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# BETWEEN GELANGGANG AND LEKRA: PRAMOEDYA'S DEVELOPING LITERARY CONCEPTS

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## Introduction

During the first decade of the New Order, the idea of the autonomy of art was the unchallenged basis for all art production considered legitimate. The term encompasses two significant assumptions. First, it includes the idea that art and/or its individual categories are recognized within society as independent sub-systems that make their own rules, i.e. that art is not subject to influences exerted by other social sub-systems (politics and religion, for example). Secondly, it entails a complex of aesthetic notions that basically tend to exclude all non-artistic considerations from the aesthetic field and to define art as an activity detached from everyday life. An aesthetics of autonomy can create problems for its adherents, as a review of recent occidental art and literary history makes clear. Artists have attempted to overcome these problems by reasserting social ideals (e.g. as in naturalism) or through revolt, as in the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century which challenged the aesthetic norms of the autonomous work of art in order to relocate aesthetic experience at a pivotal point in relation to individual and social life.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In German studies of literature, the institutionalization of art as an autonomous field and its aesthetic consequences is discussed mainly by Christa Bürger and Peter Bürger. For a short English description of

While it is true that institutionally the autonomy of art was never fully realized during the New Order and artists have had to struggle with various forms of governmental and societal interferences, it must also be said that an aesthetics of autonomy did certainly establish itself as the legitimate ideology of art. Its dominance of the literary scene is still unbroken, although it has been challenged at various times since the end of the seventies, even by well-known authors: examples of “challenging” literary productions might include Rendra’s *Pamflet Penyair* (“Pamphlets of a Poet”) and the works of young authors such as Yudhistira ANM Massardi, whose texts take direct aim at the earnestness and social dissociation of “serious” literature. Since the late seventies, many young authors have exerted themselves to broaden the social acceptance of literature; they have shown a willingness to respond to readership expectations derived from day-to-day life, and they have made creative use of a variety of literary traditions (traditional, popular, and “serious”). Literary theorists have also formulated alternatives to the ideology of the autonomy of art by focusing on contextual literature and criticism, specifically Indonesian aspects of literary criticism, and the significance of post-modern theories. Thus the ideal construct defining literature as a world unto itself, existing within a time frame all its own—a construct inherent in the term “universal humanism”—is now confronted by theoretical initiatives that emphasize the interdependence of literary texts with certain points in time, specific societal constellations, and a given readership.<sup>2</sup>

Many of those writers who signed the Cultural Manifesto (*Manifes Kebudayaan, Manikebu*) of 1963 and dominated the literary scene for years are now apparently worried about the extent to which the aesthetic ideal of the autonomy of art is losing its attractiveness. In response, they have made a concerted effort to revive the memories of the sharp attacks on the autonomy of art once mounted by defenders of politically motivated art during the early sixties. They hope in this way to pass on their aesthetic ideal to coming generations. Thus, in the beginning of 1995, two of the signatories published *Prahara Budaya*, the first Indonesian documentation in book form on the leftist “offensive” and the struggles of the Manikebu group to protect art against the ideologues. Further, many signatories of the Manifesto strongly objected when the 1995 Magsaysay Award was given to Pramoedya Ananta Toer.<sup>3</sup> The debates these issues have generated center on persecution, guilt, revenge, and the possibility of reconciliation. For all their intensity, however, those most deeply involved in the discussion persistently avoid asking why certain individual authors of the *Angkatan 45* (Generation of 45)—including two of the most gifted, Pramoedya Ananta Toer and

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the basic principles see Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde* (Minneapolis: Manchester University Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> For Yudhistira see Savitri Scherer, “Yudhistira Ardi Noegraha: Social attitudes in the works of a popular writer,” *Indonesia* 31 (1981): 31–52. For discussions on literary theory see Ariel Heryanto, ed. *Sastra kontekstual*, (Jakarta: CV. Rajawali, 1985) and Mursal Esten, ed. *Menjelang teori dan kritik susastra Indonesia yang relevan* (Bandung: Angkasa 1988) and the journal *Kalam*.

<sup>3</sup> See especially Taufik Ismail & D. S. Moeljanto, eds. *Prahara Budaya. Kilas balik ofensif Lekra/PKI dkk*, (Jakarta: Mizan dan HU Republika, 1995). Till then, the struggle of the Manifesto group was commemorated only by personal recollections published in the press usually at the anniversaries of the Manikebu. The discussions concerning the Magsaysay Award of 1995 to Pramoedya are partly documented in *Horison* 30, 6–10, (October 1995): 1–43, for an informative and penetrating analysis see Daniel Dhakidae, “Kesusastraan, kekuasaan dan kebudayaan suatu bangsa,” *Kalam* 6 (1995): 74–102.

Sitor Situmorang—turned away from the idea of an autonomous literature in the late fifties to join forces with the cultural and political Left. None of the Indonesian discussants asks what motivated these authors to demand a politically partisan literature under the motto “Politics is in command” (*politik adalah panglima*). This essay will address that question. One may begin by acknowledging that the leftist reorientation of these artists may have simply reflected the political developments of the day. Social conditions as well as personal circumstances, experiences, and ambitions certainly played a role in their decisions. Yet another very significant factor was intellectual, aesthetic, and practical: these authors invested serious effort in developing concepts of literature which, at last, they found difficult to realize.

The numerous non-fiction texts written by Pramoedya in the fifties and sixties provide a fund of information on his literary conceptions and the difficulties inherent in his work as a writer. On the basis of these texts, we will attempt to track down his reasons for leaving the circle of Gelanggang authors, to which group he must certainly be ascribed in 1950. His position within the spectrum of Gelanggang authors and the internal inconsistencies of his earlier philosophy of literature are items of some interest in this connection. His express dissatisfaction with conditions governing the literary field in Indonesia is also significant, for Pramoedya experienced these conditions as a hindrance to realization of his literary ideas. In the mid-fifties, he began a search for a new foundation for his literary work. That search finally led to his activities on behalf of the Institute of People’s Culture (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, Lekra) beginning in 1959.

### The End of the National Revolution: Split-up of the *Angkatan 45* into Gelanggang Group and Lekra

At the end of 1948, the Indonesian authors who had first published their texts during the Japanese occupation and the years of the national revolution began to use the term *Angkatan 45* to describe themselves.<sup>4</sup> The associations elicited by the term—the outbreak of the *pemuda* (revolutionary, male-dominated “youth”), vigorous action and heroic enthusiasm—were by all means intended. It called to mind the turbulent and decisive period at the end of the Second World War, as well as the dreams of freedom and a new beginning, that had been the guiding light for these young authors in their artistic, journalistic, and even military commitments. By choosing the title *Angkatan 45*, the young writers emphasized their claim to cultural recognition, aligning themselves in opposition to the authors of the prewar period associated with the journal *Poedjangga Baroe*. They blamed the older writers for insufficient creativity and petty-minded wariness (some of these writers were still producing work), contrasting it with the vigorous élan and determination of the new generation.<sup>5</sup> As the term *Angkatan 45* was not confined to the literary field, the authors in the same time

<sup>4</sup> In written discourse the term appeared first in Rosihan Anwar, “Angkatan 45 buat martabat manusia,” *Siasat*, December 26, 1948. As a name for the generation the term includes all authors irrespective of their politico-cultural affiliation. Descriptions of literary history tend to identify the *Angkatan 45* with the Gelanggang group. This tendency has been strengthened by the fact that since 1965 publication of texts by Lekra writers is banned.

