in the second place (“in de tweede plaats,” Multatuli 235) because he wanted it to be read by others outside his family. Even in stating these intentions, however, he remains true to the theme of combining disparate elements to create a unified whole. Rather than listing the two goals separately, he presents them as the two halves of a single goal that is “tweeledig” (“in two parts,” 235). The first item is personal, the second global in scale, but to Multatuli, they are intimately connected. Similarly, he closes the book with one question to the king, again in two parts: “To you I dare ask with confidence whether it is your imperial will: That Havelaar is spattered with the mud of *Slijmerings* and *Droogstoppels*? And that over there your more than *thirty million* subjects are MISTREATED AND BLED DRY IN YOUR NAME?” (237). In Multatuli’s eyes, the fate of his family has become inextricable from that of the Javanese, to the extent that these two questions cannot be asked or answered separately. While the two halves of Multatuli’s goal are linked, each can be achieved only at the expense of the other. Each reader who purchases the book contributes to Multatuli’s second aim, but also takes ownership of an object that, as a sacred heirloom, was never supposed to leave his family’s possession. Multatuli suffers the same indignity as Saïdjah’s father, who is forced to sell his and his wife’s *poesakas* to buy buffaloes to support his family, except that Multatuli has to endure the sale of his *poesaka* over and over again. In the process, however, a widening circle of readers learns of the abuses perpetrated against the Javanese people. On an individual level, reading the book is a violation; on a larger scale, it helps to promote public awareness of an issue to which Multatuli devoted his career.

Any translation of *Max Havelaar* must take into account the contradictory nature of its goal as well as its identity as a *poesaka*. Multatuli himself declares that if his Dutch audience does not believe him, he will translate his book “into the few languages I know, and the many languages

that I can learn,” in order to seek support first throughout Europe and then in the Dutch Indies (236). This threat seems to be mainly for rhetorical effect, however, given that Multatuli hopes to meet with success in his native country without needing to take this additional step. Translating the book would make it available to a much wider audience, but in doing so, the violation of the *poesaka* would be exacerbated. Not only would outsiders have access to a sacred object that was intended for Multatuli’s descendants, but the form of the *poesaka* itself would have to be adapted to accommodate the linguistic needs of a new group of readers.

Typical translation guidelines are not designed for *poesakas*, given that they are sacred objects believed to have supernatural powers. For instance, the Translator’s Charter of the International Federation of Translators instructs that “every translation shall be faithful and render exactly the idea and form of the original, this fidelity constituting both a moral and legal obligation for the translator” (I.F.T. Charter art. 4). In the absence of a well-defined and objective set of criteria to determine which characteristics of this *poesaka* make it sacred, its “idea and form” must be replicated as faithfully as possible. In the case of *Max Havelaar*, the alternating narrative strands that underpin the book’s physical structure as a *poesaka* are relatively easy to maintain, but the strands of reality and fiction are more challenging to communicate to a modern, non-Dutch audience. The book derives its impact on the reader from the realization that Stern’s story is in fact true, but it derives its impact on the world (its function as Bergmans’s “weapon of vengeance”) from the reader’s converting his or her indignation into action.

While Multatuli’s original demand to defend the Javanese from colonial oppression can no longer be followed literally, it is still possible to redirect this indignation towards a different target, as some modern adaptations have done. For instance, Gijsbert van Es closes his adaption of the novel with a section titled “Around 150 words in conclusion” in which he compares several

characters to well-known cultural figures: Havelaar is “like a David versus Goliath,” Droogstoppel is compared to Shylock and Scrooge, and Saidjah and Adinda become Romeo and Juliet (Van Es 317). He includes the Javanese in this list, writing: “THE JAVANESE ARE MISTREATED, read: South American coffee farmers, little girls in Asian clothing factories, boys on West African cacao plantations.” In doing so, however, Van Es continues to overlook the first half of Multatuli’s goal. Havelaar is less a David against Goliath than a thinly veiled version of Douwes Dekker himself, romanticized but still intended to resemble reality. The Javanese are not a symbol for abstract forms of oppression around the globe, but the specific group whose rights Multatuli hoped to promote with the publication of his book. While modern readers may not have the same awareness of colonial issues as Multatuli’s original audience, it would be irresponsible of translators and editors to widen this gap by encouraging a purely metaphorical reading of a book so firmly rooted in its historical context.

This being said, it cannot be denied that the influence of Multatuli’s work extended far beyond his initial expectations. While he was largely disappointed in his personal goals for the book and was never offered the high position that he hoped for in the colonial government, his novel eventually led to reforms, including an overhaul of the *cultuurstelsel*, the system of forced coffee cultivation implemented by the Dutch in Indonesia. In his essay “The Book That Killed Colonialism” (first published in the New York Times and included as the introduction to the 2019 translation of *Max Havelaar*), Pramoedya Ananta Toer argues that reading *Max Havelaar* was an “awakening” for the first generation of Indonesian children educated in Dutch. That generation would go on to lead the Indonesian war for independence, which in turn “awakened ever more of the world’s colonized peoples and signaled the end of European colonial domination.” While Douwes Dekker never advocated an end to colonialism, his book was reinterpreted to serve the

needs of its twentieth-century Indonesian readers – not the audience he had anticipated, but one that gave his work new meaning for its time.

With this in mind, the second half of Van Es’s “150 words” is more appropriate than the first:

Not for nothing has *Max Havelaar* also been a certification mark for fair trade products since 1988. Max Havelaar as a source of inspiration for good governance and a sustainable world economy: does it sound goody-goody, politically correct? Yes, for those who are cynical. To them this advice: read this book, or read it *again*, and choose the role that fits you. (Van Es 317)

Perhaps unwittingly, Van Es has identified the source of *Max Havelaar*’s power to influence its audience: even though its goal is now obsolete, it still draws readers in and forces them to choose a side in the debate about the Javanese people. Multatuli capitalizes on the shock of the reader’s realization that the book’s contents are true by demanding attention for the plight of the Javanese; Van Es attempts something similar by including a reference to fair trade at the end of his adapted version. While this addition is not strictly necessary, it is also not in conflict with Multatuli’s original goal. The *poesaka* motif relies so heavily on the interweaving of reality and fiction that if this tight-knit structure is preserved in translation, readers will be able to connect Multatuli’s reality to their own and to supplement modern equivalents alongside, rather than instead of, the problems he describes.

### Translations

*Batavus Droogstoppel, an Amsterdam coffee broker, encounters an old school friend whom he refers to as “Sjaalman.” Sjaalman, who has fallen on hard times, asks Droogstoppel to help him publish his extensive collection of poems, short stories, and essays. Droogstoppel is initially hesitant, but his interest is piqued when he discovers that Sjaalman’s packet contains a number of essays on coffee cultivation. He commissions Ernest Stern, an intern, to compile this information in a book called *The Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company*. When Stern is unable to understand certain details in Malay and other languages, Droogstoppel visits Sjaalman’s apartment to ask for clarification; he also intends to hire Sjaalman to replace Bastiaans, an elderly clerk whose work has recently been unsatisfactory.*

#### Droogstoppel’s impression of Sjaalman’s home and family, 32-34

I knocked and the door was opened by a woman or lady – I myself am still not entirely sure what I was to make of her. She looked very pale. Her features bore traces of fatigue and reminded me of my wife after she does the laundry. She was dressed in a long white shirt, or a tunic without a camisole, that fell to her knees and was fastened in front with a little black pin. Underneath, instead of a respectable dress or skirt, she wore a piece of dark linen with a flower pattern that seemed to have been wrapped around her body several times and that was quite tight around her hips and knees. There was no trace of pleats, width or roominess, which after all is fitting for a woman. I was glad that I hadn’t sent Frits, for her clothing struck me as very indelicate, and the strangeness of it was only augmented by the looseness with which she moved, as if she completely approved of her appearance. This person didn’t seem at all aware that she didn’t look like other women. I also noticed that she was not at all flustered by my arrival. She didn’t hide anything

under the table, shift the chairs around, or do anything else that's customary when a distinguished-looking stranger comes calling.

She had pulled her hair back, like a Chinese person or something, and tied it up in a sort of loop or bun behind her head. Later I learned that her clothing was a kind of East Indian dress that they call *sarong* and *kebaya* over there, but I found it very ugly.

"Are you Mrs. Sjaalman?" I asked.

"With whom do I have the honor of speaking?" she asked, in a tone, I might add, that seemed to imply I should have posed my question more respectfully.

Now, I'm not fond of deference. It's different with a client, and I've been in business too long not to know how these things work. But I thought it unnecessary to stand there making a commotion on a third-floor landing. So I told her curtly that I was Mr. Droogstoppel, coffee broker, of 37 Lauriergracht, and that I wanted to speak to her husband. After all, why beat around the bush?

She pointed me to a little wicker chair and, picking up a little girl who was playing on the floor, put the child on her lap. The little boy whom I had heard singing stared right at me and examined me from head to toe. He didn't seem the least bit shy either! He was about six years old, also strangely dressed. His little wide trousers reached barely halfway down his thighs, and his little legs were naked from there down to his ankles. Very indecent, if you ask me. "You here to talk to daddy?" he asked suddenly, and I realized at once that the kid's upbringing left much to be desired, otherwise he would have addressed me more formally. But because I felt a little out of place, and I didn't mind having a chat, I replied:

"Yes, young man, I'm here to speak to your daddy. Do you think he'll come home soon?"

