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Searching for *Max Havelaar*: Multatuli, Colonial History, and the Confusion of Empire



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Must everything in modern Dutch literature begin and end with Multatuli?¹ So much has been written on Multatuli and his work, and so many different things have been attributed to his influence, that his presence in modern Dutch literary history nearly overwhelms both his contemporaries and those who have followed after. Only a decade or so after his death, Multatuli's novel on Dutch colonial rule in the Netherlands Indies, *Max Havelaar*, had become nearly required reading and something like a badge of identification for both radical and mainstream political groups in the Netherlands.² Gerard Brom, writing in 1931 about the influence of the Indies on Dutch culture, could only wax poetic about Multatuli and his work: "so great was the influence of Max Havelaar for life in the Indies, and so great was its significance for Dutch culture," that the book's presence had become "a fact that no writer could hope to avoid."³ Even Queen Wilhelmina (r. 1898–1948) found inspiration in the writings of Multatuli when she began to entertain the idea of writing the story of her own life as part of the moral and material rebuilding of the Netherlands in the post-war years.⁴ Other writers speak of Multatuli as the "true Prometheus" of Dutch literature, the observance of whose literary "cult" is nearly a matter of "religious duty" for Dutch literati.⁵ Multatuli's influence has indeed been immense, both in Dutch literature and in the literature of empire, but one wonders at times if the stories of the life and work of Multatuli had perhaps taken on a life of their own and become a

mythology supplanting the more mortal facts of literary history. The luminous edifice of Multatuli's literary archive may at first glance appear unassailable, yet as I shall argue here, it is possible, indeed imperative, to search for alternative readings of *Max Havelaar*.

The standard reading of Multatuli's *Max Havelaar* relies on two central elements. The first is the belief that Multatuli, and particularly his novel *Max Havelaar*, represented an ethical, anti-colonial voice that stood up for the oppressed and helped eventually to bring about not only a more compassionate era of Dutch rule in the Indies but also the end of empire altogether. The second is the idea that Multatuli's writing style, and again the focus here is on *Max Havelaar*, represented a radical break with the past and finally freed Dutch literature from the crusty confines of traditional style and made possible the emergence of a truly modern Dutch literature.⁶ By way of revision of these standard readings, I will offer two counter-arguments: one, that Multatuli and *Max Havelaar* collectively represent not an anti-colonial voice at all but rather an exhortation for a reformed and strengthened empire; and two, that Multatuli's style was not as radically innovative as some have made it out to be. Viewing Multatuli through the lenses of Dutch modernity and colonial (literary) history, it appears that the man and his work have become emblems of a process of which they were perhaps not consciously or directly a part.

Multatuli and the Ethics of Empire

Multatuli's novel *Max Havelaar* is something of a puzzle.⁷ It begins with the story of a character named Droogstoppel, a "Dickensian" caricature who is the epitome of what Multatuli felt to be the merchant mentality: utterly unimaginative, and opposed to, if not mystified by, the complexities of artistic creation and the ambivalence of unmodified ideas and entities.⁸ Early in the novel, Droogstoppel meets by chance the mysterious character Sjaalman, who, having derived Droogstoppel's address from his business card, delivers to him a parcel of texts—indeed, a veritable archive—written by someone (Sjaalman, it turns out) who obviously had extensive experience in the Dutch East Indies and who obviously possessed the type of encyclopedic and creative tendencies toward which Droogstoppel seems to show such trepidation. Droogstoppel, who is annoyed with the whole affair but feels a certain "bourgeois" obligation to do something with the texts in the parcel, entrusts this archive to his assistant Ernest Stern, and to his own son Frits Droogstoppel. The two of them piece together a

sort of biography, or more accurately a work of fiction and conjecture about the life of Sjaalman, and this biography turns out to be the story of Max Havelaar (Sjaalman's real name) and his struggles and tribulations in the Indies. To add to the meander of relationships and texts, Stern, who is the main writing force behind the biography, is a native German speaker writing in a foreign tongue (Dutch). On top of all this is the master narrative of Multatuli the author, who intervenes in the narrative as the god-like omniscient narrator and controlling authority. In other words, the structure of the novel is one of embedded narrative frames: the story of Max Havelaar as it is, the story of how Stern and Frits write the narrative, the story of how Droogstoppel monitors and influences the work of Stern and Frits, and the larger narrative of how Multatuli is telling the whole story anyway.

The structure and style of the novel will be dealt with later. First, I will examine the ethics embedded in the story of Max Havelaar's experiences in the Indies, as told through the novel, through Multatuli's own personal experience, and through the experience of empire and the concomitant emergence of modern Dutch literature. From shortly after the publication of the novel until the present, there has persisted a belief that *Max Havelaar* represents an anti-colonial text that challenged and undermined the myths of empire and exposed the duplicitous rhetoric and practice of Dutch colonial rule in the Netherlands Indies.⁹ Edward Said, for instance, points out that in European debates over the ethics and meaning of empire, "an *imperialist* and Eurocentric framework is implicitly accepted," provided we "exclude rare exceptions like the Dutch writer Multatuli."¹⁰ Anne-Marie Feenberg argues that, among other things, "Multatuli's enduring popularity in Indonesia justifies interpreting *Max Havelaar* as a repudiation of the imperialist vision."¹¹ Essentially, there are two intertwined elements in this popular interpretation: the first is the "real life" tale of the events surrounding Multatuli's perceived ill-treatment and personal sense of injustice while in the Indies, and the second is the larger polemic against the ill-treatment of Dutch colonial subjects and systematic injustice towards "natives" in the Indies. I will examine each of these in turn.