<sup>5</sup> Here the tone was set by Chairil Anwar’s self-confident speech of 1943 and his essay of 1945 “Hoppla!,” see H. B. Jassin, ed. *Chairil Anwar. Pelopor Angkatan 45*, (Jakarta: Gunung Agung, 1956, 3rd ed. 1968), pp. 128–33, 139–140.

communicated their sympathy with the *pemuda* as the proponents of armed struggle and radical societal change, and their opposition to the Republican leadership, which advocated diplomacy as the best method for winning Indonesia's independence and showed a tendency to socio-political conservatism. The *pemuda*, with their very different experiences and their new world-view, asserted the existence of a deep gap between the generations.

Hardly a year had passed when suddenly, at the end of 1949, the *Angkatan 45* itself became the focus of discussions by these young authors. The recognition of the sovereignty of Indonesia was near at hand, but it had also become clear that the dream of a new and completely different society had not yet become reality. These realizations led to the question of whether and to what extent the Indonesian Revolution, and with it the *Angkatan 45*, had failed. The provocative essay by A. S. Dharta "Angkatan '45 is washed up" (*Angkatan '45 sudah mampus*) precipitated the discussion.<sup>6</sup> With considerable verve, Dharta described the failure of *Angkatan 45* as an artistic and political movement. The "Battlefield of Madiun" (*Medan Madiun*) was all the proof he needed. Without mentioning the prologue and course of the Madiun rebellion, he interpreted the event not as an altercation between communist and nationalist forces, but rather as a conflict of generations: in order to protect their power and privileges, the older conservative political leadership had treacherously split up the youth movement and had instigated the *pemuda* to fight against each other. Thus, the *Angkatan 45*, which had unleashed the revolution through heroic struggle and which should have been the "bearer of the Future" (*pemikul Hari Esok*), was now completely washed up (*mampus, hancur, tewas*), having ultimately failed due to its lack of commitment, organizational fragmentation, and lack of political acumen. Dharta demanded as a consequence that writers make a new beginning on the basis of an unequivocal political commitment. Step by step, what was later to become the Lekra position, as set out in its manifesto of 1950, began to coalesce out of the positive reactions to Dharta's essay. The notion of a conflict between the generations, still valid for him, was given up in favor of an analysis of class struggle and imperialist dependency like that represented by the young leaders of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in Aidit's circle. The revolution was considered a failure because its goal of a people's democracy was not achieved. In this situation, all writers should support the popular movement (defined as the organized class of workers and peasants along with intellectuals and students favoring progressive patriotism). The Lekra manifesto called on the artists to use art as a tool to help realize the goal of a people's democratic society. In accordance with the official communist guidelines for literary policy, writers were sworn to a program of literary aesthetics amalgamating realism and romanticism as a means of enhancing the people's revolutionary enthusiasm and will to fight.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Jogaswara [A. S. Dharta], "Angkatan '45 sudah mampus," *Spektra*, October 27, 1949.

<sup>7</sup> For positive reactions to Dharta's essay, see Soegiarti, "Angkatan '45 sudah mampus?!", *Spektra*, November 17, 1949; see also G. Ibarruri, "Sedikit tentang kebudayaan Indonesia," *Spektra*, December 10, 1949 and "Sedikit tentang idee '45," *Spektra*, February 4, 1950. The Lekra manifesto (*Mukadimah*)—original version of 1950, new version of 1955—is documented and translated in Keith Foulcher, *Social commitment in literature and the arts: the Indonesian "Institute of People's Culture" 1950–1965* (Clayton, Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1986), pp. 209–22.

Like all authors of the *Angkatan 45*, the Lekra members considered their task to create work within the boundaries defining serious, artistically valuable literature.<sup>8</sup> In accord with the orthodox “socialist realist” critical tradition, they positioned their creative work in the context of world literature and esteemed the names of many committed bourgeois authors. Here they devoted special attention to Multatuli because he was important for Indonesia. They measured literary value principally according to the social content of a text and therefore could even accept modernist writings, e.g. the early texts of Chairil Anwar and Idrus, which they appreciated as true expressions of rebellion against the Japanese occupation. Among the *Angkatan 45*, the authors of the Lekra group were in the minority in the first years. Politically, the Madiun rebellion had isolated them. From an artistic point of view, their reputation was also quite limited. Because of their connections to cultural nationalism, however, Lekra members were not completely excluded from official cultural activities (cultural congresses, the National Cultural Council [Badan Musyawarah Kebudayaan Nasional], and the editorial offices of its periodical *Indonesia*).

The provocative thesis proposed by Dharta declaring the failure of *Angkatan 45* and of the national revolution not only attracted adherents; it also consolidated opponents to these notions. Those who disagreed with Dharta gathered around the feuilleton *Gelanggang* in the periodical *Siasat*, thus identifying with the prestige of the literary renewal movement associated with the names of Chairil Anwar (who had died in April 1949), Asrul Sani, and Rivai Apin. The *Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang* (Gelanggang Testimonial) was their common credo.<sup>9</sup> When Pramoedya was released from two and a half years of Dutch imprisonment in December 1949, he joined this circle of authors. Although he knew Asrul Sani from the Taman Siswa school and had been admiring the rebellious élan of Chairil Anwar’s early poems, he had not previously been in close contact with this circle. One of the reasons for his turn towards the Gelanggang group may have been his strong nationalist convictions including anti-communist sentiments, and the horror he felt in reaction to news of the Madiun rebellion and cruel actions by leftist forces in Madiun.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore H. B. Jassin was a member of this circle, a man who had contributed much to Pramoedya’s recognition as an author (Balai Pustaka Prize for *Perburuan*) and whose authority as a critic was unquestioned by Pramoedya at that time. Pramoedya participated in the meeting at which the *Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang* was formulated and approved, and he assumed the function of group secretary for a period of several months. On the political side, this group of authors maintained close relations with the Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI) through *Siasat*, but they also had connections to circles affiliated to the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI) and Republican governmental institutions, for example through *Mimbar Indonesia*.

<sup>8</sup> In principle, all the writers of the *Angkatan 45*, *Gelanggang* as well as Lekra authors, referred to serious literary texts by using the term “literature.”