"I don't know. He went out, and he's looking for money to buy me a paint box." (Frits says "pastel set," but I don't. Paint is paint and not pastel.)

“Hush now,” said the woman. “Why don’t you go look at your picture books for a bit or play with the Chinese music box?”

“But you know that gentleman took all that stuff away yesterday.”

So he was disrespectful to his mother too, then, and apparently a “gentleman” had come by and “taken” everything...what a delightful visit! The woman didn’t seem to be in good spirits either: she furtively wiped her eyes as she brought the little girl over to her brother. “There,” she said, “play with Nonni for a bit.” A strange name. And he did.

“Well then, Mrs. Sjaalman,” I asked, “are you expecting your husband soon?”

“I really couldn’t tell you,” she answered.

Suddenly the little boy, who had been playing sailboats with his sister, turned his back on her and asked me:

“Sir, why do you call mama ‘missus?’”

“All right, young man,” I said, “what else should I call her?”

“Well...what other people do! The missus is downstairs. She sells tea sets and spinning tops.”

Now, *I* am a coffee broker – Last and Co., 37 Lauriergracht – and there are thirteen of us at the office, fourteen if I count Stern, who doesn’t get a salary. Even *my* wife is a “missus,” and now I was supposed to address *that* woman as “madam?” Can you imagine! People should know their place in society, and what’s more, the debt collectors had cleaned the place out just yesterday. So I thought my “missus” was just fine, and I stuck with it.

I asked why Sjaalman hadn’t asked to see me to get his packet back. She seemed to know what I was talking about, and she said that they had been abroad, in Brussels, no less. That he had worked for the *Indépendance* there, but that he hadn’t been able to stay there because his articles

often caused the paper to be confiscated at the French border. That they had been back in Amsterdam for a little while now, because Sjaalman was supposed to get a job here...

“That would be with Gaafzuiger?” I asked.

Yes, that was the one! But that hadn’t worked out, she said. Now, I knew more about this than she did. He had dropped the *Aglaia*, and he was lazy, pedantic and sickly... no wonder they’d canned him. And, she continued, he would certainly pay me a visit one of these days, and maybe he was on his way to see me right now, to ask for my response to the favor he had asked of me.

I said that Sjaalman should come by sometime, but that he shouldn’t ring the bell, because that’s so much trouble for the maid. If he waited a bit, I said, the door would open sooner or later when someone needed to go out. And then I left, and I took my Jordan almonds<sup>1</sup> with me, because, to be completely honest, I didn’t like the place at all. I didn’t feel at ease there. After all, a broker is no errand boy, and I look respectable enough, believe me. I was wearing my coat with the fur collar, but she sat there so simply and talked so calmly with her children, as if she were alone. On top of that, she looked like she had been crying, and I cannot stand dissatisfied people. And it was cold there, not cozy at all— no doubt because they’d cleaned the place out – and I do like coziness in a household. On the way home, I decided to keep Bastiaans on for a little while longer, because I don’t like turning people out on the street.

*Stern’s narrative opens with a description of the colonial administration in the Dutch East Indies, in which indigenous rulers are permitted to keep their titles but are subordinate to Dutch civil servants. These civil servants are theoretically held accountable for the actions of their Javanese counterparts, but in practice, this system encourages them to turn a blind eye to*

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<sup>1</sup> A type of confectionery traditionally given to wedding guests in the Netherlands.

*exploitation. By the time Max Havelaar arrives in the province of Lebak to take up the post of assistant resident, he is already aware that the local Adipati, or regent, is responsible for the widespread theft of livestock and exploitation of the population through forced labor. Before Stern describes these issues in more detail, he pauses to introduce Havelaar's wife, Tine.*

Stern's description of Tine, 57

I have said nothing so far about Max Havelaar and his wife – for they were the two people who had stepped down from the carriage after the resident with their child and the *baboe* – and perhaps it would be sufficient to leave the description of their appearance and character to the course of events and the readers' own imagination. Still, now that I've started describing the scene, you should know that Madam Havelaar was not beautiful, but that there was something lovely in her gaze and in her voice. The easy nonchalance of her ways showed unmistakably that she had experience of the world and that she belonged to upper-class society. She was free of that stiff and strained middle-class respectability, which saddles itself and others with emotional reticence just so it can pass as "distinguished," and she therefore paid little attention to the external appearance that some women seem to value so highly. She was a model of simplicity in her dress as well. Her travel clothes were a white muslin *baadje* with a blue *cordelière*, which I believe Europeans would call a *peignoir*. Around her neck she wore a thin silk cord strung with two small medallions, which, however, were hidden from sight by the folds before her breast. To top it off, she wore her hair *à la chinoise*, with a garland of *melatti* flowers in her *kondeh*<sup>2</sup>...thus was her toilette.

I said that she wasn't beautiful, and yet I wouldn't want you to think the opposite. I hope that you'll find her beautiful once I've had the opportunity to depict her fiery with indignation at

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<sup>2</sup> A traditional Javanese hairstyle in which the hair is worn in a bun tied with a lock of the wearer's hair rather than with a string or ribbon.

what she called the “unrecognized genius” of her revered Max, or whenever she had a feeling that her child’s wellbeing was at risk. The countenance has been called the mirror of the soul too often for anybody still to value an immobile face that has nothing to mirror because no soul is reflected in it. But *she* had a beautiful soul, and you would have to be blind not to think her face beautiful as well when her soul could be read there.

*After a number of chapters describing the difficulties that Havelaar faces in Lebak (periodically interrupted by Droogstoppel, who puts Stern’s narrative on hold to contribute several chapters of his own whenever he sees fit), Stern promises to tell the tale of “the Javanese Saïdjah.” First, however, he must provide his reader with the necessary background information to place this story in its broader context.*

#### Stern (and Droogstoppel) discuss East Indian affairs, 175-185

I’ve repeatedly spoken of the “Javanese,” and however natural this term may seem to the European reader, it will still have sounded wrong to anybody who’s familiar with Java. The western residencies of Bantam, Batavia, Preanger, Krawang and a section of Cheribon – collectively named the “Soendah lands” – are not considered to belong with Java proper, and leaving aside the immigrants from overseas in those regions, the indigenous population is indeed completely different from that of central Java and the so-called Oosthoek, or Eastern Corner. Their manner of dress, cultural character, and language are so completely different from those farther east that the Soendanees or Orang Goenoeng differs more from the true Javanese person than the English from the Dutch. Differences such as these often lead to disagreement about East Indian affairs. After all, when you consider that Java itself is already divided so sharply into two disparate

parts, even without taking into account the many subdivisions within that split, you can gauge how great the difference must be between populations that live further from each other and are even separated by the sea. Someone who knows the Dutch Indies from Java alone can no more form an accurate conception of the Malays, the Ambonese, the Bataks, the Alfuros, the Timorese, the Dayaks, the Bugis, or the Makassarese than if he had never left Europe, and to anyone who has had the opportunity to observe the differences in these populations, it is often entertaining to listen to the conversations – not to mention amusing and pathetic to read the political speeches! – of people who picked up their knowledge of East Indian affairs in Batavia or Buitenzorg. Time and again I've been amazed by the audacity with which, say, a former Governor-General, addressing Parliament, tried to lend weight to his words by a false claim of local expertise and experience. I put a high price on knowledge obtained from serious study in a library, and I've often been astounded by the breadth of expertise in East Indian affairs that some people are able to demonstrate without ever having set foot on East Indian ground. As soon as a former Governor-General shows signs of having acquired such expertise *that way*, he will be owed the respect that's the rightful reward for many years of meticulous, productive labor. He would be owed still more respect than a scholar who had fewer difficulties to overcome because he, at a great distance *without* first-hand observation, was in less danger of becoming ensnared in the errors that result from *deficient* observation, which must inevitably have befallen the former Governor-General.

I said that I was amazed by the audacity that some people display while talking about East Indies affairs. After all, they know that their words will be heard by other people besides those who believe spending a few years in Buitenzorg is sufficient to have thorough knowledge of the East Indies. Surely they must know that those words will also be read by people who personally witnessed their incompetence in the East Indies and who are as astounded as I am at the boldness

with which such a person – who so recently was struggling in vain to hide his ineptitude behind the high rank that the King bestowed on him – now suddenly talks as if he actually had some knowledge of the matters that he is dealing with.

Again and again we hear complaints about unqualified interference. Again and again one faction or another within colonial politics is attacked by denying the competence of the person who represents it, and maybe it wouldn't be a trivial idea to make a dedicated inquiry into the qualities that make a person competent to...evaluate competence. Important questions are most often judged not according to the issue at hand, but according to the value people ascribe to the opinion of the man who leads the discussion on the topic, and since this person usually passes as an "expert," preferably one who "held such a distinguished post in the East Indies," it follows that the result of a vote usually reflects the delusions that seem to cling to those "distinguished posts." If this is already the case when the influence of such expertise is exerted by a mere Member of Parliament, how great must the propensity for incorrect judgments be when that influence is paired with the trust of the King, who let himself be pressured into appointing an "expert" like this as head of his Ministry of Colonies.