The catalyst for writing the novel *Max Havelaar* was Multatuli's bitterness at being removed from his post and denied the possibility of rising to the cream of colonial society and hierarchy due to an alleged act of official misconduct on his part. In 1856, Multatuli was appointed Assistant Resident of Lebak in western Java. After hardly a month in office, Multatuli denounced his "native" counterpart, the

Regent, and accused him of gross misconduct and corruption. He demanded that the Regent's behavior be thoroughly investigated, and the Regent deposed, but when asked to provide evidence to substantiate the charges, Multatuli balked and thus found himself censured and dismissed. The dismissal was reduced, through the intervention of an ally in the Dutch colonial administration, to a proposed transfer to a different region, but Multatuli waxed indignant and stated his preference to be dismissed instead, which he was. Multatuli also resigned his post in the colonial civil service. Rather than accept defeat and rather than reconsider his own rash behavior, Multatuli's indignation turned to bitterness against the whole system that supposedly wronged him. This bitterness provided the bilious fuel that energized the writing of *Max Havelaar*.¹²

It is interesting that for all the liberal attitudes associated with *Max Havelaar*, it was a conservative member of Parliament, Jacob van Lennep (also a romantic nationalist and writer in his own right), who was largely responsible for bringing the novel to the public.¹³ When official concern grew over the threat of the publication of what seemed a critical novel, Multatuli used this added leverage to reveal his true demands: a generous promotion in rank (first to Resident, then to Councilor of the Indies), a considerable amount of money, and a prestigious medal recognizing his service, among other things. His requests were scoffed at and recognized for the self-serving and pompous demands that they were, and the result was that Multatuli the "suffering" colonial servant became Multatuli the writer. What is important to note here is that Multatuli was not writing to campaign against the injustices done to the inhabitants of the Indies; rather, he was writing to protest the injustice he felt had been done to *himself*. Rob Nieuwenhuys is right to point out that while Multatuli might have perceived himself to be a Byron or a Rousseau, his actions revealed a despotic personality more like a Napoleon.¹⁴

Multatuli may have been spent considerable energy trying to save himself and nearly negotiate his way into a higher position in the colonial administration, but was he, as is so often claimed, also interested in saving the inhabitants of the Netherlands Indies from the violence and oppression of Dutch rule? The evidence here is not as straightforward as many have presumed. First of all, what the affair at Lebak revealed was how little understanding of and how little tolerance Multatuli had for native culture and custom. He was certainly willing to borrow from it when it suited his needs, but at times Multatuli seemed less concerned with protecting the inhabitants of the Indies

than he did with ruling over them like the very “native despots” he denounced. In outlining the power structure of the empire through the lens of the Assistant Resident-Regent relationship, for instance, Multatuli points out that the Assistant Resident, being the European official, is the “responsible one” who *should* have the necessary power to carry out his duties. Yet for many reasons (such as the temerity of the Dutch administration), the native Regent retains the “real” power, creating what for Multatuli is “the strange situation where the *inferior* really commands the *superior*” (*MHI* 43:296–97, emphasis in original). It nearly seems as if Multatuli wanted nothing more than to acquire the absolute power to effect the task of saving the natives from themselves and their own, putatively corrupt, rulers.

Secondly, Multatuli did not denounce the Dutch colonial empire because it was unjust, but rather because it refused to assume the power to which it was entitled in order to protect the inhabitants from the injustices of native society. One of the main targets of the polemic in *Max Havelaar* is the *Cultuurstelsel* (Culture or Cultivation System), a plan put into place in the 1830s that among other things required peasants and cultivators to set aside a certain percentage of their lands to grow cash crops for the Dutch.¹⁵ Yet Multatuli did not attack the system because it was inherently unjust, but rather because the inordinate number of native officials (in relation to the small number of Dutch officials) employed to implement and enforce the system meant that native corruption and cruelty could be carried out in the name of the Dutch empire. Continuing with his rant against the office of the Regent, for instance, Multatuli points out that while the European official lives reasonably, like a “middle-class” (*burgerlijk*) official, the Regent lives like a sumptuous prince. Moreover, this princely life style is outrageously extravagant in terms of both wealth and power, and Multatuli makes the connection that money raised in the forced cultivation of these cash crops is then used to support the lifestyles of these despotic native princes. The culture system is not wrong because it efficiently earns revenue, but because the Regents are allowed or even encouraged by the Dutch administration to exploit native farmers by forcing them to work for free. By allowing such exploitation on the grounds of tolerating native practice, and by refusing to bring the Regent into line with the rational principles of financial responsibility, the Dutch administration has created a situation in which the responsible European official (Multatuli perhaps has himself in mind here) is prevented from carrying out his officially-sworn duty “to protect the native population against exploitations and

extortion" (*MHI* 48:529–30). In other words, *Max Havelaar* is not, as many of its admirers have claimed, an indictment of an empire that had gone too far, but rather the indictment of an empire that had not gone far enough.

Of course, one could also argue that despite Multatuli's personal antics and "ethics," and despite the novel's inconsistencies and flaws, *Max Havelaar* at least tore the mask off the face of empire and revealed its many blemishes in a way that had never been done before. Yet *Max Havelaar* was not the first piece of critical writing by a Dutch administrator or intellectual to denounce practices of the empire, and one might even say that *Max Havelaar* was coming at the tail end of a well-established tradition of criticism and appeared in good company at the crowded house of reformist polemic.¹⁶ There was certainly an established practice of journalistic debate in papers and magazines such as *De Nederlandsche Spectator*, as well as several flourishing centers of literary criticism and political banter.¹⁷ So why, then, would *Max Havelaar* be seen as such a revolutionary text? The short answer is that it *wasn't*. Rather it was used as political fulcrum by others to further their own, often radical agendas—conservatives and liberals alike could quote and fight over *Max Havelaar*—and it became a convenient vessel for a variety of revolutionary ideas. This interpretation is in line with Nop Maas's astute observation that the liberals, for instance, like so many other political groups, "could and would use Multatuli's information for their own opposition, but wanted nothing to do with his personal ambitions."¹⁸ Multatuli felt that his personal fate and the fate of the Indies were one and the same, but apparently his readers and users felt otherwise. One might say in summary that *Max Havelaar* was a pretext for the politics of others, but not itself a political text.¹⁹

Certainly Multatuli did intend for *Max Havelaar* to be political in its own way, mostly through his own version of the ethics of empire. As we have seen, Multatuli felt that since he perceived himself to have been wronged by the empire, the empire must therefore be unethical. The ethics were certainly there, Multatuli believed, embedded as they were in the goodness of Dutch values such as justice and humanitarian compassion. But the trouble was that they were not being applied by the colonial administration, which was, much to Multatuli's horror, showing signs of "going native" and allowing native values to influence and corrupt the enlightened lexicon of Dutch values.²⁰ In relating the story of a feud between two native chiefs, the Yang di-Pertuan and Sultan Salim, Multatuli writes of the outrage and disappointment

that Havelaar felt in watching the Dutch General Vandamme become involved and then mete out justice by “lowering” himself to native standards rather than enforcing a more enlightened rule of codified law. “Now the ways in which the general performed his examination on this occasion,” says Havelaar, “reminded one of the whist party of a certain Emperor of Morocco, who said to his partner: ‘play hearts or I’ll cut your throat’” (*MHI* 144:243–45). When the general uses his influence even to have a certain party declared innocent regardless of what the evidence may have indicated, Havelaar questions the “inaccuracies” of the proceedings and the irregularities of the general’s behavior and thus finds himself on the receiving end of the general’s displeasure. In a line intended to forge the link between Multatuli and Max Havelaar, Havelaar then says: “I have also suffered greatly from the consequences of this affair” (*MHI* 145:263–64).