<sup>9</sup> This credo was formulated in February 1950 mainly by Asrul Sani and Usmar Ismail. In June it was presented as *Surat Kepertjajaan ‘Gelanggang Seniman Merdeka’* in a public meeting and as part of a small brochure concerning the history, aims, and statutes of the organization. Under the shortened title *Surat Kepertjajaan Gelanggang*, the credo was published in *Siasat/Gelanggang*, October 22, 1950. For an English translation, see A. Teeuw, *Modern Indonesian Literature I* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969), p. 127.

<sup>10</sup> For Pramoedya’s judgement of the Madiun affair, see his recollection in: “Djembatan gantung & Konsepsi Presiden,” *Harian Rakjat*, February 28, 1957.

Besides, there were contacts with a group of Eurasians and Dutch who supported Indonesian independence and cultural exchange.<sup>11</sup>

The Gelanggang artists remained a loose circle without a permanent organization, united by the common idea of a conflict between the generations and the concept of the autonomy of art. With the Lekra authors they shared a dissatisfaction with their society at the end of the revolutionary period, for they judged that the *pemuda* movement had been ultimately defeated. But in contrast to Dharta, they did not speak in terms of suppression of the younger generation by force. They rather described a natural process of attenuation of revolutionary ardor. By defining a new attitude towards life as the driving motor of the revolutionary commitment, the authors convinced themselves and went on to argue that the revolution had not died. Pramoedya emphasized that the outcome of the revolution could not be measured by examining the current form of government; he expressed his faith in the dynamic creativity of the Indonesian nation, a creativity that would enable it to change the face of the state and government in due time. For him, the true greatness (*keagungan*) of the revolution was nearly inconceivable and could only be sensed by recalling the unlimited sacrifices people were willing to make. Referring to the traditional Javanese notion of the "wheel of time" (*cakra manggilingan*), he created the image of the "circuit of revolution" (*peredaran revolusi*) and described the "revolution as a continuously rotating takeoff board" (*revolusi sebagai titik loncatan yang akan beredar terus*), evoking its might, permanence, and inevitably dynamic motion that again and again reopens hope and opportunities for renewal and change.<sup>12</sup>

The Gelanggang authors expected the decisive impulses for societal change to come from the artists of the *Angkatan 45*. To them, the artist was the culture hero capable of living in accordance with his convictions, independently of societal approval and existing norms. His creativity and uncompromising individual integrity provided the means of finding answers to the challenges of his time. The complete autonomy of art was considered an absolute precondition to this creative life. An artist must, they thought, be free of all external stipulations in the form of religious ideas, political ideologies, economic interests, and the expectations of the reading public. He must obey only the call of his own inner thoughts and feelings. As the "true heirs of world culture," the Gelanggang authors proclaimed their independence from cultural nationalism and emphasized the freedom of the artist in choosing from among stimulating influences.<sup>13</sup> This basic consensus of the Gelanggang authors was to

<sup>11</sup> In his early fiction, Pramoedya experimented with different narrative styles. The author's point of view in the works *Blora*, *Perburuan* and *Keluarga Gerilya* came closest to the positions held by H. B. Jassin and the Gelanggang authors. See Keith Foulcher, "The early fiction of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, 1946–1949," in *Text/Politics in Island Southeast Asia. Essays in Interpretation*, ed. D. M. Roskies, Ohio University Monographs in International Studies, Southeast Asia Series, No. 91 (Athens: Ohio University, 1993), pp. 191–220. For relations between Dutch, Eurasian, and Indonesian intellectuals, see L. Dolk, *Twee zielen, twee gedachten. Tijdschriften en intellectuelen op Java (1900–1957)* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Suatu titik lontjatan," *Siasat*, December 24, 1950. Discontent and restlessness are seen by H. Maier as driving forces in the subsequent literary development, H. Maier, "Chairil Anwar's heritage: the fear of stultification—another side of modern Indonesian literature," *Indonesia* 43 (1987): 1–29.

<sup>13</sup> In a report on the Gelanggang group, Sitor Situmorang pointed to the general interest of these writers in world literature, and mentioned particularly Homer, Goethe, Shakespeare, Dante, Shelley, Hugo, Baudelaire, Schiller, Ibsen, Lao Tze, Confucius, Lin Yu Tang, Iqbal, and Omar Kayam. This collection of famous names is rather at random, mixing philosophers and authors belonging to different currents and

become the dominant literary concept of the fifties, not least due to the influential position held by H. B. Jassin, the leading critic, commentator, and publisher's advisor in the literary field.

### Literary Concepts of the Gelanggang Authors: Pramoedya's Position at the Fringes of the Gelanggang Group

The credo of the Gelanggang artists did not specify a common aesthetic program. On this point, the ideas held by the individual writers differed widely in some cases. Two essential positions can be differentiated: that of the core group mainly associated with the feuilleton editors, and that represented by fringe figures such as Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Mochtar Lubis, and Trisno Sumardjo, who approved the positions set forth in the *Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang* but did not share in the aesthetic program of the core group.<sup>14</sup> In these groups, artists' aesthetic ideas generally correlated with basic attitudes towards the modernization process.<sup>15</sup>

The authors of the core group—Asrul Sani, Sitor Situmorang, and Rivai Apin, to name the most prominent essayists—saw themselves as the heirs of Chairil Anwar and his programmatic modernism and they deliberately sought to tie up Indonesian literature with the most recent developments in Western dominated "world culture."<sup>16</sup> In Western European and North American literary circles at the time, cultural critique and the notion of the heroic individual were en vogue, with the idea of cultural

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with varying aesthetic ideals and qualities. The list only underlined the claim of the Gelanggang authors to intellectual recognition, turning to the whole range of world literature in contrast to the *Poedjangga Baroe* authors whose heroes had been the Dutch writers of the *Tachtigers* (Eighties). See Sitor Situmorang, "Gelanggang," *Mimbar Indonesia*, March 4, 1950.

<sup>14</sup> Achdiat Karta Mihardja, the author of *Atheis*, can be reckoned as one of the fringe figures, but he did not join the Gelanggang circle from the very beginning. Being close to Dharta, he had participated in the discussions about people's culture and also in the founding of Lekra. Not much later, he withdrew from Lekra because of communist influences in the organization. See *Percakapan Achdiat K. Mihardja dengan Abdul Ghaffar Ibrahim*, (interview transcript, Penang 1975). His literary concepts had clear didactic traits, and he advocated tendentious writings, defining the literary text primarily as a medium to discuss and impart a *Weltanschauung*. This approach positioned him halfway between the *Pujangga Baru* generation and the *Angkatan 45*. He emphasized rationality, as a prime necessity for the development of the nation. See Achdiat Karta Mihardja, "Angkatan 45, Angkatan Chairil, Angkatan Merdeka," *Pudjangga Baru*, Nomor Peringatan 10 Tahun (1950): 17–28.