It's a peculiar phenomenon – more likely than not it springs from a kind of inertia that shuns the effort of thinking things through for oneself – how readily people trust those who affect an air of superior knowledge, provided only that their knowledge is drawn from sources that are not accessible to all. Maybe it's because their self-esteem is less insulted by acknowledging that superiority than it would be if those resources were available to them as well, which would give rise to something like competition. It's easy for a Member of Parliament to abandon his convictions if the person opposing them can be thought to reach a more accurate judgment than his, provided only that such supposedly greater accuracy need not be ascribed to personal superiority – which

would be a tougher pill to swallow – but only to the exceptional circumstances in which this opponent happens to have found himself.

And leaving aside the people who “held such *high posts* in the East Indies,” it’s certainly strange how, time and time again, people give weight to the opinions of those who possess absolutely nothing that warrants it other than “memories of this or that many years spent in those regions.” It’s all the more bizarre because the same people who ascribe importance to that justification wouldn’t readily accept everything told to them about, say, the Dutch economy by everyone who could prove to have lived in the Netherlands for forty or fifty years. There are people who have spent almost as long as that in the Dutch Indies without ever coming into contact with either the locals or the indigenous rulers, and it’s a sad fact that the Council of the Indies is very often composed entirely or almost entirely of such people – that, in fact, they’ve even found ways of having the King sign the appointments to Governor-General of people who were “experts” of that kind.

When I said that to assume a newly appointed Governor-General was competent must also entail the assumption that people held him to be a genius, it was in no way my intention to promote the appointment of geniuses. Aside from the objections that there would be against leaving such a distinguished post unfilled for long stretches of time, there is yet another reason against this. A genius would be unable to work under the Ministry of Colonies and, as Governor-General, would therefore be useless...as geniuses frequently are.

Maybe it would be desirable for the main flaws that I outlined in terms of the progression of a disease to draw the attention of those who are responsible for selecting a new Governor-General. Provided, first of all, that all the candidates recommended for the post are principled and possess enough intelligence to learn, more or less, what they need to know, I consider it crucial

that they can justifiably be expected to avoid that presumptuous arrogance in the beginning and especially that apathetic lethargy in the last years of their term in office. I already pointed out that Havelaar, struggling to fulfill his duty, thought he could rely on the support of the Governor-General, and I added that his opinion was naïve. That Governor-General was awaiting his successor: tranquility in the Netherlands was close at hand!

We'll see the damage this inclination towards lassitude has done to the region of Lebak, to Havelaar, and to the Javanese boy Saïdjah, with whose monotonous tale – one among many others! – I will now proceed.

Yes, monotonous it will be! As monotonous as the story of the diligent ant who has to drag her contribution to the winter stores over a clump of sod – a mountain in her eyes – that lies on the path to the storehouse. Again and again she falls back with her burden, to test again and again whether she can finally find firm footing on that little pebble up above... on the boulder that crowns the mountain. But between her and the summit is a chasm that must be circumvented... an abyss that a thousand ants could not fill. So she, barely strong enough to drag her burden forward on even ground – a burden many times heavier than her own body – must heave it upwards and stay standing on unstable footing. She must keep her balance when she stands upright with her cargo between her front legs. She must cast it upwards at a slant so that it lands on the ledge that sticks out from the cliff face. She falters, staggers, flinches, falls... tries to grab hold of the half-uprooted tree with its leaves pointing into the abyss – a blade of grass! – she can't find the support she seeks: the tree springs back – the blade of grass gives way beneath her feet – ah, the drudge falls into the abyss with her cargo. Then she is still for a moment, a second at least, which is long in the life of an ant. Is she in a haze of pain from her fall? Or is she admitting, sorrowfully, that all her effort

was in vain? But she doesn't lose courage. Again she seizes her burden, and again she drags it upwards, only later to fall again, and again, into the abyss.

Thus is the monotony of my story. But I will not speak of ants, whose joy and suffering escape our notice through the coarseness of our senses. I will tell of people, of beings who have the same motivations that we do. It's true that those who shun compassion and wish to avoid tiring empathy will say that those people are yellow, or brown – many call them black – and for such people, the difference in color is sufficient excuse to turn their gaze away from this misery, or even if they do look down on it, to look down on it without emotion.

My tale is therefore directed only to those capable of the difficult conviction that there are hearts beating under that dark outer skin, and that a person blessed with whiteness and the accompanying comportment, noble-mindedness, knowledge of commerce and of God, virtue...might be able to apply those white qualities in a *different* way than has thus far been experienced by those who are less blessed in color of skin and virtuosity of soul.

My confidence in this compassion for the Javanese does not extend so far, however, that, with my description of the theft of the last buffalo from the *kendang*, in broad daylight, shamelessly, protected by Dutch authority...when I have the stolen bovine be followed by its owner and his weeping children...when I have the man sit down on the front steps of the thief's house, speechless and expressionless and sunk in anguish...when I have him be chased away from there with scorn and slander, with threats of corporal punishment and imprisonment in chains...see, I don't demand – nor do I expect, my Dutch countrymen! – you to be moved as greatly as you would be if I described the fate of a farmer whose cow was taken from him. I ask no tear for the tears that flow on such dark faces, nor anger when I speak of the despair of the bereaved ones. Nor do I expect

that you will rise and go to the King with my book in hand and say: “See, O King, this is happening in *your* kingdom, in your beautiful kingdom of Insulindia!”

No, no, no, I expect none of that! Too much suffering closer by lays claim to your feelings to leave you with so much feeling for something so far away! Aren’t all your nerves kept taut by the unpleasantness of electing a new Member of Parliament? Isn’t your torn soul oscillating between the world-famous merits of Nothingness A and Triviality B? And don’t you need your costly tears for more serious matters than...but what more do I have to say! Wasn’t it slack at the stock exchange yesterday, and didn’t a slight surplus threaten the coffee market with falling prices?

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“Don’t write such ridiculous things to your father, Stern!” I said, and maybe I said it a little heatedly, because I can’t stand falsehoods, that’s always been a firm principle of mine. That same evening I immediately wrote to the elder Stern that he should hurry up with his orders, and that above all he should guard himself against false reports, because coffee is doing very well.

The reader can feel what I suffered again when I heard those last chapters. I found a little solitaire game in the nursery, and from now on I’ll bring *that* with me to our soirées. Wasn’t I right when I said that Sjaalman had driven everyone crazy with his packet? Would you recognize in all that writing of Stern’s – and Frits joins in too, I’m sure of it! – young men who are being raised in a dignified household? What’s with those silly outbursts against an illness that manifests in the desire for a country estate? Is that aimed at me? Am I not allowed to go to Driebergen when Frits is a broker? And who talks about stomach trouble in the company of women and little girls? It’s a firm principle of mine always to stay composed – because I find it useful in business – but I must admit that this was often very difficult for me while listening to all that nonsense that Stern reads aloud. What could he possibly want? How will this end? When will there finally be something

decent? What do I care whether this Havelaar keeps his garden neat and whether people enter his house by the front or the back? At Busselinck & Waterman you have to go through a narrow little alleyway next to an oil warehouse, where it's always very dirty. And then that griping about the buffaloes! What do they need buffaloes for, those blacks? I've never had a buffalo, and yet I'm satisfied. Some people always complain. And as for the criticism of forced labor, you can tell that he didn't hear Reverend Wawelaar's sermon, otherwise he would know how useful that labor is for the expansion of God's kingdom. It's true, he's a Lutheran.

Oh, certainly, if I could have guessed *how* he would write the book, which is supposed to become so significant for all coffee brokers – and other people – I would rather have done it myself. But he has supporters in the Rosemeyers, who are in sugar, and that makes him so impertinent. I told him frankly – for I'm forthright in these matters – that we can do without the story of that Saïdjah, but then suddenly Lousie Rosemeyer started protesting against me. It seems that Stern told her there would be something about love in there, and little girls like her are crazy about that stuff. But I wouldn't have let myself be scared off by this, if only the Rosemeyers hadn't told me that they would like to make the acquaintance of Stern's father. Of course, that's so they can get through the father to the uncle, who's in sugar. Now if I take the side of common sense against the young Stern too forcefully, I'd give the impression that I want to keep them away from him, and that's absolutely not the case, because they're in sugar.

I really don't understand Stern's intentions with that writing of his. There are always discontented people, and does it give a good impression of him, he who enjoys the privilege of so many good things in Holland – just last week my wife made him chamomile tea – to criticize the government? Does he want to fire up the general discontentment that way? Does *he* want to become Governor-General? He's arrogant enough for it...to *want* it, I mean. I asked him that the

day before yesterday, and added frankly that his Dutch was still so deficient. “Oh, that’s no objection,” he replied. “It seems that there is rarely a Governor-General sent there who understands the language of the country.” Now, what am I supposed to do with such a smart aleck? He doesn’t have the slightest respect for my experience. When I told him last week that I had been a coffee broker for seventeen years, and had already been visiting the stock exchange for twenty years, he brought up Busselinck & Waterman, who have been brokers for eighteen years, and, he said: “They’ve got one more year of experience, then.” He got me there, because I must admit, since I love the truth, that Busselinck & Waterman don’t know much about business, and that they’re bunglers.