We are meant to see, therefore, in spite of the interlocking frames of the novel’s narrative structure, that the character of Max Havelaar is in essence the literary foil of Multatuli. Yet, the literary structure of Multatuli’s novel is as inconsistent as his political ethics. Multatuli in fact comes much closer to the unflattering and hapless Droogstoppel than he does to the “heroic” Max Havelaar.²¹

To give but one brief example, we can take a passage that appears near the beginning of the novel in which Droogstoppel is fulminating against the uselessness of the stage and theater in general. The scene is meant to show how Droogstoppel lacks the depth of character to understand art in any of its forms, not only because he has limited powers of perception (though is quite convinced that he has “superior” capacities for perception), but also because art, in all its forms, is unproductive (that is, it cannot be comprehended by a business sensibility). After a brief, Platonic diatribe against the corrosive power of poetic verse, Droogstoppel then moves on to theater. The stage, he says, “corrupts many people—more, even, than novels do. It’s so easy to see! With a bit of tinsel, and a bit of lace made from cut out paper, it all looks so very enticing. For children, I mean, and for persons who aren’t in business” (*MHI* 5:100–03). The trouble with this is not merely aesthetic, for according to Droogstoppel, “public morality is undermined by accustoming them [the audience] to applaud something on the *stage* which, in the *world*, any respectable broker or businessman would regard as ridiculous lunacy” (*MHI* 6:120–23). Yet later in the novel, in the famous scene in which Max Havelaar addresses the chiefs of Lebak (a key scene that develops the link between Max Havelaar as literary character and Multatuli as historical actor), we see that Max

Havelaar has no time or patience for the “ridiculous” theatrics of Javanese society, and measures their actions only in accordance with the strictures of codified, Western law. “I don’t like to accuse anyone, whoever he is, but if it *must* be done, then a chief is as good as anyone else,” says Havelaar. “Tomorrow I shall go pay a visit to the Regent. I shall point out to him how wrong it is to make illegal use of authority” (*MHI* 92:587–91).²² If we, in the spirit of Clifford Geertz, keep in mind here the elaborate array of ritualized gestures and deferential locutions that constituted Javanese political culture, it becomes clear that the address to the chiefs of Lebak, and the “real life” version of the affair which spelled the end of Multatuli’s hopes to move into the colonial elite, are little more than mirror images of Droogstoppel’s critique of theater.²³ Droogstoppel confuses his critique of theater with his misunderstanding of its methods and intent, and Multatuli, like Max Havelaar, cannot distinguish between his critique of native injustice and his misunderstanding of the intricacies of native society.²⁴

In sum, what is clear from the reception of the novel, from Multatuli’s acts while in the Indies, and from the text of the novel itself, is that *Max Havelaar* is not an anti-colonial or anti-imperial novel. For Multatuli, the injustice of empire was part and parcel of the injustice done to his person: the Dutch were not enforcing their good and noble values among the people of the Indies, and the result was the continued persecution of the native people by their own despotic chiefs and the continued persecution of Multatuli by the administrative elite of the empire. If the imperial administration wanted to regain its sense of justice, then it could do so by rewarding Multatuli for his criticisms and rash acts and putting him in a position with sufficient (or absolute) power to deal with the “corrupt” native chiefs and with his enemies in the Dutch colonial administration once and for all.

Multatuli and the Absolute Truth

If *Max Havelaar* is not the anti-colonial novel it has been presumed to be, then what of its status in modern Dutch literature on the grounds of its stylistic innovations? Here we have two different approaches. The first is the argument offered by Rob Nieuwenhuys, who states that Multatuli made a definitive break with the formalistic style of traditional Dutch literature and freed himself and later writers from the constraints of tradition and finally allowed for the development of a truly modern Dutch literature (*Nieuwenhuys, Oost-Indische Spiegel* 142–43).²⁵ The second is the interpretation offered by E. M. Beek-

man, who sees in Multatuli's novel a precocious mix of Bakhtinian heteroglossia and postmodern relativising of author-ity and truth.²⁶ "Everything about *Max Havelaar*," says Beekman, "indicates that this was the first modern prose text in Dutch that brilliantly used the possibilities of heteroglossia; it was, therefore, a critique not only of political but also of literary orthodoxy" (Beekman 229). I would like to offer an alternative explanation suggesting that Multatuli's status as harbinger of literary modernity both in the Netherlands and in the colonial Indies is not as straightforward as it seems. Indeed, the roots of Multatuli's presumed innovations may lie at least partly in colonial appropriations of Indonesian literary and historical narratives.

Admirers who like to classify Multatuli as a modern writer verging on post-modernity argue in essence that Multatuli *intentionally* uncoupled the "classical" and illusionary link between author and text. Such an argument would require a certain consistency in Multatuli's work and in its reception among the reading public and contemporary literary critics; that is, we would expect to see all sorts of literary games and deceptions designed to undo the link between literature, reality, and authorship throughout the works of Multatuli. This, however, is not the case, and in fact what we find is that Multatuli is involved in what he himself perceived as an epic struggle for Truth against the Lies of his opponents and detractors. He sought to prove this by retaining absolute and despotic control over his text, as if his characters were analogs to the colonial natives he sought to "rescue" from imperial rule.

Before the publication of *Max Havelaar*, Multatuli showed few inclinations towards radical literary experimentation.²⁷ Even Nieuwenhuys, who argues that the merits of Multatuli's place in literary history rest on his stylistic innovations, has to concede that Multatuli's earlier writings are for the most part sentimental, unsophisticated, and uninspired ramblings of prose and verse: "there is nothing [in the early writings] that would suggest that Dekker would one day develop into a writer with such a completely original use of language" (*Oost-Indische Spiegel* 139). Nieuwenhuys does cite a few of Multatuli's letters to the effect that he seems to believe he is working on a new literary style, one that is "spontaneous" and free-flowing—much like a letter.²⁸ The question, however, is whether this was really an innovation of any sort, or whether Multatuli was only reinventing the literary wheel.