<sup>15</sup> Another correlation can be seen between the different aesthetic approaches and the authors' attitudes towards different genres. The authors at the core of the Gelanggang group mainly wrote poetry, though in some cases also short stories and dramas (e.g. Sitor Situmorang), whereas the fringe figures were mainly prose narrators. However, the different aesthetic programs are not necessarily bound to specific genres as in the case of Iwan Simatupang, who wrote since 1953 in *Gelanggang* and whose prose accords to the aesthetic ideals of the core group. Note that in the context of this essay the different positions held by Pramoedya and the authors of the core Gelanggang group are of primary interest. Differentiations within the core group (e.g. between Asrul Sani and Sitor Situmorang) and between the authors at the fringes of the Gelanggang group cannot be examined in this space.

<sup>16</sup> To them, the revolution marked the leap into a modernity which had no clear traits yet, but which had to be a very new beginning. On this point, Sitor Situmorang argued that historical experience in the Western and Eastern world had shown that none of the prevailing cultural models could prevent barbarism. Therefore, he saw worldwide an urgent need to found a new universal humanism. See Sitor Situmorang, "Angkatan 45," *Siasat*, November 6, 1949; "Kritik," *Siasat*, December 11, 1949; "Berkatalah Armijn. (Membaca 'Kort overzicht van de moderne Indonesische literatuur')," *Mimbar Indonesia*, March 12, 1950.

freedom being hailed as bulwark against every form of totalitarian dictatorship. The authors of the core Gelanggang group felt called upon to adopt these themes and to reflect on the position of the individual in modern society. They discussed the vacuum left by the loss of traditional values, spoke about the experience of existential and social alienation, and warned against the dominance of purely functional and pragmatic rationality. Though they were aware that the society of recently independent Indonesia was not really modernized, they felt a need to deal with these experiences which could be observed already in its early stages. Accordingly, they directed their critique mainly against the optimistic belief in progress held by politicians and bureaucrats whom they accused of petty-minded materialism and a lack of cultural sensibility. The authors were convinced that the aesthetic way of thinking contrasted sharply with the pragmatic and functional organization of life; therefore art and literature were best suited to strengthen the position of the individual in society and counterbalance the impact of technology, rigid norms, and power structures.<sup>17</sup>

For literary production, this implied a radical concept of aesthetic autonomy, giving absolute priority to aesthetic perception and creativity, which were expected to crystallize in the work of art as a unique reality. Matured as a world unto itself, art would provide to an individual a highly specific revelation concerning his or her life. The appropriate mode of reception which was demanded by this kind of creation was a critical reflecting attitude. While Asrul Sani remained rather guarded, Sitor Situmorang plainly expressed the assumption that the knowledge achieved through art and literature would finally incite the recipients to change culture and society. Although the problem was obvious in postwar Indonesia, the authors disregarded the fact that the standard of living and educational level of the great majority of the people limited the reading public and furthermore would only permit a small minority of this audience to grasp the artistic intentions involved. The authors avoided tackling the basic dilemma inherent in this literary concept, i.e. that the envisaged social function of literature was inseparably bound to the aesthetic form and therefore to a highly artificial and esoteric language accessible only to a small intellectual elite.

The authors at the fringes of the Gelanggang group, including Pramoedya Ananta Toer, described their task in a very different way. They did not mention a fundamental opposition between the field of aesthetics and rationality. Their concept of the autonomy of art was of a more moderate nature. In their view, the autonomy of art was primarily an expression of its status within society, and the function of art was considered to be much more closely bound up with the social realities of life. It was perhaps no accident that these authors wrote mainly prose texts, i.e. the genre that had withstood all aestheticizing tendencies for the longest period in occidental literature. For Pramoedya as well, autonomy meant primarily being independent of external influences. He appreciated that in the modern age the author was free to raise his own insights and conscience to the level of an absolute authority, a situation that cleared the

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<sup>17</sup> Here a shift of emphasis in the literary concepts of Chairil Anwar and of the core Gelanggang group is evident. They propose three ideas bound up with the program of a truly modern literature: self-assertation and self-investigation of the individual, rebellion against prevailing moral standards, and cultural critique. Their admiration of Chairil Anwar notwithstanding, the authors of the core Gelanggang group loosened the link between literature and moral rebellion which Chairil Anwar had exemplified, and instead emphasized the importance of cultural critique.

way for works of art ruled solely by the prerogative of the individual personality and reason (*keharusan pribadi dan keharusan budi*). Pramoedya wanted to make use of this independent spirit to change society. He described literature as a vehicle for the communication of moral and ethical ideals. His objective was to provide a corrective for societal aberrations.<sup>18</sup>

The difference between Pramoedya's positions and those of the core Gelanggang group is revealed by his definition of the "beautiful." He did not consider beauty to be of value in and of itself, but required it to be combined with other ideals—for instance justice, humanity, or nationalism. Pramoedya did not hesitate to evoke links with traditional Indonesian ideas. He did this through the etymology of the term *su=sastra*, rendered as a "beautiful" (*indah*), "good" (*baik*), "useful" (*berfaedah*) text. He also used the term *halus* (sublime, refined), a notion central to Javanese culture, which he stripped of its courtly and ceremonial aspects to describe the all-encompassing perception of an artist for beauty and ethical ideals.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, his writings emphasized the serious nature of literature, and little significance was given to its recreational and diverting function.

In independent Indonesia, Pramoedya felt it was necessary to impart and strengthen new orientations among all groups of society. In contrast to the core Gelanggang group, he did not attribute the nation's ills to the modernization process. His concern was rather a lack of moral standards or, as he formulated it in reference to Ranggawarsita, a widespread "confusion" (*kebalauan*). He blamed this on the hypocrisy of the society's elite—all of them from the older generation—who had not realized their own ideas because they lacked strength of character and were weakened by the lasting influence of their colonial education. As Pramoedya illustrated by examples from politics, the economy, and culture, the transformation of the old colonial into the modern and independent society had failed.<sup>20</sup> The young people who had demonstrated courage, idealism, a willingness to sacrifice, and considerable creative energy during the fight for independence could, he argued, have provided the needed help. The country's youth represented, in Pramoedya's opinion, the personality type best suited to the new society. Although he liked to refer in this context to European strands of thought with references to the humanism and committed idealism of Romain Rolland and Saint-Exupéry, this new personality type showed obvious parallels to the model of an independent *citoyen* as outlined by the Java-based organizations of the nationalist movement: the ideal *citoyen* rejected exclusively personal achievements and self-centered interests, accepted active responsibility for the common weal (*sepi ing pamrih, rame ing gawe*), was fearless and willing to speak up for the rights of the weak.<sup>21</sup> The problem was, however, according to Pramoedya, that

<sup>18</sup> Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Kesusasteraan sebagai alat," *Mimbar Indonesia*, March 17, 1953; see also Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Kesusasteraan dan perjuangannya," *Siasat*, April 20, 1952.