Marie is all mixed up too. Picture this, last week – it was her turn to read aloud at breakfast, and we were on the story of Lot – she suddenly stopped and didn’t want to keep reading. My wife, who is as devoted to religion as I am, tried to bring her over to obedience with gentleness, because it’s not proper for a virtuous little girl to be so stubborn. All in vain! Then, as a father, I had to chastise her very strictly, because with her obstinacy she was ruining the atmosphere at breakfast, which always has a bad effect on the whole day. But nothing could be done about it, and she went so far as to say that she would rather be beaten to death than keep reading. I punished her with three days confinement in her room on bread and coffee, and I hope it will do her good. To make sure this punishment leads to moral improvement at the same time, I’ve directed her to copy out the chapter that she didn’t want to read ten times, and I resorted to this strictness mostly because I’ve noticed that lately – whether it comes from Stern, I don’t know – she’s taken to using terms that strike me as dangerous to morality, to which my wife and I are especially devoted. Among other things, I heard her singing a French tune – by Béranger, I believe – in which a poor old

female beggar who sang in a theater in her youth is pitied, and yesterday she came to breakfast without a corset – Marie, I mean – which really isn't respectable.

Also, I must admit that Frits didn't bring much good home from the prayer meeting. I had been fairly satisfied with the way he sat still in church. He didn't budge and kept his eyes fixed on the pulpit, but later I found out that Betsy Rosemeyer was sitting in the baptistery right behind it. I didn't say anything about it, because one shouldn't be all too strict with young people, and the Rosemeyers are a respectable household. They gave something very generous to their oldest daughter, who is married to Bruggeman in spices, and so I believe that something like this will keep Frits away from the West Market, which greatly pleases me, because I'm so devoted to morality.

But that doesn't stop it from bothering me to see Frits's heart hardening, just like Pharaoh, who was less to blame than he is, because he didn't have a father who pointed out the right path for him so regularly, for the Scriptures don't say anything about the old Pharaoh. Reverend Wawelaar complains about his arrogance – Frits's, I mean – at catechism lessons, and the boy seems to have gotten – from Sjaalman's packet again! – a know-it-all air that is driving good-hearted Wawelaar crazy. It's pathetic how the good man, who often has coffee at our house, tries to appeal to Frits's conscience, and how the imp always has new questions ready that reveal the stubbornness of his character...all of it comes from that damnable packet of Sjaalman's! With tears of emotion on his cheeks, the diligent servant of the Evangelist tries to convince him to turn away from the wisdom of men and so to be initiated into the mysteries of God's wisdom. With gentleness and tenderness he begged him not to cast away the bread of eternal life and, so doing, to fall into the claws of Satan, who dwells with his angels in the fire prepared for him unto the ages of ages. "Oh," he said yesterday – Wawelaar I mean – "oh, young friend, simply open your eyes

and ears, and hear and see what the Lord gives you to see and hear through my lips. Consider the testimony of the saints who died for the true faith! See Saint Stephen as he sinks down under the stones that crush him! See how his gaze is still directed heavenwards, and how his tongue still sings psalms...”

“I would rather have thrown them back!” Frits said to that. Reader, what can I do with that boy?

A moment later Wawelaar began again, for he is a diligent servant and doesn’t cease from his labor. “Oh,” he said, “young friend, simply open...” The beginning was the same as just now. “But,” he continued, “can you stay unmoved when you imagine what will become of you, once you have been counted among the rams on the left-hand side...”

There the rascal burst out in laughter – Frits I mean – and Marie started laughing too. I even thought I detected something that looked like laughter on my wife’s face. But then I came to Wawelaar’s aid, I punished Frits with a fine from his piggy bank for the missionary society.

Alas, reader, all that troubles me deeply. And could anyone, in the face of *such* suffering, enjoy listening to stories about buffaloes and Javanese? What’s a buffalo compared to Frits’s salvation? What do I care about the affairs of those people far away, when I have to fear that Frits will ruin my own affairs through his lack of faith, and that he’ll never become a sound broker? For Wawelaar himself said that God directs everything in such a way that orthodoxy leads to riches. “Behold,” he said, “are there not a lot of riches in the Netherlands? That is because of faith. Is there not constantly murder and manslaughter in France? That is because they are Catholic there. Are not the Javanese poor? They’re heathens. The longer the Dutch have dealings with the Javanese, the more riches there will be here and the more poverty over there. God wills it thus!”

I'm amazed by Wawelaar's business acumen. Because it's true that I, who am meticulous when it comes to religion, see my business improving from year to year, and Busselinck & Waterman, who don't give a damn, will stay bunglers as long as they live. The Rosemeyers, too, who are in sugar and keep a Papist maid, recently had to accept 27 percent from the estate of a Jew who went bankrupt. The more I think about it, the further I come in getting to the bottom of God's unfathomable ways. Recently it turned out that another thirty million in profit had been earned from the sale of products that were delivered by those heathens, and that's not even counting what I earned on them, as well as the many others who get their livelihoods from this business. Isn't this just as if the Lord were saying: "There you go, thirty million as a reward for your faith?" Isn't this clearly the hand of God, who causes the sinner to labor, that the righteous one might be saved? Isn't this a nod to continue along the right path? To have large quantities be produced over there, and here to persevere in the true faith? Isn't that why the saying goes: "pray and work," in order that *we* should pray and let the work be done by the black ruffraff that doesn't know the "Our Father?"

Oh, how right Wawelaar is when he calls God's yoke a gentle one! How light the burden is made for everyone who has faith! I'm only in my forties, and I could get out of this racket if I wanted and go to Driebergen, and would you just look at how it ends with other people who abandoned the Lord? Yesterday I saw Sjaalman with his wife and their little boy: they looked like ghosts. He's pale as death, his eyes are bulging out of their sockets, and his cheeks are hollow. His posture is stooped, even though he's even younger than I am. She was also dressed very shoddily, and she looked like she'd been crying again. Now, I had noticed immediately that she's discontented by nature, because I only need to see a person once to make a judgment about him. That's a little something I've picked up from my experience. She was wearing a little cape of black

silk, and it was quite cold after all. There was no trace of crinoline. Her thin little dress hung limply around her knees, and there was a fringe around the hem. He wasn't even wearing his scarf anymore and looked like it was summer. Despite this, it seems that he still has some kind of pride, for he gave something to a poor woman who was sitting on the lock – Frits says: *bridge*, but anything that's made of stone and can't be raised, I call *lock* – and someone who himself has so little is sinning if he still gives to another person. Besides, I never give money on the street – that's a principle of mine – because I always say when I see poor people like that: who knows if it's not their own fault, and I can't support them on the wrong path. On Sundays I give twice: once for the poor, and once for the church. *That's* how it should be done! I don't know if Sjaalman saw me, but I walked past quickly and looked upwards, and thought about the justice of God, who after all wouldn't let him walk around like that without a winter coat if he had been more careful and weren't lazy, pedantic and sickly.

As for my book, I really must ask the reader for forgiveness for the unforgiveable way in which Stern is abusing our contract. I must admit that I'm dreading the first evening get-together and the love story of that Saïdjah. The reader already knows the healthy understanding I have about love...just think of my judgment on that little excursion to the Ganges. If young girls are into that kind of thing, I can understand it, but it's inexplicable to me that grown men listen to that kind of bilge without revulsion. I'm certain that I'll win my solitaire game at the next get-together.

I'll try not to hear anything about that Saïdjah, and I hope the man gets married quickly, if *he* is even the hero of the love story. It's just as well that Stern warned beforehand that it will be a monotonous affair. As soon as he gets started on something else later, I'll listen again. But that disapproval of the Administration annoys me almost as much as love stories. It's obvious from every detail that Stern is young and has little experience. To evaluate matters properly, you have

to see everything from close by. When I got married, I myself went to The Hague, and I visited the Mauritshuis art museum with my wife. While I was there, I came into contact with all classes of society, because I saw the Minister of Finance ride past, and we bought flannel together in the Veenestraat – my wife and I, I mean – and nowhere did I spy the slightest hint of dissatisfaction with the Government. That woman in the shop looked well-off and content, and so in 1848 when some people tried to dupe us into thinking that matters in The Hague weren't as they should be, I said my piece about that dissatisfaction at our get-together. People believed me, because everyone knew I was speaking from experience. Also, on the ride back in the stagecoach, the conductor played a cheerful song on the whistle, and the man wouldn't have done that if things were really that bad. That's how closely I was paying attention to everything, and so I immediately knew what to think of all that grumbling in 1848.

