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# Summary

The 1950s are known as a two-faced decade: on the one hand, it was a time of reconstruction and resurrection of the pre-war 'pillars' in society in an atmosphere of consensus; on the other hand there are numerous innovative tendencies that herald the turbulent sixties. A clear signal of the urge for innovation can be found in literature. The inspiring revolutionary programme of the 'Vijftigers' aimed at both poetry and society; in 1951, Lucebert wrote 'lyriek is de moeder der politiek / ik ben niets dan omroeper van oproer' ('lyrical poetry is the mother of politics / I am just the announcer of revolt') in 'School der poëzie' ('School of poetry'). With this, he set the trend for the journal *Podium*. The literary periodicals of the 1950s show clear traces of the political and social issues of the period. Current issues demanded positioning in a country that was trying to put the Second World War behind itself, that was wrestling with its colonial heritage, and that had the Cold War on its doorstep. Many writers and poets took a stand against the established opinions.

This political protest received little attention in later years. The literary voices of protest cannot be found in the historiography of the 1950s, while in literary history it is predominantly innovations in form that are studied. The Vijftigers' political engagement in their work is almost never touched upon.

My research highlights the engagement in the literary journals of the 'long fifties' (1950-1963): What positions did authors take with regard to the major socio-political issues and how was their engagement shaped? The texts relate to three important socio-political 'discourses': coping with the grief and the aftermath of the recent war, the developments in the former Dutch Indies, and the tensions between the new global power blocks.

Literary texts are a factor in shaping the public debate. This starting point corresponds to the view of literature of the 'new historicism' as formulated by Stephen Greenblatt. It means that points of view voiced in literature influence the shape of the socio-political discourses of the 1950s, which in turn is of importance for how our view of that period is constructed.

In many texts, several 'voices' are heard; these texts are polyphonic, a term introduced into literary studies by Mikhail Bakhtin. His theory also gives us the opportunity to recognise the workings of literary engagement in multi-interpretable texts and in texts without an evidently party political 'message'. From my study it appears that this holds especially for poetry, the text genre that seems to lend itself least to engage-

ment. Apart from using polyphony, the poet, like the prose writer, has specifically literary instruments at his disposal to express his commitment.

I see polyphony not just at text level, but also at the level of discourse: there is an accepted opinion and there are voices opposing that opinion. My research focuses on the opposing voices: they, the dissonants, are the ones that attracted attention within the debate, while the consonant voices confirmed the public opinion. In this study, the engaged literary texts enter into a dialogue with the public debate of the period, providing a different view of the time and of the literature of the period.

With the interweaving of the specifically literary engagement and the influence of these 'voices' on the public debate, the gap between autonomy and engagement, which is also a recurring subject of discussion in the 21st century, can be bridged: the relatively autonomous place of literature in society provides the opportunity to voice a specifically phrased socio-political opinion in that society. The writers and poets in the 1950s were well aware of this. Literature, in their texts, is a sanctuary for dissonant voices.

In this dissonance, these authors are ahead of their time. The same applies to the discourse on the Second World War and on decolonisation, as well as to the discourse on the Cold War.

In the historical view, a 'memory culture' does not get into its stride until the 1960s, and only then does it become part of our modern 'cultural memory'. The 1950s were supposedly dominated by suppression or repression of the recent past. This is indeed reflected in the religious periodicals, but in other literary journals there is a counter-current from early on, especially with regard to the Second World War. The myth of a country in resistance during the war is dispelled in *Maatstaf* and *Podium*, and, to a lesser extent, in *De Gids*. Also, the clear division between right and wrong is put under pressure, especially in collectively reflective texts in which the authors examine the role of Dutch people and call for attention for the Shoah. A number of writers and poets directly relate the function of literature to the war by asking how war memories should be shaped, now that traditional ethical values have become inadequate.

The memory of the Second World War is a continuum in *Maatstaf* and *Podium*, both journals that can be regarded as breeding grounds for opposing views. Here Herzberg, Presser, Van Randwijk, Lammers and J.B. Charles were engaged in polemics that not only breached consensus, but also bear witness to a new historical awareness. In their call for vigilance they connect the Second World War to the Cold War, especially in the discussion of German rearmament. The reader has to draw conclusions from his memory of the war, because fascism is still the enemy and it can raise its head again any moment in a monstrous alliance with the United States. Clearly, there were authors writing against the dominant view of communism being the greatest threat to the West.