It is perhaps convenient, but ultimately slightly misleading, to compare *Max Havelaar* with "traditional" or "proper" Dutch literature because *Max Havelaar* as a literary endeavor was conceived in the

literary and political environment of the Netherlands Indies. If one thing can be said with any certainty about the endeavor of European colonialism, it is that it produced pages and pages and volumes and volumes of texts. Most of these texts, particularly but not exclusively the administrative reports, have a style of their own—somewhat spontaneous and in the style, one might say, of a letter. We know that many of the characters and events of *Max Havelaar* were based on a strange combination of Multatuli's own life (as he perceived it) and the lives of his colonial predecessors, and it is clear that he read their works, both official and unofficial, and included many of their ideas and perceived injustices in his own novel. Multatuli himself would have been familiar with colonial reports and administrative communications, particularly since he himself would have been asked to write such reports in his position.²⁹ Writing long letters "back home" was also an art that every colonial administrator engaged in, and many of the travelogues that appeared before and after Multatuli's time were often nothing more than extended versions of these letters. In relation to colonial prose, therefore, the suggestion that Multatuli's style was something radically new and extraordinary is at least problematic. Indeed, it is probably more accurate to say that Multatuli's style conformed to these new styles rather than created them; that is, his style is a product, rather than an instigator, of change.

Even then, if we compare Multatuli's style and literary efforts with so-called "traditional" Dutch literature—literature written in the Netherlands outside the colonial context and preceding the era of Multatuli—it is still not absolutely certain that Multatuli would have appeared radical or revolutionary. Already in the eighteenth century, nearly a century before the appearance of *Max Havelaar*, authors and the literary societies that engaged them had been grappling with the question of the artifice of literature and the representation of truth (*waarheid*) and reality (*waarschijnlijkheid*), marking a collective if elementary break with the classical past.³⁰ As these societies gave way to more formalized literary criticism in the Dutch press in the first half of the nineteenth century, conservative critics battled with new literary forms, styles and genres, and along with them new political ideals and platforms, in an attempt to slow the pace of change and to promote conservative and traditional values.³¹ The perhaps unintentional result was the development of a new style of writing in the Dutch press and in the growing Dutch book trade, a style which reflected both the spontaneous style required by journalistic writing and also the increasing preference for "real-life" narratives that blurred

the lines between novels and reportage.³² Thus, Multatuli's writing style would have had clear antecedents in the Dutch literary scene, and the political debates of the period being fought out in the pages of the critical press—debates over morality, truth, social change, and justice—provided a well-established context for the reception and debate over *Max Havelaar* when it appeared in 1860.³³ In other words, *Max Havelaar* would arguably have been seen as comfortably situated in the Dutch literary scene of its time.

Yet even if *Max Havelaar* did not necessarily introduce any disruptive or radical stylistic innovations, there is still the claim by analysts such as Beekman that the deep structure of Multatuli's novel did represent something truly innovative, something verging on a post-modern relativization of truth and an interrogation of linear narrative and authorial control. Here, too, the evidence is not conclusive, at times for reasons inherent in the novel and Multatuli's ideological framework, and at times for reasons embedded in the general colonial context in which Multatuli was writing.

The idea of truth (*waarheid*) is absolutely central to *Max Havelaar* and, indeed, to much of Multatuli's work in general.³⁴ For Multatuli, to search for the truth is both a poetic and a religious quest, and the manner in which the narrative of *Max Havelaar*, as in his other works, speaks to the necessary triumph of truth over lies (*leugen*) indicates that truth is "knowable" in its classical, absolute (substantive) sense.³⁵ Ironically, this reveals a sympathy much more in accord with conservative values of the period than with the radical "free thinkers" with which Multatuli has often been associated. Within the novel itself, Multatuli distinguishes between authentic and inauthentic quests for the truth by having both Droogstoppel and Max Havelaar search for the truth in their own personal lives. Droogstoppel may often speak of his own "love of truth" and the search for other virtues such as "honesty, religiosity, and respectability," but his search is rendered inauthentic because his sentiments are insincere and, above all else, because he does not understand the "poetry" of truth. Droogstoppel is thus the type of person who often insists on the need for principles, though he in fact cultivates none, unless they are convenient and self-serving (strengthening again the link between Droogstoppel and Multatuli himself). Max Havelaar, on the other hand, speaks of the truth in poetic terms, of the duty to seek it out and cultivate it among humanity.

This represents yet another aspect of his criticism of Dutch rule: that it had left its deep rooting in "classical" ideas of truth and "gone

native” by absorbing the confused and ambivalent (and hence morally suspect) truths of native society. This moral disorder is even represented spatially and symbolically in the lack of order (*zindelijkheid*) in the grounds and gardens of Havelaar’s compound. Generally, the work of groundskeeping is to be done by chain-gangs of convicts (Havelaar has no moral problem with the use of convicts for forced labor), but since there usually are not enough prisoners to work the grounds and keep them in good order, Dutch officials apparently adopted the native strategy of using *corvée* labor from the local population to do the task. This horrifies Havelaar as it seems to violate the “truthful” laws of an ordered economy and seems to legitimate the exploitative and morally ambiguous practices of the native chiefs, since those chiefs “are all waiting for a bad example to follow in order to follow it to excessive proportions” (*MHI* 149:465–66). Since Max Havelaar refuses to engage in such forms of exploitation, opposed as they are to the higher Truth represented in codified law and supposedly superior Dutch values, the grounds of his compound are therefore left in disarray. The irony is that this disarray is a symbol of Havelaar’s higher morality and a monument to his superior Truth. Multatuli’s criticism here is that because the native population is “so easily impressed by appearances,” Dutch officials ought to keep their grounds in impeccable order to show the type of discipline that the Empire *should* represent. A disordered garden might give the impression that all is not well with the Empire, but in this case, Havelaar’s botanical anarchy is a symbol of his superior morality and his pursuit of absolute Truth because the well-ordered grounds of other officials are dependent upon the morally uncertain practices of the indigenous (non-Dutch) rulers.

Perhaps no other element of Multatuli’s truth-seeking quest, as enunciated through the character of Max Havelaar, displays the classical sense of Truth (as opposed to the poetic or postmodern) than Multatuli’s use of the parable as a literary device.³⁶ While it is certainly true that the parable can be a relatively complex vehicle for relating ideas, prone as it is to multiple and simultaneous interpretations, Multatuli’s use of the parable derives not from an attempt to problematize his message by offering potential parallel meanings (which would render the text open and complex) but from the self-cultivated association, through his own perceived suffering, with another historical figure who also sought and knew the truth but was persecuted for it: Jesus.³⁷ Multatuli felt his suffering and his persecution were “Christ-like,” adding a religious certainty to his truth which, when coupled with his classical borrowings, makes it increasingly difficult

to interpret this text as single-handedly opening the door for Dutch literature into modernity or postmodernity.