A woman lives across from us whose nephew runs a *toko* in the East, which is what they call a shop there. If things were really going as badly as Stern says, she would know something about it too, and yet it seems the woman is very satisfied with all that business, because I never hear her complaining. On the contrary, she says her nephew lives on an estate there, and that he's on a church council, and that he sent her a cigar case made with peacock feathers, which he had made himself out of bamboo. All that shows clearly how unfounded that grouching about bad governance is. From that, you can also tell that there's plenty to be earned in that place by someone who uses common sense, and therefore that Sjaalman was lazy, pedantic and sickly over there too, otherwise he wouldn't have come home so poor and be walking around here without a winter coat. And the nephew of the woman across from us isn't the only one who made his fortune in the East. In the Polen café I see a lot of folks who have been over there and are really dressed to the nines. But it doesn't need to be said twice, you have to watch out for your business affairs, over there just

the same as here. On Java nothing will be thrown in your lap: the work has to get done! And whoever isn't willing to do *that* is poor and stays poor, that goes without saying.

*Stern tells the tragic story of Saïdjah and Adinda, two lovers whose families are reduced to poverty after the regent's relatives illegally take away their water buffaloes. Saïdjah is separated from Adinda and joins a rebel group to search for her, only to find her body moments after she has been killed by Dutch soldiers. Incensed, Saïdjah runs onto the soldiers' bayonets and dies near Adinda's corpse. The narrative focus then returns to Lebak, where Havelaar discovers that his predecessor was poisoned for trying to enact the same reforms that he himself is striving for. Havelaar writes to his direct superior, the resident of Bantam (the larger administrative region in which Lebak is located), officially accusing the Adipati of abuse of power and calling for his arrest. Before Stern can fully describe the response to Havelaar's letter, Droogstoppel interrupts.*

#### Droogstoppel goes back to Sjaalman's house, 211-213

That Sjaalman is a dirty good-for-nothing! Here's the thing, reader, Bastiaans has frequently not been coming into work again because of his gout. Since I consider it a matter of conscience not to squander the funds of the company— Last and Co. — for I'm unwavering in my principles, it occurred to me the day before yesterday that Sjaalman has pretty good handwriting, and since he looks so hard up and therefore could probably be gotten for a modest wage, I realized that it's my duty to the company to arrange Bastiaans's replacement in the cheapest way possible. So I went to the Lange Leidse Dwarsstraat. The saleslady was in the front of the shop, but she didn't seem to recognize me, even though I had told her very clearly that I was Mr. *Droogstoppel*, the *coffee broker*, of *Lauriergracht*. It always feels a little jarring not to be recognized, but since it

hasn't been too cold lately and last time I was wearing my coat with the fur collar, I chalked it up to that and brushed it off – the insult, I mean. So I repeated that I was Mr. *Droogstoppel*, the *coffee broker of Lauriergracht*, and asked her to go see if that Sjaalman was home, because I didn't want to run into that perpetually dissatisfied wife of his like I did recently. But the huckster refused to go upstairs. She said she couldn't spend the whole day climbing the stairs for those freeloaders, I should go look for myself. And then came the whole spiel about the stairs and the landings, which I really didn't need to hear, since I always recognize a place where I've been before, because I pay such close attention to everything. That's a little something I picked up in business. So I climbed the stairs and knocked on the familiar door, which swung open. I went inside, and since I found nobody in the room, I took a look around. It's not as if there was much to see. A pair of short trousers with an embroidered strip was hanging over a chair...what do people like that need to wear embroidered trousers for, anyway? In a corner stood a fairly lightweight suitcase which I mentally sized up by the handle, and there were several books on the mantelpiece that I briefly flipped through. What an incredible collection! A few volumes of Byron, Horace, Bastiat, Béranger, and... guess what? A Bible, a complete Bible, with the Apocrypha in it! I certainly hadn't expected *that* from Sjaalman. And it seemed like it had been read, too: I found loose sheets of paper with many notes that had to do with Scripture. He says that Eve came into the world twice...the man is crazy! Now, everything was in the same handwriting as the pieces in that damned packet. He seemed to have studied the book of Job, in particular, very diligently, because it fell open to those pages. I think he's starting to feel the hand of the Lord and wants to reconcile himself with God by studying the holy books. I have nothing against that. But while I was waiting, my eye fell on a sewing basket that stood on the table. I had a look through it, not expecting to find much. It contained a few half-finished children's stockings and a number of ridiculous verses. Also

a letter to Sjaalman's wife, as I learned from the address. The letter had been opened, and it looked like someone had crumpled it up in a rage. Now, it's an unwavering principle of mine never to read anything that's not addressed to me, because I don't find it respectable. So I never do it if I have nothing to gain by it. But at that moment I had a hunch that it was my duty to take a look at that letter, because its contents might enlighten me as to the philanthropic intentions that were leading me to Sjaalman. I thought of how the Lord is never far from His chosen ones, since He had presented me with this unexpected opportunity to learn a little more about this man and He was thereby shielding me from the risk of performing a good deed for an immoral person. I pay close attention to such indications from the Lord, and this has often been a great help to me in business. To my great wonderment I saw that Sjaalman's wife came from a genteel family, that is, the letter was signed by a blood relative with a considerable reputation in the Netherlands, and I was elated to read the wonderful contents of that piece of writing. The writer seemed to be someone who diligently serves the Lord, for he wrote that Sjaalman's wife should get a divorce from that wretch, who was allowing her to suffer poverty, who couldn't earn his own bread, and who in addition was a scoundrel, since he had debts; that the writer of the letter was deeply concerned about what would become of her, even though she had brought it upon herself by abandoning the Lord and clinging to Sjaalman; that she must return to the Lord, and that then, perhaps, the whole family would work together to procure sewing for her to do. But first of all she had to divorce Sjaalman, who was truly a disgrace to the family.

In short, not even in church could you find more encouragement than in that letter.

I knew enough, and I was grateful that I had been forewarned in such a miraculous way. Without this warning I would certainly have fallen victim yet again to my goodheartedness. So I decided one more time to keep Bastiaans around until I found a suitable replacement, because I

don't like turning people out on the street, and we can't do without a clerk just now, with so much going on.

*Droogstoppel tells his reader that he did not attend the soirée at which Stern's most recent chapters were read. Instead, he visited an acquaintance who made his fortune in the East Indies and who confirmed Droogstoppel's preconceived notions regarding the colonies. Stern resumes his story and describes the resident's response to Havelaar's accusation. Resident Slijmering refuses to discuss the matter in official correspondence, writing instead as a private citizen. He later visits Havelaar and asks him to retract his previous statements. Instead, Havelaar stakes his career on his accusation.*

#### Max and Tine at home in Lebak, 225-227

It was evening. Tine was reading on the sunporch, and Havelaar was drawing an embroidery pattern. Little Max was skillfully putting together a jigsaw puzzle and was working up a temper because he couldn't find "that lady's red body."

"Is it better like *that*, Tine?" Havelaar asked. "Look, I made the palm branch a little bigger... Now it's exactly Hogarth's 'line of beauty,' don't you think?"

"Yes, Max! But those eyelets are too close to one another."

"Really? And those other strips, then? Max, let me take a look at your trousers! What, are you wearing *that* strip? Oh, I still remember where you embroidered that one, Tine!"

"I don't. Where, then?"

“It was in The Hague, when Max was sick and we had had such a fright because the doctor said that he had such an unusually shaped head, and that so much care was needed to prevent pressure on his brain. It’s precisely in those days that you were working on that strip.”

Tine got up and kissed the little one.

“I got her tummy, I got her tummy!” the child called out cheerfully, and the red lady was complete.

“Who can hear the *tontong* striking?” the mother asked.

“Me,” said little Max.

“And what does that mean?”

“Bedtime! But...I haven’t eaten yet.”

“You’ll get dinner first, of course.”

And she got up and gave him his simple meal that she seemed to have taken out of a well-locked cupboard in her bedroom, for the turning of several locks had been audible.

“What’s that you’re giving him?” Havelaar asked.

“Oh, don’t worry, Max; it’s rusks out of a tin from Batavia! And the sugar’s been under lock and key the whole time too.”

Havelaar’s thoughts returned to the point at which they had been interrupted.

“Do you realize,” he continued, “that we still haven’t paid that doctor’s bill...oh, it’s awful!”

“Dear Max, we live so frugally here, soon we’ll be able to pay everything off! And besides, you’re sure to become a resident soon, and then it will all be taken care of in no time.”

“That’s just exactly the thing that saddens me,” said Havelaar. “I would be so loath to leave Lebak... I’ll explain it to you. Don’t you think that we loved our Max all the more after his illness? Well, that’s just how I’ll love poor Lebak after it’s cured of the cancer it’s been suffering from for

so many years. The thought of a promotion scares me: they can't do without me here, Tine! And yet, on the other hand, when I consider that we have debts..."

"Everything will be fine, Max! Even if you did have to leave now, you can always help Lebak later when you're Governor-General."

Wild lines appeared in Havelaar's embroidery pattern! There was wrath in those blossoms, the eyelets became angular, jagged, they bit into each other...

Tine realized that she had said something wrong.

"Dear Max..." she began, in a friendly tone.

"Damn it! Do you want those wretches to starve for so long? Can you survive on *sand*?"

