

Preface from the author regarding the novel: The Game changer

Dear reader,

As involuntary protagonist, they dare ask me to write a foreword, just to make matters worse. Have they gone completely mad?! Well, all right then! Henkie will not let anybody down, folks! I do this for you people, as I have always done everything for you all.

Was signed,

Henk van Wijnen-Swarttouw

Writing a novel is a complicated process, but writing a good preface about your own novel seems rather impossible. Do not even start you might say, and I agree with you wholeheartedly. But in recent months the idea emerged to devote a few pages to the development of this novel. Elias Canetti wrote a threevolume biography in which he indicates in veiled terms how 'Die Blendung' was created and where to find the origin of it. Other writers have done something similar. Also within me arose the need to interpret my novel by sketching backgrounds and circumstances, or at least start a meagre attempt to do so, even while knowing failure is guaranteed. First, however, I want to indicate that a novel 'explains' itself. Every reader will reflect something else, will recognize themselves or not, will judge the writing or condemn it, will be able to feel or experience something rather unique while reading. Yes, every reader will be able to explain the novel in a different way. To tell something sensible, I shall therefore relate myself to my own novel as a reader, a hazardous undertaking for a writer! But I will give it a try and start by answering a question: a colleague asked me about the philosophical meaning of my novel, and although philosophy plays no direct role, except at the point where Julia discovers she has to break eternal repetition to improve the future and thereby advance her Amor Fati, we can with good will try to understand the social context in which the novel is situated, seen from a wide perspective, and only then zoom in on psychosocial aspects and relationships. This social environment, often undeliberate determines how people behave. Individually, everyone needs to relate towards the world, even though this could mean a stubborn retreat or rejection, and the way an individual relates to society is determined by a mix of genes, education and psychosocial situations in which he lives, from birth until present, while vitality, or rather a lack of it, finds its way through this cultural and social norms, scholar or, if at all possible, more or less independently acquired norms and value systems with which the individual, consciously or unconsciously, has to deal with. The influence of your environment is big. It is rather an illusion to think we are not affected by it. Without environment, a human being does not exist, and this setting includes largely other people and their beliefs. However, most individuals live in their own world of thinking, often they do not realize how they are actually influenced, how they are merely responding by standards of their (immediate) environment. This is also true for our protagonist, Henk van Wijnen-Swarttouw as well as for the other characters in the novel, such as his daughter Julia.

How did the novel come about?

At first, I wanted to write about a hiker, a man walking through the city of Rotterdam at various times, receiving and experiencing impressions. During the writing came this idea of a complicated relationship with his daughter, who against the wishes of her father started to exhibit and perform her works of contemporary art. The role of art as contrast to this desire of the parents towards a noble profession was born. Then arose in that interaction father-daughter and surroundings of Rotterdam as a harbour reaching as far as my hometown Vlaardingen 10 miles West and with the city Schiedam in between, so three cities with the Maas river close by, a story in which the struggle of

Henk with forbidden amorous feelings for his almost fullgrown daughter led to sublimation into the direction of another, namely his secretary of Romanian origin. Someone who not coincidentally resembles his daughter Julia. All this against the background of rising populism in society, the impending split, increasing polarization and tensions in multicultural Rotterdam, as seen and experienced from the characters in the novel. Stress is becoming concrete when Julia starts a love affair with a young man of a Moroccan family. Additional contrasting this idea arose to introduce another employer of Henk, account manager Cor Figeë, a port worker who slowly climbed higher up by working long hours. Thus, this idea of a no-nonsense self-made businessman arose, a 'company doctor' in which "the people", harbour workers, believe as a saviour within the personification of Cor Figeë. Cor sees his new boss Henk initially this way, as the saviour of their almost bankrupt business. As work within the harbour is under pressure from modernization and globalization, Henk van Wijnen-Swarttouw will turn things around for the better. He will be the tipper who stops the downward social spiral and bends it into a more positive direction. So, we are dealing with a father-daughter relationship and two employee-employer relationships against the background of social problems of ordinary people, of the 'hardworking man', while multicultural tensions are rising, fuelled by lower growth and increasing contrast between the rich and poor. From this delicate position, Henk van Wijnen-Swarttouw turns into an opportunistic and openminded entrepreneur who is not afraid to go out and study the crowd in order to assess the current situation in the city. He also is not afraid to use latest technical developments for the benefit in his unique way. Apologies, dear reader, I notice I am starting to make some kind of summary. Let me, before I give away any more content or even worse the plot, and thereby deprive your reading pleasure, close this preface with a paltry attempt to discuss the circumstances of my writing process. There has been talk about the populist slant and rather strange kind of rawness of *The Game Changer*, but this is purposefully interwoven, particularly in the first hundred pages, to move into ever more comedic slant and thus deliberate nuance, where reality of being spontaneous is not neglected. In the afterword to *Lolita*, Nabokov writes that it is a reassurance for a writer to know that your novel has been published. I'm rather ambivalent about this: sometimes I feel this as well, at other times I am in doubt. Writing a novel is carrying through against odds, it's a tough road to walk, an exhilarating and exciting quest in creativity with unknown outcome. The real torment however begins after publication. Personally, I have a complicated and, reluctant to say, a bit of a love-hate relationship with this novel, but all this will be of no concern to you, the reader. And fortunately so.

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Dave Dröge

www.dekantelaar.com