The special combined issue of the *Nationale snipperdag* magazine from April 1954 is the turning point in dealing with the war in literature: in this publication, writers

and poets rebel and draw attention to the importance of remembering and warning. This joint action, directed against the government plans to abolish the official commemoration of 4 May and the celebration of 5 May is a firm countervoice against the widespread desire to let the war years rest – circumstances that may strike as odd the present-day reader who shares the collective experience of 4 and 5 May, because these dissonants are firmly rooted in our collective memory. The predominant tone in the issue is discontent, but there are fiercer protests as well, where authors make a connection with the reality of the Cold War. Where memory is linked with reflection, ‘then’ and ‘now’ converge.

The dominant discourse of decolonisation is under pressure as well in the literary journals, but the number of protesters is limited. A number of periodicals remain silent on the subject of colonial times and the recent war of independence that was so fresh in the memory, and that was to be continued in the Netherlands New Guinea dispute. The editors of *Ontmoeting* and *Roeping* had no idea how to handle the colonial ‘heritage’, nor is it a much-discussed theme in the other periodicals, albeit for a different reason. The contributions that did appear show that it was not a matter of suppression: decolonisation did not come into view until it touched upon the current situation. This is particularly shown by essays on the New Guinea affair in *Libertinage*, *Tirade*, *Maatstaf* and *Podium*.

The ‘indirect’ countervoices that attest to breaking the silence and that criticise the decolonial policy are not great in number, but they are very dissonant in the degree and manner of their resistance. The most powerful texts appeared in *Podium* and were written by two debutants: Jan Wolkers and Lucebert, who, each in his own way, placed himself in the tradition of Multatuli. In the play ‘Mattekeesjes’ (1958), Wolkers mocks the arguments to preserve New Guinea for the Netherlands, and at the same time ridicules the missionary work. Lucebert, in his ‘Minnebrief aan onze gemartelde bruid *Indonesië*’ (‘Love letter to our tortured bride *Indonesia*’, 1949), performs a frontal attack on the policy with metaphors and polyphony, and makes the Dutch feel ashamed of themselves for their colonial past with an image that is poetically charged, but has lost all its loftiness: the groom has extorted, mutilated and wasted his bride. The image of the Netherlands as a model colonial power has been mercilessly destroyed.

The countervoices on issues related to the Cold War are the most numerous and voluminous. This conclusion is striking, because the Cold War, as opposed to the Second World War and the colonial past, has hitherto hardly been an issue in the literary history of the 1950s. The biting cold deeply permeated poetry, prose and essays. The countervoices became so loud that they not only broke the consensus with regard to the Cold War, but forced themselves from the margins of the literary domain to the centre of the debate.

There were several issues that led to writers taking stands: (anti)communism, German rearmament, the atomic bomb and the nuclear arms race, and the polarisation

in the world and in Dutch society. The contrary views of writers and poets in *Podium* and *Maatstaf* are directly opposed to the fierce anti-communist line of the editors of *Libertinage* and *Tirade*. In the latter journals, De Kadt and Van Galen Last, among others, often vented their anger at the intellectual and literary climate in which writers showed themselves to be weak, chose a 'third way', or, even worse, tended towards communism. Their opinion was shared by the editors of *Roeping*, who also denounced the literary engagement shown by other authors. *Podium* and *Maatstaf* provide a diametrically opposed view. In these journals, staying in line with the United States and the aversion to communism were no longer a matter of course. The submissiveness of the press and the public caused great irritation; consensus was continually under fire.

A clear development from memory to reflection on the future can be discerned in *Maatstaf*. The commemorative issue of 1955 has an important place in this development: Bert Bakker set the critical, committed course, which was immediately made concrete by the antimilitaristic plays by Lucebert and Rodenko, interspersed with critical poems by Warmond, Mok, J.B. Charles and Achterberg. In later volumes, J.B. Charles leaves his mark on the journal's profile with his series 'Van het kleine koude front' ('From the little cold front'), in which he positions literature in the conflict that divided the world.

During the entire 'long fifties', *Podium* has an undiminished critical spirit of contrariness. The editors of *Braak* and *Reflex* had already paved the way. A pinnacle in the framework of engagement is the ninth volume (1953-1954), with the manifesto 'Mit brennender Sorge' by Kousbroek and Schierbeek's reaction to it, together with many engaged poems by, among others, Kouwenaar and Lucebert voicing several dissonant positions. In the second half of the 1950s the literary engagement remains essential, embedded in declarations of ever-changing boards of editors. The transformations in the poems often coincide with the subjects that are exposed in prose.