To be sure, there are a few moments in *Max Havelaar* where Havelaar's use of the parable comes close to disrupting his own voice and the text itself, something which, if true, would lend credence to the suggestion that *Max Havelaar* is a veritable harbinger of Dutch literary modernity. In the prelude leading up to the famous "Japanese Stonecutter's" parable in the novel, Havelaar introduces a tale of his own which leads into a set of pallid verses regarding Natal. When pressed on its origins, Havelaar confesses: "The legend . . . was no legend. It was a parable that I made up, and that will probably be a legend in a couple of centuries if Krygsman [his clerk in Natal] keeps chanting it often enough. That's how all mythologies begin" (*MHI* 115:390–93). What this quote reveals is not someone indulging in the artifice of literature to unmask its hollow aspirations to truth and to interrogate the presumed authority of the author; rather, it reveals a certain presumptuousness about Multatuli's own sense of power as an author as well as his belief in the gullibility of the natives. The main parable that follows, the one regarding the Japanese Stonecutter, was itself taken (and indirectly credited) from an earlier text that Multatuli admired.³⁸ Again, it would require a certain degree of enhancement or exaggeration of intent and interpretation to assume that Multatuli's collocation of texts, ideas, and parables makes *Max Havelaar* a modern or postmodern novel. *Max Havelaar* as a novel may read like a cornucopia of contemporary and colonial voices at times, but this is not a subversive attempt to undermine the colonial archive. Multatuli was borrowing from what was useful and what he admired in order to bolster his own authority as omnipotent author and omniscient actor; that is, these other voices intrude not to problematize truth and literary perspective, but to help capture truth and control it. Through the obsessive desire to capture and control knowledge, to retain the power to label the categories of truth, *Max Havelaar* is not merely a novel *about* imperialism, it is a literary text which mimics its aspirations for control and power.

In the end, it seems increasingly necessary to at least reconsider the credit given to *Max Havelaar* for the things it supposedly represents in the history of modern Dutch literature. It is certainly not an anti-colonial novel, and there are at least reasonable grounds for rethinking the claims to its being radically innovative in terms of style or structure. As for Multatuli, his politics appear to be rather ordinary for his time. One would expect an author who is supposedly so adept at shifting

frames of reference and narrative perspectives, and who is supposedly so adept at changing voice and character and providing complex foils for characters within the novel and between those characters and himself as author, to be able also to problematize and unsettle ideas of chronological progression and of truth-claims in “realistic” literature. Instead what we see is that Multatuli’s aspirations to truth rely on a very un-modern and conservative belief that an absolute Truth is knowable and can be represented factually in literature. Still, this does not consign Multatuli or *Max Havelaar* to the dustbin of historical mediocrity, nor does it necessarily deprive Multatuli of his literary empire or strip away the influence of his literary legacy. What it does suggest, however, is the possibility for an alternative reading of at least one of the central texts associated with his literary legacy.

Conclusion: The Legacy of *Max Havelaar*

Multatuli’s place in the history of modern Dutch literature will always be difficult to pin down. When Indonesian writer Y. B. Mangunwijaya was asked during an interview in the 1980s about his favorite writers, Mangunwijaya mentioned two persons: Pramoedya Ananta Toer and then his (Mangunwijaya’s) “first teacher,” Multatuli. Then the interviewer asked the rather unexpected question, “And what about *foreign* writers?”—as if Multatuli were in fact an Indonesian writer.³⁹ Other observers have gone to the opposite end of the spectrum and denied that Multatuli was a colonial writer at all.⁴⁰ This confusion over Multatuli seems to evoke a final question about his legacy and that of *Max Havelaar*: namely, if Multatuli was not the first modern Dutch writer, then who was, and how did modern Dutch literature come to be? There is a rather perplexing oddity about searching for specific persons or specific chronological progressions for the origins of a modernity that would probably disavow both explanations. Yet Multatuli, as I have argued, was caught up in and associated with a complex and serpentine movement towards new and “modern” forms of narration that were already in process when *Max Havelaar* appeared in 1860. The experience of colonialism was part of this process, for it not only exposed expatriates and colonial officials to new forms of art and narration already present in the Indies, it also required new forms of narration to administer the empire and to report on and describe that administration and its empire to Dutch subjects “back home.”

One could speculate on other possible sources for Multatuli’s style

as well. We know, for instance, that precolonial or “native” texts (both written and performed) exhibit similarly the tendencies of mimicry and blending, with equally problematic and contested histories.⁴¹ We also know that such precolonial antecedents often utilized poetic traditions of complex and interwoven tales, borrowing from folktales from several regions and cultural pasts and blending them together in ways that would complicate authorship and allow for shifting narrative structures and frames of reference.⁴² If we integrate this with what we know about the colonial authorities’ relationships to these texts—that they sponsored and supported their composition/performance to legitimize their power by “mimicking” the role of traditional patrons and at the same time cataloged and categorized these texts in an attempt to control and improve these “primitive” art forms—and with what we know about Multatuli and his experience in the colonial administration, we arrive at the possibility of a very different conclusion about the role of Multatuli and *Max Havelaar* in the creation of modern Dutch literature and postcolonial literature in the former Dutch empire. This, of course, is informed speculation, a potential framework for future research, but such readings are certainly within the realm of the possible, and suggest other alternative readings of Multatuli’s work.

I have sought to establish one such alternative reading here: namely, that Multatuli’s *Max Havelaar* was not an anti-colonial text and that its stylistic innovations were not radically new and did not single-handedly invent Dutch literary modernity. Other Dutch colonial writers such as P. A. Daum and Louis Couperus, who wrote both fiction and descriptive travelogue-style journalism, were much more comfortably rooted in new forms of narration to construct a more recognizably coherent rhetorical style than Multatuli. Still, both Daum and Couperus, like Multatuli, have often had their own works cast into a preconceived framework of colonial tropes.⁴³ Alternative readings of those works, along with the alternative reading of Multatuli I have offered here, can collectively be viewed as potential keys to unlock colonial and postcolonial literature (Dutch or otherwise) from these and similar interpretive confines. In doing so, we may finally have a narrative of Dutch literary modernity, and colonial (literary) history, that is every bit as complex and multilayered and rich as the fictional tale that Multatuli himself always desired but could never quite seem to write.