"Dear Max!"

But he jumped up. There would be no more sketching that evening. He paced angrily up and down the inner gallery, and finally he spoke in a tone that would have sounded rough and harsh to any stranger, but that Tine understood very differently:

"Damn their apathy, their shameful apathy! Here I've been sitting around for a month waiting for justice to be done, and meanwhile those poor people are suffering terribly. The Regent seems to be betting that nobody will dare take him on! Take a look..."

He went into his study and came back with a letter in his hand, a letter that lies here before me, reader!

"Look, in this letter he dares to propose what *type* of labor he wants to have done by the people he's mobilized illegally. Isn't this shamelessness being pushed too far? And do you know who those people are? They're women with small children, with infants, pregnant women who were driven from Parang-Koedjang to the capital to work for *him*! There are no more men! And

they have nothing to eat, and they sleep by the side of the road, and they eat sand! Can *you* eat sand? Are they supposed to eat sand until I'm Governor-General? Damn it!"

Tine knew perfectly well who was the real object of Max's anger when he spoke like this to the person he loved so much.

"And," Havelaar continued, "all that is happening under *my* responsibility! If any of those poor souls are wandering around out there at this very moment... if they see the glow of our lamps, they'll say, 'There lives the scoundrel who was supposed to protect us! He sits there calmly with his wife and child, and sketches his little embroidery patterns, and we lie out here like feral dogs by the roadside, starving to death with our children!' Yes, I hear it, I hear it, the call for vengeance on my head! Here, Max, come here!"

And he kissed his child with a ferocity that frightened the boy.

"My child, if they tell you someday that I'm a scoundrel who didn't have the courage to act justly...that so many mothers died because of me...if they tell you that your father's neglect of duty stole the blessing from upon your head...oh Max, oh Max, bear witness to my suffering!"

*Havelaar is dismissed from his post, but he is offered the position of assistant resident in another district. Knowing that conditions there are similar to those in Lebak and that efforts towards reform will again be futile, he resigns from the civil service. The family travels to Batavia in preparation for their return to the Netherlands, and Havelaar repeatedly seeks an audience with the Governor-General to plead his case.*

The completion of the *poesaka*, 234-237

Havelaar waited that evening. He waited the whole night.

He had hoped that perhaps agitation about the tone of his letter would accomplish what he had tried in vain to achieve through gentleness and patience. His hope was futile! The Governor-General departed without having heard Havelaar. Another Excellency had gone to rest in the motherland!

Havelaar wandered around, poor and abandoned. He sought...

Enough, my good Stern! I, Multatuli, take up the pen. You were not called to write Havelaar's life history. I called you into being...I had you come from Hamburg...I taught you to write fairly good Dutch, in a very short time...I had you kiss Louise Rosemeyer, who is in sugar...that's enough, Stern, you can go!

\*

That Sjaalman and his wife...

Halt, miserable product of foul covetousness and blasphemous false piety! I created you...you have grown into a monster under my pen...I am disgusted by my own creation: choke on coffee and begone!

\*

Yes, I, Multatuli "who have suffered much" take up the pen. I ask no forgiveness for the form of my book. That form struck me as suitable for achieving my goal.

This goal consists of two parts:

I wanted, in the first place, to bring into existence something that can be preserved as a holy *poesaka* by little Max and his sister, once their parents have died of misery.

I wanted to give those children a proof of nobility from my own hand.

And in the second place: *I want to be read.*

Yes, I want to be read! I want to be read by politicians, who are required to pay attention to the signs of the times...by literary scholars, who after all have to take a look through the book that people are saying so many wicked things about...by merchants, who have a vested interest in the coffee auctions...by chambermaids, who rent me out for a few cents...by Governors-General at rest...by Ministers in busy times...by the lackeys of those Excellencies...by preachers, who will say *more majorum* that I am insulting Almighty God, when I am only standing up against the little god that *they* have made in their image...by thousands and tens of thousands of specimens from the race of Droogstoppels, who – continuing to tend to their little affairs in a manner that is well known – will shout along the loudest about the beauty of my writing...by the members of Parliament, who have to know what is happening in that great Kingdom across the ocean that belongs to the Kingdom of the Netherlands...

Yes, I *will* be read!

If this goal is achieved, I will be satisfied. For I didn't care about writing *well*...I wanted to write in such a way that it would be heard. And, just as someone who yells "Stop, thief!" has little concern for the style of his improvised appeal to the public, it means nothing to me how people will judge the manner in which I have shouted *my* "Stop, thief!"

"The book is a hodgepodge...there's no build-up...hunting after effect...the style is bad...the writer is unqualified...no talent...no method..."

Fine, fine, all fine! But...THE JAVANESE ARE BEING MISTREATED!

For: *denial of the MAIN POINT of my work is impossible!*

What's more, the louder the disapproval of my book, the happier I'll be, for the greater the chance of *being heard*. And this is what I *want!*

But you, whom I disturb in your “busy times” or your “rest,” you Ministers and Governors-General, don’t count too heavily on the inexperience of my pen. It could train itself and, with some effort, perhaps reach a level of skill that would finally even get the truth to be believed by the People! Then I would ask that People for a place in Parliament, if only to protest against the certificates of integrity that Dutch Indies experts hand out to each other, perhaps to bring others around to the strange perception that they themselves value that quality...

To protest against the endless expeditions and acts of heroism against poor miserable beings who, in advance, were forced by abuse to rebel.

To protest against the shameful cowardice of pamphlets that stain the honor of the Nation by calling for *public charity* for the victims of *chronic piracy*.

It’s true, those rebels were starved skeletons, and the sea pirates are able-bodied men!

And if they denied me that place...if they continued *not* to believe me...

Then I would translate my book into the few languages I know, and the many languages that I can learn, to ask of Europe what I would have sought in vain in the Netherlands.

And in all the capitals, songs would be sung with refrains such as this: *a pirate state lies on the coast, between East Frisia and the Scheldt!*

And if this too were to no avail?

Then I would translate my book into *Malay, Javanese, Sundanese, Alfur, Buginese, Batak...*

And I would hurl *klewang*-sharpening war songs into the hearts of the poor martyrs to whom I promised help, I, Multatuli.

Salvation and help, through lawful channels, where it is *possible*...through legitimate channels of violence, where it is *necessary*.

And *this would work out very badly for the* Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company!

For I am no poet who saves flies, no soft-hearted dreamer, like the downtrodden Havelaar, who did his duty with the courage of a lion, and suffers hunger with the patience of a marmot in the winter.

This book is an introduction...

I will grow in power and keenness of weapons as needed...

God grant that it not be needed!

No, it *will* not be needed! For I dedicate my book to *you*, Willem the Third, King, Grand Duke, Prince...more than Prince, Grand Duke and King...EMPEROR of the magnificent kingdom of INSULINDIA that casts itself around the equator like a garland of emeralds...

To you I dare ask with confidence whether it is your imperial will:

That Havelaar is spattered with the mud of *Slijmerings* and *Droogstoppels*?

And that over there your more than *thirty million* subjects are MISTREATED AND BLED DRY IN *YOUR* NAME?

### *Max Havelaar as Pastiche*

Gijsbert van Es's modernization is just one of multiple adaptations that *Max Havelaar* has inspired in recent years. Following a trend begun by *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, Martijn Adelmund published *Max Havelaar met Zombies (Max Havelaar with Zombies)* in 2016, adhering to the general structure of Multatuli's work but giving Havelaar the role of zombie hunter as well as assistant resident of Lebak. Adelmund further departed from the original text by including excerpts from Louis Couperus's 1900 novel *De Stille Kracht (The Hidden Force)*, which is set on Java, apparently to provide convincing background detail for his zombie scenes. These changes are minor, however, compared to the 2017 work *Pax Havelaar, of het Theeleuten der Nederlandse Handel- en Wandelmaatschappij (Pax Havelaar, or the Tea Drinking of the Dutch Trading and Strolling Company)*; "theeleuten" also connotes wasting time on idle conversation rather than taking action). *Pax Havelaar* purports to be a "pastiche" of *Max Havelaar* and uses a similar two-narrator framework, but retains almost none of Multatuli's actual writing on the sentence level. Although the original text from 1860 is almost imperceptible behind the façade of *Pax Havelaar*, a comparison of the two novels reveals how carefully Multatuli designed his *poesaka*, particularly with regard to his use of the play-element in leading the reader to his own conclusions.

Written by Chris van de Ven under the pseudonym Multaboni, *Pax Havelaar* tells the origin story of HOPE XXL (Human Odyssey of People's Elevation, a name created purely to fit the predetermined acronym), an organization Van de Ven founded in the Netherlands to promote global welfare. Droogstoppel is replaced by Gerardus Gortstro, a high-ranking member of a fictional political party called the Partij voor Chronisch Verongelijken (Party for the Chronically Wronged). Gortstro's intern, Menens Nova, becomes interested in HOPE XXL and decides to write a book about the organization with Gortstro's support. Nova deliberately models his work

on *Max Havelaar* and chooses the name “Pax” for his protagonist, while Gortstro, who insists that he has never read or even heard of *Max Havelaar*, refers to him as “Petmans.” The two narrators are represented by different fonts, and both their stories are interspersed with pieces previously published by HOPE XXL, which are printed on a darker background.