<sup>19</sup> Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Definisi keindahan dalam kesusasteraan," *Indonesia* 3, 8 (1952): 14–17.

<sup>20</sup> Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Kebalauan hari ini I & II," *Mimbar Indonesia*, January 27, 1951 and March 3, 1951; Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Repolusi, pertentangan dan tantangan kembali," *Mimbar Indonesia*, March 15, 1952; Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Angkatan dan dunianya," *Duta Suasana*, January 10, 1953.

<sup>21</sup> This model contained traditional ideas of the *priyayi* (Javanese traditional/colonial officialdom) adjusted to modern needs, i.e. the ascetic detachment of the *pandita* (teacher, sage) from the world and the positive attributes of the *satria* (warrior, nobleman). It was imparted to Pramoedya through family socialization and education. The experience with his father, a frustrated nationalist, may have reinforced

the young generation had unfortunately entrusted the positions of power to the older generation who only substituted new rulers for the former rulers without making any attempt to build up a new kind of state which would unfold its own character (*watak*). Thus, with the process of decolonization still incomplete and the *pemuda* unable to attain a position of influence, Pramoedya saw the danger that their idealism would fade away like that of the older generation. Therefore, the young also needed continuously to be confirmed in their convictions. He urgently appealed to them to continue the struggle for the good of all in spite of the resistance they met with.<sup>22</sup> Compared with his enthusiastic support for the *pemuda*, his attitude towards the majority of the people was ambivalent. The *pemuda* had sensed a natural affiliation with the people. Pramoedya emphasized repeatedly the revolutionary spirit and the willingness to sacrifice demonstrated by simple people during the fight for independence. On the other hand, he considered the mass of the people unstable and urgently in need of guidance. He warned of a relapse of the people into traditional modes of behavior and bemoaned their susceptibility to empty propaganda.<sup>23</sup>

During this period of "confusion," Pramoedya wanted to answer to the need for orientation he had diagnosed through literary works and to anchor the new personality type in society. Literature should be a forum for the communication of values and discussion of opinions. It should deal with social experience and make the readers understand their situation. Besides that, it should show them the disparity between generally valid ideals and the reality of one's own actions.

Thus, Pramoedya located literature in a direct relation to societal needs, but at the same time he rejected works of art which evidently expressed the commitment of the author to particular social interests. For him, the independence of literature from external forces was not only a matter of its social status (freedom from censorship, etc.), but was to determine form and content of the works as well. Pramoedya referred to the main aesthetic notions that had grown up in Europe around the idea of the autonomous work of art. He thus adopted the concept of the organic work (with its standards of inner balance, and the identity of form and content) and he expected a literary text to present itself as a harmonious unit (*harmoni, perpaduan, kesatuan*). Tendency was acceptable to him as long as they penetrated into all the elements of a work of art, binding them together like a natural, imperceptible "breath."<sup>24</sup> This notion was tied up with a demand for universality and timelessness: a great literary work

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Pramoedya's conviction that the older generation as a whole was not able to live up to their ideals. For evidence of a *priyayi* view of society in Pramoedya's early fictional texts, see Savitri P. Scherer, "From culture to politics. The writings of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, 1950-1965" (Sydney: Australian National University, PhD thesis, unpubl., 1981): Part B. However, even the Pramoedya of the early fifties was not a *priyayi* author; he did not primarily narrate about their world, and he also criticized them. For references to Romain Rolland and Saint Exupéry, see Pramoedya A. Toer, "Kebalauan hari ini"; also, Pramoedya, "Repolusi, pertentangan dan tantangan kembali."

<sup>22</sup> Pramoedya, "Angkatan dan dunianja." Other authors of the Gelanggang group had appealed in a similar way to the morals of the younger generation but only during and immediately after the end of the revolution.

<sup>23</sup> Pramoedya, "Suatu titik lontjatan"; Pramoedya, "Kebalauan hari ini."

<sup>24</sup> Pramoedya, "Kesusasteraan sebagai alat"; Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Daja chajal & daja tjipta dalam kesusasteraan," *Siasat*, January 18, 1953; Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Kortsluiting dalam kesusasteraan," *Suara Nusantara*, April 30, 1954.

should be permeated with universal ideals and visions for the future relevant for the people of different societies and mankind as a whole.<sup>25</sup> The content of such works must thus be guided and shaped by the highest goals and ideals, which ultimately are nearly unattainable within the framework of social reality.

All of these aesthetic norms require an author to take a detached view of society. Pramoedya considered that such a viewpoint would not be difficult to assume given an autonomous status for art. Under less favorable circumstances, for instance in the case of politically controlled literature, he still considered such detachment possible in truly great writers due to their strength of character and genius. At the same time, the subjectivity of an author bore a twofold risk. As mentioned above, an author should not be bound so closely to society that his subjective goals would conceal objective facts and "true conclusions."<sup>26</sup> Another risk seen by Pramoedya was that an author's subjectivity might lead to a withdrawal from society, resulting in decadence and stagnation. He considered artists who isolate themselves from society and the struggles of their times to be "*sunyi*" (lonesome, desolate), and believed that their personalities are wasted and their creativity lost. Pramoedya observed that this tendency towards decadence and stagnation was enhanced by the autonomous status of art in society.<sup>27</sup> His view was that an author who avoided these dangers would be awarded with a "potency" (*potensi*) that would empower his subjectivity to create significant works of art.<sup>28</sup> Thus the autonomy of art was realized in ideal form for Pramoedya when an artist, of his own free will, chose to commit his essential freedom to the social and moral betterment of all and to the establishment of universal values.

The question remains why should an author—especially in times of "confusion"—be able to express truth and to formulate the general objectives of society as a whole in his work of art. Pramoedya saw a prerequisite for such an accomplishment in the characteristics shared by the young authors and the revolutionary *pemuda*: idealism, a willingness to sacrifice, and affection for the people. Furthermore, he justified the role of serious literature as a source of truth with reference to the special nature of the creative process, which he primarily described as a non-rational experience. He gave the artist and the creative process a kind of sacred aura—an idea historically well known in European aesthetics. This mode of thinking is problematical, since it tends to make the work of art immune to critique. It is noteworthy in this context that Pramoedya's emphasis on the non-rational element coincided with the period of his own altercations with the critics. However, it would be wrong to interpret the entire process of developing and explaining his own philosophy of creation as a mere attempt to defend his personal position. Mystical experiences and literary production

<sup>25</sup> Pramoedya, "Daja chajal & daja tjipta"; Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Hidup dan kerdja sasterawan Indonesia modern," *Seni* 1,1 (1955): 32; Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Bimbingan rasa sastra di gelanggang kebangunan bangsa," *Buku Kita* 1,4 (1955): 157–59.

