

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

“YES, I *shall* be read! And if I achieve this aim, I will be content. My wish, you see, was not to write *well* . . . but to write so that I would be heard.” Multatuli’s declaration resonates with our own sense of our task as twenty-first-century translators of this nineteenth-century classic: to bring his authorial voice to life for contemporary readers, in all its wit, urgency, lyricism, indignation, and idiosyncrasy.

Almost since it was first published, *Max Havelaar, or the Coffee Auctions of a Dutch Trading Company* has been considered a masterpiece of nineteenth-century Dutch literature, and Multatuli has been fortunate in the number of English translations it has seen (the first appeared a mere eight years after publication of the book in 1860; this one is the fourth). A look at earlier English versions often alerted us to potential pitfalls, confirmed our intuitions, or inspired us to improve on our own solutions. Yet this is not a modified or edited version of one or more earlier editions, but a fully new translation from the original Dutch. More than fifty years after Roy Edwards’s fine English translation, it was high time for a fresh perspective. As two translators from different regions and generations, we hope that the result of our collaboration will interest a wide range of readers in the United States and around the world.

Given that the style and tone of Multatuli’s impassioned tale of political intrigue and personal frustration were decidedly modern for the time, and that many of the issues faced by the protagonist remain strikingly relevant, we felt it was of prime importance to give this new English version an up-to-date sound. Accordingly, we have aimed to use present-day spelling for all Indonesian words, including

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place names; the sole exceptions are places that had completely different names under Dutch colonial rule, such as Batavia (now Jakarta).

Our work has been greatly enriched by the notes and other insights in the 1992 scholarly edition of *Max Havelaar* edited by A. Kets-Vree. This is not an English counterpart to that edition, with its massive critical apparatus, but an invitation to new generations of readers to explore the vast archipelago of Multatuli's mind and world. In the later editions of *Max Havelaar* published during the author's lifetime, he included extensive notes. This translation includes the large majority of those notes, which show how his views evolved over time and provide a fascinating additional layer of narrative. A few have been abridged or left out for various reasons; for instance, some deal with linguistic concerns irrelevant to the English version. It was occasionally difficult to draw the line, and we believe we generally erred on the side of inclusion.

We have also added a few translators' notes, as well as a glossary and timeline for the reader's convenience.

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—INA RILKE
and DAVID MCKAY