According to a short introduction, *Pax Havelaar* was created with the approval of the Multatuli Genootschap (Society): “A sequel to *Max Havelaar*! What a nerve. 156 years after its publication, now a pastiche... But this time warmly recommended by the Multatuli Society, because the ideology of Eduard Douwes Dekker is translated into concrete action plans that make society better” (Van de Ven). The book is bound back to back with Gijsbert van Es’s modernized version of *Max Havelaar*, so that readers can choose to open the volume at either the front or the back cover. Whatever they choose, they first encounter a “leesinstructie” or “reading directive” (signed “Multaboni”) with directions for reading the two books, pointing out that “chronologically it is preferable to start with *Max Havelaar*” and claiming that “*Pax Havelaar* is, like *Max Havelaar*, not a novel. What it is, then, you’ll just have to judge for yourself. Either way, it is clear that both books want to be *read*” (Van de Ven 5).

Van de Ven goes to great lengths to emphasize this alleged similarity between his book and Multatuli’s, starting with his choice of cover illustration. *Max Havelaar*’s cover bears a famous photograph of Multatuli; *Pax Havelaar* has the same picture, but with Van de Ven’s face photoshopped onto Multatuli’s head, to somewhat macrocephalic effect. (*De Volkskrant* seemed to question this design choice in a 2017 article entitled “*Max Havelaar*: Nog Altijd een Relevante Boekomslag (*Max Havelaar*: Still a Relevant Book Cover).”) This is merely the beginning of Van de Ven’s desire to be seen almost as Multatuli’s rightful heir, however. Between 1862 and 1877, Multatuli published seven volumes called *Ideeën (Ideas)*, collections of mostly short texts

numbered up to 1282. The *Ideeën* largely concerned social criticism, and early versions may have been the real-world inspiration for Sjaalman's packet. Van de Ven's personal website, multaboni.nl, features a section called "Ideeën" where Van de Ven publishes his own thoughts on a variety of issues; he begins with number 1283.

It quickly becomes apparent that *Pax Havelaar* is modeled more closely on the 2010 edition than on Multatuli's original, with far-reaching consequences for the reading experience. Like Van Es's *Max Havelaar*, *Pax Havelaar* includes short summaries at the beginning of each chapter that are designed to help the reader interpret the text "correctly." For instance, Van Es introduces the play in the book's prologue by explaining that "through this, the author wants to express that he feels he has been unjustly condemned" – this before the reader has even had a chance to look at the play, which appears two pages later. Likewise, Gortstro's first chapter is introduced as follows: "Gerardus Gortstro, a swindler, announces that he is going to write a book. He is self-obsessed and wants to make a weighty impression. Therefore writes exaggeratedly in a flawed, archaic style" (Van de Ven 13). This seems to indicate Van de Ven's intentions rather than what he has actually achieved; after the first few pages, in which the old-fashioned "ge" is used as a second person pronoun a small number of times, there is nothing archaic about Gortstro's writing. (Whether it is flawed is another question; in any case, his, and Van de Ven's, idiosyncratic use of punctuation often leads to confusion.)

More importantly, supposedly helpful explanations such as the one above simply tell readers how they should interpret the text without giving them the chance to do so for themselves, directly undermining the central role of the reader in Multatuli's work. Van Es introduces the first chapter by saying "Droogstoppel whines and complains," even though the reader first encounters Droogstoppel as an odd but harmless coffee merchant whose tirades are more amusing than

offensive (Van Es 21). Similarly, Van Es's introduction to the seventh chapter, when the reader still knows very little about Havelaar's situation, needlessly divulges that "between the lines, it can already be read that Havelaar is about to enter a strenuous time" (83). The fact that this might have been left "between the lines" for a reason apparently escapes Van Es, whose chapter captions are clearly influenced by his knowledge of how the book will end. As described above, however, a key feature of Multatuli's text is his use of multiple in-text "readers" to manipulate the actual reader's sentiments. Multatuli is able to do this successfully precisely by avoiding the appearance that he is steering the reader towards a particular side, instead waiting for readers to come to the inevitable "correct" conclusion on their own. This is the exact opposite of the approach taken by Van Es, who makes his opinions clear from the beginning.

*Pax Havelaar* compounds this error through the lack of subtlety with which it seeks to reproduce elements of Multatuli's text. For example, Droogstoppel occasionally includes side remarks in parentheses about synonyms that Frits would have used at certain points in the text, usually accompanied by "but I do not do this." Van de Ven's Gortstro includes such comments many times more frequently (sometimes multiple times per page) and in places that make far less sense. At one point, after using the word "lichaam," he explains that "mijn zoon zegt 'body'" ("my son says 'body'"), something that no Dutch speaker would actually say. Later, Gortstro makes a confession to his reader: "I have not told you this yet and I love my son very much, but the fact that he continually thinks he has to complement me, by contributing an equivalent in English, is awfully annoying" (Van de Ven 155). He has decided to keep these additions in the text, however, to lend it an air of authority: "It's because it comes across as clever to use a difficult word or an English term every now and then that I've roped him in to give MY book a sound character:

otherwise I would leave it out.” A humorous detail in Droogstoppel’s writing thus becomes absurd and distracting when employed by Gortstro.

Whereas *Max Havelaar* allows the reader to piece together a picture of Droogstoppel’s hypocrisy from comments that he absentmindedly lets slip, *Pax Havelaar* places less trust in the reader’s interpretive ability, and the descriptions of Gortstro’s character are as heavy-handed as his writing. Gortstro describes his party’s platform as “it’s never acceptable or it’s not proper and that’s other people’s fault,” and he agrees to help write a book because “something in book format is pretty new in our party, where barely anyone ever reads anything and this novelty would reflect back on me” (18, 19). Finally, even the pseudonym Multaboni, which Van de Ven translates as “veel goeds” (“much good(ness)”), is a failed attempt to mimic Multatuli with grammatically nonsensical Latin.

Despite being explicitly modeled on *Max Havelaar*, Van de Ven’s book violates some of the most basic structural elements of Multatuli’s work. For instance, Gortstro includes a number of anecdotes about Petmans that he himself did not witness, giving the impression that he sometimes acts as an omniscient narrator. Writing about Multatuli’s *Max Havelaar*, Sötemann notes that Droogstoppel’s account of Havelaar’s fight with a Greek salesman is written in an unusually dramatic style and is therefore not in character. The style of this passage, however, was a conscious choice on Multatuli’s part to accommodate the “explicable need to create a contrast that is as dramatic as possible” (Sötemann 73). Droogstoppel does not actually claim (at least in this passage) to have knowledge of events at which he was not present. Gortstro’s anecdotes, on the other hand, seem to be an oversight on the part of Van de Ven, an impression that is supported by Gortstro’s occasional use of “Pax” or “Havelaar” to refer to the man he knows as Petmans (something that Droogstoppel never does for Sjaalman). Similarly, Van de Ven seems to forget

that he is ostensibly writing as Multaboni in his conclusion, telling the reader: “Reproach me for calling HOPE XXL a WE-project and writing a book all about myself. I, who present myself as Petmans, Pax Havelaar and Multaboni” (Van de Ven 224). This may be due to a rushed writing and editing process; Van de Ven claims in his introduction that his book was written in twenty days, possibly in an attempt to rival the single month that it took Multatuli to write *Max Havelaar*. The result, however, is a complete lack of separation between Gortstro’s and Nova’s sections and the collapsing of the Pax-Petmans-Multaboni character into a single person, with no hint of the original *poesaka* structure.

Van de Ven does maintain the idea of the two-part goal that Multatuli introduces at the end of his book, writing that he wants in the first place to preserve the history of HOPE XXL and in the second place to be read. Yet he fails to notice that Multatuli’s two questions to the king are designed to reflect the two parts of his goal, which are distinct from each other even though they have become intertwined. Van de Ven (addressing “Willem de Vierde,” the current King Willem-Alexander, rather than Willem de Derde of Multatuli’s time) instead conflates his two aims, maintaining the basic sentence structure of Multatuli’s conclusion but asking what is fundamentally only a single question:

“To you I dare ask with confidence whether it is your imperial will:  
That Havelaar is spattered with the mud of *Slijmerings* and *Droogstoppels*?  
And that over there your more than *thirty million* subjects are MISTREATED AND BLED  
DRY IN *YOUR NAME*?” (Multatuli 237)

To you I dare ask with confidence whether it is your imperial will: that which your father already saw so much earlier than all of us together: to ensure that every inhabitant on this vulnerable sapphire has it good. And *therefore* that everywhere in the world, more than nine billion people, at the end of this century, evaluate their wellbeing with an 8. (Van de Ven 225, emphasis mine)

These closing sentences highlight the essential flaw in Van de Ven's book: in trying to mimic Multatuli (via Van Es) on the level of character names and sentences, he has overlooked the broader structure that makes the book's message so effective.