<sup>26</sup> Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Roman dan Romance," *Duta Suasana*, April 15, 1952. Heteronomy, to Pramoedya, constituted a criterion to exclude texts from the field of legitimate literature. The external influences could be of political nature or could represent economic interests—as in case of trivial literature which is in a double way heteronom aiming at readers' expectations and only affirming the existing situation. See Pramoedya, "Kesusasteraan dan perdjungan"; also Pramoedya, "Angkatan dan dunianja."

<sup>27</sup> Pramoedya, "Kesusasteraan dan perdjungan"; Pramoedya, "Kesusasteraan sebagai alat."

<sup>28</sup> Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Kesusasteraan: Bitjara," *Sebaran B.M.K.N.* 4 (1956).

had been closely related in Pramoedya's life, as demonstrated by his report on the genesis of the novels *Perburuan* and *Keluarga Gerilya* in the Bukitduri prison.<sup>29</sup>

In a description of the creative process from the fifties, he traced the truth inherent in literature to the effects of a special force with a source external to the artist, designated in 1953 as "imagination, fantasy" (*daya khayal, daya fantasi*) and in 1956 as "inspiration" (*ilham, wahyu*). All these terms were placed by Pramoedya in the field of theological and mystical experience.<sup>30</sup> In spite of this, he considered it as an absolute prerequisite for literary creation that the author be fully aware of his social experience and moral-ethical ideals. Other essays present similar ideas, so he mentioned feeling and thinking (*perasaan dan pikiran*) as the tools of the author and asserted that the quality of literary texts is mainly determined by insight and reason (*budi*).<sup>31</sup> The rational element however receded into the background when he came to describing the actual process of literary production. Thoughts and feelings tested by the reasoning faculty were, for him, only the material of creation, elements that did not attain to their true significance until influenced by a higher power. Pramoedya divided the creative process into three phases. The first consisted in "emptying oneself," and it happens when the personality withdraws and assents to the advent of the second phase; here "the imagination comes for a visit" and "awakens the inanimate objects and the rigidified thoughts and feelings with the touch of life." With the help of the imagination, a "better, truer reality [. . .] beyond the naked facts" is revealed to the author. Suddenly, he grasps the relations between the "incomplete, fragmented, isolated phenomena of reality." This world of the imagination is the basis of his work. Although it is not as rich in detail as the "palpable material world," it possesses a higher, "absolute clarity." Pramoedya characterized this reality as the "perfect totality." In the third phase, the experience is transformed into text. Pramoedya described the actual contribution of the writer at this stage in widely differing terms. In 1953 he emphasized the role of creativity in transforming the imaginary experience. In 1956, in reaction to his critics, he called himself sarcastically a "primitive author" (*pengarang primitif*); being annoyed by their demand for intellectually controlled and outworked texts, he rather stubbornly reduced the role of the author to that of a

<sup>29</sup> Pramoedya discussed the creative process in two essays: "Daja chajal & daja tjipta" and "Lahirnja sebuah tjerita pendek," *Kisah* 4,9 (1956): 21,24. In both essays he emphasized the non-rational element. Rather rational, he commented on the same subject in his speeches "Hidup dan kerdja sasterawan Indonesia modern" and "Kesusasteraan: Bitjara." Here, the metaphysical dimension is not basically excluded; it is even explicitly mentioned in the second speech. For his description of the creative mysticum, see also Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Perburuan 1950 and Keluarga Gerilja 1950," *Indonesia* 36 (1983): 25-48. In this essay he relativized the relevance of mystical experience for the creative process, explaining that he learned soon to achieve the creative mysticum in a rational way. The following description is principally based on "Daja chajal & daja tjipta."

<sup>30</sup> At that time this concept must have seemed to be outmoded as Chairil Anwar had already rejected the idea of an external inspiration attributing it to the old generation, see Jassin, ed. *Chairil Anwar. Pelopor Angkatan 45*, p. 129. Pramoedya referred to a statement of the Culture Congress 1952 in Bandung: "Literature is not created but creates itself." He thus implicitly joined the view of the older artists who dominated the congress.

<sup>31</sup> See "Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Sekitar realisme—kesusasteraan dan keadaannja di Indonesia," *Duta Suasana*, February 15, 1952; Pramoedya, "Kesusasteraan sebagai alat"; Pramoedya, "Hidup dan kerdja sasterawan Indonesia modern."

“recorder comparable to the stenographer in parliament” (*pencatat semacam stenograf di sidang parlemen*).<sup>32</sup>

By describing the creative process as mysticum, he gave the author a high degree of moral authority, while at the same time uncoupling a literary work’s claim to truth from the judgement of others. The work was not considered to be an arbitrary product of an individual. Rather, it was given the character of a natural event, conditioned by the sublime forces of the cosmic order. The idea of hidden totality revealed to the ingenious researches of the artist is known from classic European discourses describing the autonomous artist and artistic creations. The contradiction between rationally tested ideals and a non-rational experience of totality paralleled the contrasting elements in Pramoedya’s position, which might be described as a defense of “moderate autonomy,” a concept that demands some commitment to society coupled with detachment from society. The ideal is nearly unapproachable within the framework of the social reality of present-day life.

Javanese concepts of inspiration and meditative potency cited and used by Pramoedya underlined both literature’s claim to the truth and the author’s demand for social recognition for himself and his work. Pramoedya presented literature as the discourse of a “potent self,” i.e. a person who has transcended the world of selfish interests, passions, and external attachments (*lair*) and who intuitively experiences and controls the world of invisible forces (*batin*) inside and outside himself. The greatest possible amount of influence and efficacy is ascribed to the discourse of the “potent self.”<sup>33</sup> Journeying on the mystic path to his work had been an important personal experience for Pramoedya. Nevertheless, the presentation of the inspirational concept and, even more, its sarcastic, radical formulation in 1956 tell us something of the writer’s isolation within society and the literary community, where he sought in vain for kindred spirits with whom he could have cooperated to outline a new moral order within a framework of a rational exchange of ideas.

Although the artists of the Gelanggang group subscribed, on the whole, to the aesthetics of autonomy, the difference between its radical formulation by the core group and Pramoedya’s more moderate ideas led to widely differing conceptions in nearly all aspects of literary production, becoming apparent in the selection of works, aesthetic standards, styles, and literary issues considered significant. The radical concept of an aesthetics of autonomy, as represented by the authors of the core Gelanggang group, was connected with aestheticism and modernism, with exploring the inner world of the individual, concentrating on the medium of artistic expression, and positioning art as a counterweight to society. As shown above, these notions were contradicted by Pramoedya’s definition of the function of literature. For him, the work of art was an instrument to criticize society on the basis of moral and social ideals. His description of the creative mysticum notwithstanding, he did not see art in a fundamental opposition to rationality. This difference is also evident from the

<sup>32</sup> With this sarcastic self-image he disassociated himself from the core Gelanggang group and the “intellectual stories” of authors like Wiratmo Soekito, Asrul Sani, and Iwan Simatupang. He uttered doubts about the position of Rivai Apin and Sitor Situmorang, as he had obviously remarked a change in their political and literary concepts. Pramoedya, “Lahirnja sebuah tjerita pendek,” p. 21.