In its criticism of nuclear armament and its warning against the atomic danger, *Podium* also is a forerunner of widespread social tendencies. The opposition is voiced early on in poems by Kouwenaar and Lucebert. At the beginning of the 1960s, the criticism of the nuclear arms race increases rapidly in the journal, with the 'Bericht aan de bevolking' ('Message to the people') by Claus, and plays by Mulisch and Van Hoek. The poets and writers are not paralysed by fear – which in *Ontmoeting* is still tied to the hope for salvation by God –, but they stand at bay, influenced even more by the passivity of the rest of the Netherlands. They are supported by the authors of *Gard Sivik*, where the engagement is concentrated in fierce criticism of nuclear armament. The opposition resembles that in *Podium* and has been put into words by authors writing for both periodicals. This shows that on this point they had more in common than was previously assumed. For their engagement, the New Realists use their method of selection, isolation and annexation, giving new meaning to texts that are seemingly randomly taken from reality.

The dissonant conceptions often go together with literary innovation, both in poetry and in prose. The essays in *Maatstaf* and *Podium* furnish the genre with a literary layering that is absent in the arguments in *Tirade* and *Libertinage*. In the latter periodicals, literature and politics are juxtaposed rather than intertwined. The essays by Hofland, Lammers, Sleutelaar and Charles are different in their expressiveness: the authors stand back from specific events in order to criticize them in a more or less literary form, and in this criticism, they can display great commitment. In addition, the reader is challenged: is he part of the uncritical masses, or will he join the contrarian thinkers?

In these contributions, literature is assigned a specific task, whether or not this is expressed explicitly in words. Authors question the complexity of engagement, literature and society, often in revolutionary language, sometimes with very concrete political ambitions, and now and then with more room for doubt and consideration. The arguments, manifestos and calls by Kousbroek, Schierbeek, Andreus, Elburg, Pollet, Vinkenoog and Buddingh' in *Podium* and those by Bert Bakker, Schulte Nordholt and Charles in *Maatstaf* bear witness to this. In 'Van het kleine koude front', J.B. Charles goes one step further and looks for opportunities to relate to reality *in language*.

This is in line with the mission statement of the Vijftigers. The possibilities specific to poetry are explored and put into words. A poem is not a direct representation of the extratextual reality, but has its own reality in the verse itself, which in the engagement, at the surface of the text, is linked to the historical context. Thus considered, poetry has no limitations with respect to engagement, but on the contrary offers extra possibilities: ambiguity receives its form in an autonomous field, which creates the opportunity to break with certain social rules, standards and values. In this respect, the poetry in *Podium* differs from that in *Maatstaf*, where the engagement is usually articulated in a more traditional form and as a clear, time-bound message.

In *Podium*, the engaged poem frequently transcends the concrete historic event; the text can be actualised time and again. This appears most strongly in the poetry of Lucebert, who had already written 'dit steeds weer hedendaagse verleden' ('this continually contemporary past').

Engagement runs like a thread through Lucebert's poetry. In his programme, the poetic revolution at the beginning of the 1950s goes hand in hand with social upheaval, and has a communist character. The task of the 'dichterlijke Don Quichots van het proletariaat' ('poetical Don Quixotes of the proletariat') always remains in force, beside the existential doubt on the possibilities of poetry. The ambiguity of poetry that represents the horrors of reality in an aesthetic way remains.

Even when the dust of the revolt had settled, Lucebert continued to depict the resistance to the existing order and the stances adopted amidst the burning reality. In his verses, he berates the nuclear arms race, the docility towards the United States, the red-baiting, the abuse of power by the Catholic church and the tendency to con-

ceal the disgraces of the recent past and the intrusive present. Many poems bear witness to a very critical view of society in which wars and tyranny govern the community.

From my analyses of the separate poems, it appears repeatedly that the poet will deploy his own resources to testify and to act against abuses. The language in the verse may offer comfort, but more often it reveals abuses and uses harsh words in opposition. Sometimes, a new common ideal accompanies the protest: the poet then assumes the task of a prophet, the announcer predicting a new society for the community. In so doing, the poet remains true to his programmatic line of verse from 1951.

With this concrete socio-political function of the poet *and* the poem, Lucebert breaks with the concept of poetry as an autonomous language construct, while at the same time his verses represent in language their own reality; a reality moreover that can take on a new shape at every reading. The poet does not prefer the one or the other reality; there remains an equilibrium filled with tension. This can be considered the specifically literary effect of engagement.

The engaged poems by Lucebert perpetuate *Podium's* signature. It is in this journal that the protest is articulated most originally and fiercely. In the long 1950s, writers and poets proclaimed unparalleled rebellious views of politics, literature and the relation between the two. *Podium's* rebellious character is apparent not only from its content, but also in the unconventional forms chosen for the essays, the stories and especially the poems. Several writers and poets showed a strong awareness of the paradoxical effect and the power of literary engagement. I wanted to demonstrate that *in the text* the gap is bridged between the autonomy of literature and the author's point of view that can be seen as action in the public sphere. The journal is the cradle of the countervoice; the possibilities of literature are used to formulate 'een hard en waakzaam woord' ('a hard and vigilant word').