NOTES

- 1 Multatuli is the pen name for Eduard Douwes Dekker (1820–1887). ‘Multatuli’ as a pseudonym means, roughly, “I have suffered much.” All references in this paper are to the critical edition edited by A. Kets-Vree: Multatuli, *Max Havelaar: of de koffieveilingen der Nederlandse Handelmaatschappij*, 2 vols. (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1992). Hereafter, this will be referred to simply as *MHI* (text) and *MH2* (commentary). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.
- 2 Rolf Schuurmsma, *Jaren van opgang: Nederland 1900–1930* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2000) 348.
- 3 Gerard Brom, *Java in onze Kunst* (Rotterdam: W. L. & J. Brusse, 1931) 51, 75.
- 4 Cees Fasseur, *Wilhemina: Krijgshaftig in een vormloze jas* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2001) 424.
- 5 Willem Ellschoot, as quoted in Freddy De Schutter, *Het verhaal van de Nederlandse literatuur*, vol. 2 (Kapellen: Pecklman 1992) 191.
- 6 I will sometimes use the terms modern and postmodern in tandem throughout this essay, not because they are interchangeable, but because Multatuli has been associated, erroneously in my opinion, with both. For a rigorous chronological treatment of modern Dutch literature, see the introductory sketch in Frans Ruiter and Wilbert Smulders, *Literatuur en moderniteit in Nederland 1840–1990* (Amsterdam: Arbeidspers, 1996) 16–31.
- 7 Aside from E. M. Beekman, who is discussed below, see generally on the framing of the novel A. L. Sötemann, “Over de structuur van *Max Havelaar*,” in *Studi Belanda di Indonesia/Nederlandse Studiën in Indonesië*, ed. Kees Groenboer (Jakarta: Djambatan, 1989) 79–86.
- 8 Though I have described Droogstoppel as “Dickensian,” there is substantial evidence that his character, and perhaps also that of Max Havelaar (and the internal structure of the novel itself), were greatly influenced by Sir Walter Scott’s *Rob Roy* (1818), which Multatuli read and admired. Droogstoppel bears a resemblance to the character Nicol Jarvie, a Glasgow merchant who epitomizes the statistical and orderly perception of the world, a perception bereft of the romantic, poetic sensibility evoked by Scott’s Scottish highlanders. In *Max Havelaar*, Droogstoppel is significantly not merely a merchant but a broker, making him, in Multatuli’s opinion, the laziest and least creative type of merchant. It is also worth noting, in relation to the alternative reading of Multatuli’s novel that I am offering here, that Scott’s depiction of the Scottish highlands, which parallels Multatuli’s depiction of the Netherlands Indies, was in fact as imperialist as it was romantic. Just as Multatuli used the Netherlands Indies to justify his own imperial project, so too were the Scottish highlands reinvented and appropriated as part of the mythology used to justify the “internal colonialism” that marked relations between the “civilized” center and the Celtic fringe. On this, see Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1975) and Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).
- 9 In the preface to the 1927 English translation (published by Alfred Knopf), D. H. Lawrence seems unable to pin down the meaning of the novel and its politics (something which partially amuses and partially irritates him). There is praise for Multatuli, but also a sense of ambivalence. In the end, Lawrence falls for the Multatuli-as-David and Empire-as-Goliath interpretation, emphasizing the “honorable hate” of Multatuli in the tradition of Twain and Gogol. The reading I am offering here would make this latter assessment questionable.

- 10 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1993) 240.
- 11 Anne-Marie Feenberg, "Max Havelaar: An Anti-Imperialist Novel," *MLN* 112 (1997): 817–35. Feenberg's argument would hold true only if one could show that Multatuli's novel actually retained an "enduring popularity." The reception of *Max Havelaar* in Indonesia has been highly problematic and ambivalent at best. The first complete translation of the novel into Indonesian appeared only in 1972, and the government of Indonesia has tried to limit what is read in schools because it fears that students may learn to question authority. The Dutch film version of *Max Havelaar* was in fact banned in Indonesia. When the government of Indonesia allowed for a celebration of a Multatuli centennial in 1987, the reaction was lukewarm, and indeed, many scholars opined openly that the "myth of Multatuli" was more of a "feel-good" device that would allow the Dutch to think of colonial rule as having a humanitarian legacy. On the banning of the film, see Krishna Sen, *Indonesian Cinema: Framing the New Order* (London: Zed Books, 1994) 86–88; Karl G. Heider, *Indonesian Cinema: National Culture on Screen* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1991) 22–23. On the debate generated by the centennial, see, for instance, "Membela Rakyat Kecil," *Kompas* 5 Apr. 1987: 11–12.
- 12 One of the debates surrounding the writing of *Max Havelaar* concerns the length of time Multatuli spent writing it: so bitter or "impassioned" was he over his mistreatment that he allegedly wrote the novel in less than three weeks. For a recent treatment of this issue, see the thesis by Jacob Hoogteijling, *Door de achterdeur naar binnen: over de wording van Multatuli's Max Havelaar*, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 1996.
- 13 Even so, a feud developed over time between Lennep and Multatuli over the form of *Max Havelaar* and also over its copyright (which Multatuli did not regain until 1874). It is hard at times to pin down any consistency in Multatuli's politics. Jan Meyers, "Domela en Multatuli, een vriendschap," *Maastricht* 41.2 (February 1993): 50–57, details the relationship between Multatuli and Toen Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, who was a prominent socialist of the time. Though friends, Multatuli showed a cool distance from socialist politics.
- 14 Rob Nieuwenhuys, *De mythe van Lebak* (Amsterdam: G. A. van Oorschot, 1987) 171.
- 15 Also spelled *Cultuurstelsel*. Generally, see C. Fasseur, *Cultuurstelsel en koloniale baten: de Nederlandse exploitatie van Java 1840–1860* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers Leiden, 1975); H. A. J. Klooster, *Indonesiërs schrijven hun geschiedenis: De ontwikkeling van de Indonesische geschiedbeoefening in theorie en praktijk, 1900–1980* (Leiden: Foris Publications, 1985) 130–31. Interestingly, J. de Louter, *Handboek van het staats- en administratief recht van nederlandsch indië* (The Hague: 1914) 379–91, offers an overview of the rise and demise of the *Cultuurstelsel* (the administration moved to dismantle it starting in the 1870s and it was replaced completely with the so-called Ethical Policy in the early 1900s) without mentioning the presence or influence of Multatuli at all.
- 16 In 1780, for instance, Willem van Hogendorp had written a play criticizing the treatment of slaves in the Netherlands Indies, a play which aroused sufficient controversy and indignation that when it was performed in The Hague there were protests that brought its run to a close. See Rob Nieuwenhuys, *Oost-Indische Spiegel* (Amsterdam: Em. Querido, 1972) ch. 2.
- 17 See, for instance, Nop Maas, *De Nederlandsche Spectator: Schetsen uit het letterkundige leven van de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw* (Utrecht: Veen, 1986).
- 18 Nop Maas, *Multatuli voor iedereen (maar niemand voor Multatuli)* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2000) 37. Liberals, for instance, "used" *Max Havelaar* to support their arguments to reform or dismantle the *Cultuurstelsel*.