<sup>33</sup> For the idea of a “potent self,” see Ward Keeler, *Javanese Shadow Plays, Javanese Selves* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987), pp. 38–50.

references to world literature in his essays of the early fifties, where he mostly names socially committed bourgeois authors, giving prominence to nineteenth-century novelists.<sup>34</sup> This accords with his general preference for realism, which he considered to be the modern style per se, since it “shows man and his society as they really are.” He favored—at least in theory—a critical but optimistic realism: a text should, in spite of bitterness over reality, still communicate a sense of confidence, a belief that the struggle to realize the higher ideals of mankind will, in the end, bear fruit.<sup>35</sup>

When one considers these opposing preferences, it comes as no surprise that the authors of the core Gelanggang group were of the opinion that Pramoedya’s texts did not completely fulfill current standards of world literature as they defined them. As early as 1950, Asrul Sani had already announced that mere character types and “an extremely conventional view of human nature” prevailed in Pramoedya’s prose. The prewar protagonist in the role of an official had, he stated, simply been replaced by the more modern figure of a soldier; besides, according to Sani, Pramoedya’s texts revealed “false idealism” and “sentimentalities.”<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, he blamed Pramoedya for failing to deal with the problems the core Gelanggang group had outlined to be urgent in modern times. It seems that these remarks set the tune for other critics: Balfas, proceeding from a formalist approach, similarly commented on shortcomings in Pramoedya’s psychological descriptions and plot construction, critiqued his emotionalism and sentimentalities, and demanded that the author maintain a greater distance from his characters, which Balfas perceived as being swamped by the personal views and frustrations of the author himself.<sup>37</sup>

The critique enraged Pramoedya; he felt misunderstood. His very emotional reactions were related to four sources. First, Pramoedya having only passed through the native school system, was an autodidact. In a literary climate where legitimation was mostly drawn from references to world literature, so that literary discussions tended to become intellectual displays, he felt vulnerable, but this didn’t alter his

<sup>34</sup> It is known that Steinbeck, Saroyan, and Zieles had strongly influenced Pramoedya’s early narrative techniques, though in his essays he hardly referred to them. The names of Saint Exupéry and R. Rolland had been already mentioned. Besides them, Pramoedya referred to the Russian critical realists Tolstoi (two longer articles), Turgenev, and Gogol, to the socially committed writers V. Hugo and E. Zola, and to the nationalistic authors Mickiewicz from Poland and José Rizal from the Philippines. Sartre is mentioned only once, not with reference to existentialism but as a proponent of *littérature engagée*. There is a critical remark on Henry Miller and a note on Gertrude Stein’s “lost generation.” One should keep in mind that the selected writers are named to illustrate or legitimate Pramoedya’s considerations. As it is the case with most authors of the *Angkatan 45*, it is not evident from the essays, to what extent Pramoedya had read works by or about the authors mentioned.

<sup>35</sup> Pramoedya, “Sekitar Realisme”; see also Pramoedya, “Kesusasteraan dan perjuangannya.”

<sup>36</sup> Asrul Sani, “Fragmen keadaan III,” *Siasat*, November 5, 1950.

<sup>37</sup> Indonesian literary criticism was in its very beginnings in these years, and the adopted formalist approach was not always applied thoroughly. One should note that Pramoedya was not the only target of the critique; Balfas directed similar remarks to Mochtar Lubis and Utuy Tatang Sontani. See M. Balfas, “Apa sebab kurang roman,” *Siasat*, December 14, 1952; “Menudju kepada kedewasaan dalam prosa Indonesia,” *Siasat*, December 26, 1956; “Sorotan tjerita pendek. Ketjapi,” *Kisah*, 5,2 (1956): 3. Critics of today with different horizons of expectation come to an opposite judgement, so for instance Teeuw who now esteems the sophisticated structuring techniques applied by Pramoedya in his early novels and short stories. See A. Teeuw, “Revolusi Indonesia dalam imajinasi Pramoedya Ananta Toer,” *Kalam* 6 (1995): 4–47.

unyielding attitude when defending his positions. Secondly, Pramoedya felt that the items examined by his critics were not of prime relevance to his work. He missed a discussion of the social message of his texts, as this was his main concern. In defense he underlined the relation between intention and narrative mode, pointing out that in order to communicate a story had to rivet the readers emotionally.<sup>38</sup> Thirdly, he felt that his critics were applying foreign critical frameworks without adjusting them to the Indonesian situation. Like all authors of the *Angkatan 45*, he underlined as the decisive characteristic of his generation its openness to world literature, as exemplified by Chairil Anwar and Idrus, who had been able to reveal new realms of creative language use through their encounters with Western literature.<sup>39</sup> Pramoedya himself had received a great deal of stimulation from his readings; but he emphasized the need for Indonesian literature to unfold its own character. Sticking too closely to a foreign model, in his view, indicated a lack of genuine creativity. To him, Indonesian literature had to be seen as a variant with equal rights, not as a replica of the occidental model. He felt he was being pushed by his critics in exactly the opposite direction.<sup>40</sup> Finally, one has to keep in mind that it was also in these years that Pramoedya began to feel unsure about his position, because he had discovered that many external circumstances hindered the realization of his own literary concept.

### Obstacles to the Realization of Pramoedya's Literary Concept

At the beginning of the fifties, Pramoedya was well aware that the existing social situation would make it difficult to realize his program calling for a moral renewal of society sparked by literature. The reading public was too small, and only a very few readers were interested in serious literature. In a large number of essays, Pramoedya demanded that the literary community take these facts into consideration and that the state must institute active cultural policies to change things for the better. From 1950 on, the persistency and intensity Pramoedya brought to his critique of literary market conditions and to the social situation of writers was hardly consistent with the image of the Bohemian literary artist that was prevalent in the Gelanggang group. But Pramoedya was not only interested in improving his own material situation; he was concerned with strengthening the literary field to become a vigorous social sub-system. His untiring efforts on behalf of this cause must be attributed to the fact that the marginal role of literature in society and the limited readership were detrimental to his idea of a moral renewal by means of literature.