Whatever its own merits, *Pax Havelaar* demonstrates clearly how crucial the play-element is for the success of *Max Havelaar*. Multatuli's book presents the reader with Droogstoppel's play-world, which is later found to contain a "play-world" of Stern's creation. It is through the contradictory opinions of the two narrators that the reader is eventually led to agree with Stern's version of the story (and therefore with Multatuli's argument at the book's conclusion). In *Pax Havelaar*, on the other hand, Gortstro's play-world is presented so clumsily that it is almost impossible for the reader to play along. Meanwhile, Nova narrates only a small portion of the book, and far from creating an entertaining "play-world" within Gortstro's, his sections are presented as basic records of facts regarding HOPE XXL's creation. Douwes Dekker's own comment, cited above, that "nobody takes the trouble to read official correspondence" comes to mind at the sight of the long list of HOPE XXL publications that make up the bulk of Nova's passages. These sections also contain no commentary by a first-person narrator or direct speech among the characters, and all characters besides "Pax" are introduced by their real names, including a number of well-known Dutch politicians and celebrities. The reader cannot possibly play along with Nova's account, given that it contains no play-element at all and makes no efforts to mask its connections to an everyday reality beyond the limits of the novel.

Ultimately, the fundamental difference between the two books is identified within the texts themselves. *Max Havelaar*'s very nature as a *poesaka* places it in a tradition that relies on the physical integrity of material objects to ensure intergenerational continuity. While a written text is not a typical example of a *poesaka*, Multatuli's novel succeeds in bringing together disparate

elements that speak to each other in such a way that they are eventually able to speak as one. Like a piece of woven and dyed *batik* or a damascened *kris*, Multatuli's text is stable enough to withstand scrutiny and the passage of time. *Pax Havelaar*, on the other hand, is almost proudly identified as a *pastiche*, a word that has its roots in the mash used to fill pies or other baked goods in medieval times. A *pastiche* can thus refer not only to an artist's imitation of another's work (even rising to the level of a forgery), but also to an object that deceives the viewer on the surface level: its outer shell appears structurally sound, but closer inspection reveals that the contents are nothing but stuffing, devoid of the expected organization or integrity. In appropriating *Max Havelaar* for his own purposes, Van de Ven failed to recognize, let alone reproduce, the text's identity as a *poesaka*. Multatuli's work is a construction, carefully designed to be passed down to his children and future descendants; Van de Ven's is a concoction that attempts to give itself credibility by usurping the scaffolding that Multatuli built.

Within Multatuli's narrative, Stern addresses the issue of construction many times, wondering aloud how best to compose his text to achieve his intended effect. At one point, he seems to despair of attaining his goal, comparing his own lack of experience with Havelaar's rhetorical skill (Multatuli 171-2):

If I could write like he could, I would write *differently* than he did.

Style? Did you hear how he addressed the Chieftains? What good did it do him?

If I could speak like he could, I would speak *differently* than he did. [...]

So if I want to be heard – and above all understood! – I must write *differently* than he would. But *how*, then?

You see, reader, I am seeking the answer to that *how?* and that is why my book has such an eclectic appearance. It is a collection of swatches: make your selection. Later I'll give you yellow or blue or red according to your wish.

It is this constant search for the “how” behind the text, the constant awareness that a sacred and deeply personal object demands careful – even loving – attention to detail, that allowed Multatuli to create a work that has retained its power over readers even a century and a half after it was written. Van de Ven, on the other hand, bypassed this essential step, apparently assuming that inserting his own words into the outer shell of *Max Havelaar* would raise them to the level of Multatuli’s writing. This approach, of course, failed for multiple reasons. Firstly, a *poesaka* is a fiercely individual creation, one that cannot be appropriated on behalf of a family or community for which it was not intended. Moreover, Van de Ven’s message, and particularly his twenty-first century audience, are not the same as Multatuli’s, and the “how” of Multatuli’s work is simply not suited to Van de Ven’s purposes. Given that Van de Ven himself refused to make the effort to determine the optimal form for his novel and construct it accordingly, he can hardly expect his readers to make the effort to engage with it the way they would naturally engage with Multatuli’s *poesaka*.

The task of the translator is to answer the question of “how” as well, this time when transforming the text from one language to another. In much the same way that simply filling Multatuli’s scaffolding with new words does not create a coherent text, mechanically replacing each Dutch word with an English equivalent would fail to replicate the intricacies that give *Max Havelaar* its structural integrity. Moreover, to translate *Max Havelaar* in such a literal, rather than literary, way would be to disregard the translator’s responsibility to the work as a complex, challenging whole. However vehemently Multatuli may have insisted that “I didn’t care about writing *well*...I wanted to write in such a way that it would be heard,” his work is far from a “collection of swatches” from which readers can make their own selections. As Douwes Dekker’s letters to his wife show, he cared deeply about the form his book would take and the response he

hoped his audience would have to it. The translator's responsibility, then, is to ensure that the text continues to evoke that response in its new language. Individual translators will answer the question of "how" differently, but provided that their approaches preserve the tightly interwoven design of Multatuli's text, *Max Havelaar* will continue to draw readers into its *poesaka* structure across linguistic and temporal boundaries.

### **Appendix A: Interview with Gijsbert van Es**

*Translated from Dutch and edited for length and clarity.*

**There have already been modernizations made of other books from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example of *Sara Burgerhart* in 1902. Would you potentially be interested in modernizations of other books?**

No, no – well, I would certainly approve of it, but I wouldn't do it myself. Personally I was also inspired by the contents of *Max Havelaar*. It's a book against exploitation, a book against slavery – *Max Havelaar* is a fair trade certification mark as well – and the book is a pamphlet, right? It's literature, but at the end Multatuli himself writes that it was a protest against abuse of power. What was important to me was mostly the historical significance and the still relevant significance, and not as much the literary significance. I think that it's for real writers, shall I say, real scholars of literature, to modernize literature. I mostly modernized the pamphlet *Max Havelaar*, if you could make that distinction.

**I also wanted to ask you about the process of modernization. For example, in the original version, there are lots of poems and footnotes. Why did you decide to take those away?**

The footnotes made it complicated, I thought, because those have to do with an argument with the writer Van Lennep. [...] My son was sixteen at the time, about the age of 4, 5 vwo [10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> grade in the US]. He was also sort of my gauge, you could say, my reader, so I also especially wanted him to read the book. So I just left the footnotes out. That poem – did I leave out poems? I really don't remember anymore.

**Yes, there were some poems in French and German in the original version.**

Okay, okay. I mean, it's ten years ago now.

**How long would you say that you spent on the whole project?**

I think over half a year, nine months.

**Did you personally come back to it often after modernizing it to adjust or improve things?**

No. I did get feedback with corrections a few times, but that would be about a word. Somewhere I once made a relative pronoun refer to a person and it was supposed to be something else. No, I didn't really work much more on it.

**You said that your son was your gauge for this. How did you decide to modernize certain things and to change certain words and to leave other things unchanged?**

Fun question! I was aware that I was looking for a kind of balancing act. On the one hand I wanted to do right by Multatuli's language from 1859, on the other hand I wanted to modernize. I constantly looked for words that in my eyes – I mean when I had to think about it, of course it doesn't apply to all words, but every now and then I thought: Multatuli's word isn't so easy to understand, but I do have to choose a synonym that doesn't feel all too modern. So I looked for a kind of timeless Dutch. Whether I did a good job of that, that's for the real experts to decide. But I did always keep saying this, at the end of the book there's the famous sentence: "I wasn't concerned with writing beautifully, I wanted to write in such a way that I would be heard, the Javanese are mistreated." So I also didn't worry too much about whether it all turned out so precisely. I was more concerned with being heard, or with my modernization being heard.

**Now that we have this modernization and lots of secondary school students read your modernization instead of the original version, would you still encourage secondary school students to go back and also read the original version after your modernization?**

Yes, I would find that ideal. [...] I've also been sharply criticized for making a modernization, because I had raped a masterpiece. But I mean, it's not a painting and I didn't grab a brush to go make a mess all over a Rembrandt. The "real thing" can just exist next to the modernization. The real *Max Havelaar* is obviously a monument, a monument of literature, a monument in Dutch history. The modernization is just the diet version with great respect for the real work. Let me give another example. You can also ask yourself what you prefer, that either the modernization or the original is read more. I think by now, in the past ten years, that the modernization has really been read many times more often and by much younger people than the original. Then I have to think back to an evening that I was able to exchange ideas with Dutch teachers at the university in Leiden, they have a kind of reunion at the university a few times a year, and there I found myself taking considerable fire from Dutch teachers, in a very nice way, though. Some of the Dutch teachers were yelling very loudly stuff like "you shouldn't have done that, and if you had to do it, you should have let yourself be guided by Dutch language experts, you can't just randomly start a modernization like that." Then there was another Dutch teacher who said: "People, stop whining already." And she said that she had just been on a school trip, a trip to Rome, with all her students, and she had seen my modernization lying on the beds of at least three students. She said that that had never happened to her in twenty years as a teacher, that *Max Havelaar* was lying on a student's bed. Those are all examples of a fun confrontation between the real book and the modernization.

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