- 19 To give a contemporary example, P. C. Emmer, *De nederlandse slavenhandel 1500–1850* (Amsterdam: Arbeidspers, 2000) 204, points out that in the popular protest movement of the early 1860s against the use of slaves on Dutch colonial plantations, the political debate over the use of slaves (the slave trade itself having already been banned) found a receptive audience already primed by the debate over the general labor practices of the Dutch colonial administration set in place at least in part by the publication of *Max Havelaar*. While these issues, Emmer argues, were “thoroughly debated—thanks to Multatuli,” the implication is that Multatuli’s novel was only one, and not necessarily the most important, element in an ongoing, well-established debate.
- 20 There is a gendered element to this as well. In Multatuli’s novel, Max Havelaar’s wife Tina is the paradigmatic “strong woman” whose strength derives, ironically, from her devotion to wifely values. She is the female counterpart to Havelaar insofar as she represents the “good Dutch woman” whose model of virtue is meant as an example to emulate for native women suffering under the despotism of their native husbands. *Max Havelaar* is an early example of this; for later examples, see Tessel Pollmann, “Bruidstraantjes: De koloniale roman, de njai en de apartheid,” in *Vrouwen in de Nederlandse koloniën*, ed. Jeske Reijs et al. (Nijmegen: SUN, 1986) 98–125. For Multatuli’s depiction of similar “strong women” in his domestic (non-colonial) works, see Jeroen Brouwers, “Multatuli’s ‘Hansje,’” *Maatstaf* 41.9 (1993): 17–24.
- 21 This point was also suggested originally by Manuel van Loggem, “Havelaar as Droogstoppel,” in *100 Jaar Max Havelaar*, ed. Pierre Dubois et al. (Rotterdam: Ad. Donker, 1962) 114–21. Marcel Janssens, *Max Havelaar: De Held van Lebak* (Antwerp: Standard, 1970), argues strongly against this. At best, argues Janssens, there is an “ambivalent love-hate relationship” between Multatuli and Droogstoppel. Yet the identification of Multatuli with the “anti-hero” Droogstoppel is “not so surprising,” according to Janssens, “because he put something in [Droogstoppel] of what Multatuli himself was and also something of what he wished to be” (216). Janssens then generalizes this to be something commonly found in the works of all great and skilled writers. I do not find this argument convincing. In relation to Scott’s *Rob Roy*, for instance, which we know influenced Multatuli in writing *Max Havelaar* (see note above), the first-person narrator Frank Osbaldistone, is a complex character whose characteristic traits are often self-contradictory. Moreover, Frank Osbaldistone can see the attraction of things that are his opposite (such as the character of Rob Roy) and learn over time to appreciate them and accept their influence on his own point of view. In *Max Havelaar*, most characters remain unidimensional and do not learn over time; because the novel is in essence a melodrama, the characters are meant to represent exaggerated versions of discrete points of view. For Multatuli to have “mixed” these points of view, or to have confused his own vision as master-narrator with the hero and the anti-hero, would clearly undermine the professed project of his novel.
- 22 Multatuli’s emphasis on obeying codified law as opposed to the vagueness and inherent corruption of local custom or “native” law (*adat*) once again highlights the difficulty of considering *Max Havelaar* an anti-colonial novel. Though the argument for unifying and codifying law throughout the Netherlands Indies always had its advocates, for the most part the legal part of the administration remained separated by community, race, and region—another example of pandering to native interests that outraged Multatuli. See, for instance, J. H. Carpentier Alting, *Grondslagen der Rechtsbedeeeling in nederlandsch-indië* (The Hague: 1926) 92–103.
- 23 Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1980). Elsewhere Geertz has also written of the process of ritual change in Java under imperial rule, arguing that the less authority the native rulers

- had (as it was appropriated from them by the colonial administration), the more ornate and ritualized their behavior became. For Multatuli to find this behavior ridiculous is either to “blame the victims” of colonial manipulations of power or to be completely unaware of the nature of the transformation.
- 24 Tom Phijffer, *Het gelijk van Multatuli: Het handelen van Eduard Douwes Dekker in rechtshistorisch perspectief* (Amsterdam: Lubberhuizen, 2000), argues from a legal perspective that given the propensity in native law for injustice and corruption, and given Multatuli’s oath of office and sworn duty (as well as the evidence of his ethical “conscience”), Multatuli is innocent of all charges against him and questions concerning his behavior in Lebak and his colonial affairs in general. This seems a bit disingenuous: to praise Multatuli for battling the colonial regime while excusing him for his loyalty to it.
 - 25 Cf. Frans Ruiter and Wilbert Smulders, *Literatuur en moderniteit in Nederland 1840–1990* (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1996) 92: “The directness of [Multatuli’s] style, the outlandishness of the literary forms he chooses, and the non-conformist viewpoints he adopts, make it so that he is the spokesman of no one except himself and the enemy of everyone, including himself.”
 - 26 E. M. Beekman, *Troubled Pleasures: Dutch Colonial Literature from the East Indies 1600–1950* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1996) ch. 8.
 - 27 Hugo Brandt Corsius, “Des mythes combatifs: Mythe et vérité dans quelques “romans vrais,” *Etudes germaniques* 56.2 (April–June 2001): 213–18, reiterates the claim that Multatuli, as author of *Max Havelaar*, should not properly even be called a writer but rather a “witness” narrating his own (truthful?) testimony.
 - 28 See also Hans van der Bergh, “Multatuli: schrijver tussen waarheid en schoonheid,” in *Studi Belanda di Indonesia/Nederlandse Studiën in Indonesië*, ed. Kees Groenboer (Jakarta: Djambatan, 1989) 5.
 - 29 Phijffer describes these colonial texts as “positivist” in nature and “fact-like” in style, providing a good context in which to understand Multatuli’s concern with the “truth” (42–51).
 - 30 Marleen de Vries, *Beschaven! Letterkundige genootschappen in Nederland 1750–1800* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2001) 125–31; Olf Praamstra, *Gezond verstand en goede smaak: De kritieken van Conrad Busken Huet* (Amstelveen: Ernst, 1991) 73–74, notes that in an unpublished manuscript of Dutch literary history written by Huet in 1860–61, he marked the end of the eighteenth century as the time when an “emergent realism freed itself from classicist rules and schools of poetry.”
 - 31 Korrie Korevaart, *Ziften en zemelknoopen: literaire kritiek in de Nederlandse dag-, nieuws- en weekbladen 1814–1848* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2001) 155–63; see also Bernt Luger, *Wie las wat in de negentiende eeuw?* (Utrecht: Matrijs, 1997).
 - 32 There were also other direct influences on Multatuli’s style, the most significant of which was perhaps Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Multatuli was admittedly imitating the style and intent of Stowe’s work when writing *Max Havelaar*, and at least one of his contemporaries, J. J. Rochussen, described Multatuli as “the Dutch Beecher Stowe.” See the *Volledige Werken*, vol. x (Amsterdam: Van Oorschot, 1950–1995) 130. It is also important to note that while Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* originally had the same aura about it in relation to anti-slavery as Multatuli’s *Max Havelaar* did in relation to anti-imperialism, Stowe’s work has undergone repeated and often radical re-readings which have pointed out, among other things, Stowe’s own racism (she supported the deportation of blacks to Africa) and her advocacy for Western imperialism to spread Western and Christian values among the “ignorant” African natives. Stowe also depicted a world in which black slaves needed to be saved by others (and could not save or help themselves), just

- as Multatuli (at least as I have argued it) depicted a colonized population waiting to be saved by an enlightened superior such as Max Havelaar, or by extension, Multatuli himself. African American writers such as Richard Wright, Ishmael Reed, and Langston Hughes, among others, have all pointed out, harshly at times, the problematic and heavy burden of Stowe's novel on the history of slavery and the emergence of African American literature. On this, see for instance *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (New York: Cambridge UP, 1986). Strangely, there has hitherto been no similar revisionist reading of Multatuli and the legacy of *Max Havelaar*.
- 33 Gerard Termorshuizen, "Schreeuwen tegen oost-indische doofheid: Multatuli en de koloniale journalistiek," *Over Multatuli* 38 (1997): 37–54, points out that from the end of the 1850s to the 1890s or so, an oppositional press emerged in the Netherlands Indies, ironically under what was supposed to be a regimen of conservative rules governing the practice of journalism. This development occurs too early to be attributed directly to the influence of Multatuli.
 - 34 According to K. ter Laan, *Multatuli Encyclopedie* (Den Haag: SDU, 1995) 503–04, Multatuli "preaches" in many places about the need to struggle for the truth. Quoting Multatuli's philosophical work *Ideën*, we have the following in the entry for "Truth" (*Waarheid*): "The finding of truth—that is, the drawing near to truth—would not be such a difficult task if we were less cowardly. In many cases we dare not know the truth." See also Jaap Hoogteijling, "Sleutelwoorden in *Max Havelaar*," *Tijdschrift voor nederlandse taal- en letterkunde* 107.2 (1991): 89–104.
 - 35 Eep Francken, "De waarheid heeft een schoon geluid," *Over Multatuli* 39 (1997): 3–10, reiterates that for Multatuli, "[o]pposite to reality stands not fantasy, but lies."
 - 36 Many of Multatuli's parables have been collected in E. M. Beekman, *The Oyster and the Eagle: Selected Aphorisms and Parables of Multatuli* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1974).
 - 37 Philip Vermoortel, *De parabel bij Multatuli: hoe moet ik u aanspreken om verstaan te worden?* (Gent: Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde, 1994) develops Multatuli's "imitation of Christ" rhetoric and shows how Multatuli used the parable not to complicate truth but to emphasize it by giving it a pseudo-religious grounding. See also Thomas Schneider, "Dichter erschaffen nicht, Sie ordnen neu': Parabolisches Denken und aphoristische Strukturen im Werk Multatulis," *Etudes Germaniques* 44.2 (April–June 1989): 158–65: "Dekker chose this aesthetic discourse not only to compensate for his narcissism, but also because it was the only possible route for him from the deep confusion between "I" and "world." In his productive naiveté, he hardly produced a [new] literary genre, let alone the aphorism or the parable."
 - 38 Specifically, from the writings of W. R. Baron van Hoëvell, who wrote the original story, under the name Jeronimus, for the *Tijdschrift voor Neerlands Indië* 4.1 (1842): 4008. See *MH2* 95, notes for 456–58, 460–61, and 461 note 91. Ironically, the message of this parable is to be content with one's lot in life, a message to which Multatuli himself scarcely adhered.
 - 39 Quoted in Kess Snoek, "Blijvende controverse: Max Havelaar als spiegel van een neofeodale samenleving," in Gerard Termorshuizen and Kees Snoek, *Adinda! Duizend vuurvliegies toten je loshangend haar: Multatuli in Indonesie* (Leiden: Dimensie, 1991) 67.
 - 40 H. Brandt Corstius, "De Man van Wiesbaden," in *Studi Belanda di Indonesia/Nederlandse Studiën in Indonesië*, ed. Kees Groenboer (Jakarta: Djambatan, 1989) 35–36. Corstius describes Multatuli not as a Dutch colonial author but rather as a Dutch writer who happened to do a lot of work out of the country.

- 41 See, for instance, M. C. Ricklefs, *The Seen and Unseen Worlds in Java 1726–1749: History, Literature and Islam in the Court of Pakubuwana II* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1998); Laurie J. Sears, *Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales* (Durham: Duke UP, 1996).
- 42 Nancy K. Florida, *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future: History as Prophecy in Colonial Java* (Durham: Duke UP, 1995), points to two potential precolonial antecedents to Multatuli's "modern" style: the problematic nature of "authoring" in Javanese texts and tales (the "author" is described as "one who interlaces" or "binds together") (19); and the writing of (and later compilation and translation by colonial authorities) of "Javanese letters" (62).
- 43 See, for instance, the reading of Louis Couperus's *De stille kracht* in Pamela Patynama, "Secrets and Danger: Interracial Sexuality in Louis Couperus's *The Hidden Force* and Dutch Colonial Culture around 1900," in *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*, ed. Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1998), 84–107. For a more nuanced reading, see Mary Kemperink, *Het verloren paradijs: De Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur van het fin de siècle* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2001) 79–87.