<sup>38</sup> Pramoedya, "Hidup dan kerdja sasterawan Indonesia modern." Scherer discusses the negative critique of Pramoedya's texts and relates diverging expectations and orientations to different educational backgrounds. In her view, negative critiques from Gelanggang and a shared educational background with members of Lekra motivated Pramoedya's increasing rapprochement with the Lekra. See Scherer, "From Culture to Politics," pp. 141-48. Pramoedya identified a strong desire to communicate which in everyday life was hampered by his uncompromising disposition as a main impetus to his writing. Pramoedya, "Kesusasteraan: Bitjara."

<sup>39</sup> See Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Sebongkah perdjalan kesusasteraan Indonesia selama dan sesudah revolusi (1945 - 1955)," (manuscript, Jakarta, August 8, 1955).

<sup>40</sup> Pramoedya, "Angkatan dan dunianja"; Pramoedya, "Hidup dan kerdja sasterawan Indonesia modern." Pramoedya deals with this subject also in his short story "Keguguran calon dramawan" (Fall of a dramatist aspirant), *Cerita dari Jakarta* (Jakarta: Grafica, 1957), pp. 70-86.

Pramoedya believed the conditions of the literary market thwarted his intentions in a number of ways. The profit interests of publishers appeared to him to be responsible for the splitting of literature into two camps—trivial and serious—with trivial and entertainment literature reflecting nothing but the expectations of the readers. He also saw the taste of readers influenced for the worse by films, pop music (both mostly foreign), and the yellow press. Pramoedya turned against this dichotomy and insisted that serious literature was addressed to, and accessible to, everyone. He appealed to the idealism of the publishers, asking them to make a special effort to get texts of literary value published. To improve the quality of literature, he demanded higher pay for authors since otherwise, he said, low-grade scribbling was unavoidable.<sup>41</sup> Pramoedya himself admitted to having published texts that were written routinely and did not really come up to his own standards.<sup>42</sup> The conditions of the literary market also fostered, in his opinion, a spirit of competition (*saling jatuh-menjatuhkan*) among writers; he saw personal vanity everywhere and considered that the criticism offered to writers was often arbitrary and shallow. Pramoedya would have liked to see a broad-based, fair discussion among authors of the intentions embodied by their works.<sup>43</sup>

Since he realized the situation was not likely to be improved by appeals to the idealism of the publishers, he also demanded new cultural policies: a revision of copyright laws, reduction of taxes for writers, state subsidies for publishers of literary works, support for translation projects, and the expansion and upgrading of the state publishing house Balai Pustaka.<sup>44</sup> He also expected changes in cultural policy that would increase public interest in literature: improved teaching of literature as a school subject, support for literary studies at university level, enhancement of public esteem for literature (e.g. by means of library construction, museums for literature, archives and cultural centers), and last, limitation of imports from the foreign cultural industry.<sup>45</sup>

Pramoedya did not mention in his essays that all of these appeals and demands were, as a matter of fact, directed to the older generation of politicians. These were the people whose hypocrisy and selfishness he had blamed for the general "confusion" of society, the confusion he wished to surmount with the instrument of literature. In his attempts to overcome this dilemma, in 1952 he built up an independent publishing and

<sup>41</sup> See Pramoedya, "Repolusi, pertentangan dan tantangan kembali"; Pramoedya, "Hidup dan kerdja sasterawan Indonesia modern."

<sup>42</sup> Pramoedya, "Lahirnja sebuah tjerita pendek."

<sup>43</sup> Pramoedya, "Kebalauan hari ini"; Pramoedya, "Hidup dan kerdja sasterawan Indonesia modern".

<sup>44</sup> See Pramoedya, "Repolusi, pertentangan dan tantangan kembali"; Pramoedya, "Hidup dan kerdja sasterawan Indonesia modern"; Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Biro konsultasi hak tjipta," *Buku Kita* 2,4 (1956): 152–54; Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Balai Pustaka harum namanja didunia internasional-dahulu," *Star Weekly*, February 9, 1957; Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Balai Pustaka dialam kemerdekaan," *Star Weekly*, February 16, 1957.

<sup>45</sup> See Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Leo Tolstoi sebagai penghargaan sebuah museum," *Siasat*, September 23, 1951; Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Kedjadian dan masalah," *Siasat*, September 21, 1952; Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Daja chajal & daja tjipta"; Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Galerie Le Canard—sebuah gelanggang kesenian jang menarik," *Siasat* October 25, 1953; Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Pembelaan untuk dana budaya," *Mimbar Indonesia*, November 28, 1953; Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Tentang mata peladjaran kesusasteraan disekolah," *Star Weekly*, May 19, 1956.

sales company, the "Literary and Features Agency Duta," to put an end to dependence on publishers and obtain state subsidies for serious literature. Since subsidies were soon cut, the company had to close down two years later. It was not until the mid-fifties that he considered forming a strong writers' organization to represent the interests of writers vis-à-vis publishers, the media (radio, film), and government, especially the department of education and culture.<sup>46</sup>

In the middle of the fifties, Pramoedya's situation was difficult, both personally and materially. A family could not live from the work of a writer, even a writer with an established name like Pramoedya. To cover the day-to-day expenses, he would have had to write, and see to publication, at least ten short-stories a month. The few book publications in the area of belles-lettres appeared in only three to five thousand copies, which usually took about five years to sell. The precarious income situation had finally led to the failure of Pramoedya's first marriage, and he lived separated from his family in indigent circumstances. It also became clearer to him that his idealism was not falling on fruitful soil: the number of literates in independent Indonesia had increased by leaps and bounds thanks to literacy campaigns, but the number of readers of serious literature had increased but little. He ascribed this fact less to a lack of buying power than to the difficult living conditions of the masses, who, exhausted from the struggle to survive, sought refuge in shallow entertainment. The marginal status of literature in society was worsened even further when, in 1953, the Ministry of Education sharply reduced public library system funding and entirely stopped purchasing books of modern literature.<sup>47</sup>

By the mid-fifties, it had become impossible for Pramoedya to ignore material exigencies by focusing on idealism. He now openly addressed the "Janus-face" situation of the writer, who would prefer to deal with life (*kehidupan*) as a "producer of creative art," but who must worry about survival (*penghidupan*) in his role as an "entrepreneur," to be a major problem. The "entrepreneur" needs the good name of the "producer of creative art" as a seal of quality, but by the same token he tends to ruin his own good name since he does not have time to allow a text to mature into a major work.<sup>48</sup> Caught in this contradiction, Pramoedya realized his virtual inability to envision and create a "better reality." He was no longer able to follow social and cultural developments with a critical and detached eye, since these exigencies of society affected his own existence so directly as to have a destructive effect on his own work.

Pramoedya discussed the situation of the writer in the short story, "Sunyisenjap di siang hidup" (Silence at Life's Noon).<sup>49</sup> It is the story of an author in a life crisis. The reader learns of his growing bitterness in response to the lack of material and spiritual support for his work, the dwindling of his idealism and self-confidence in an

<sup>46</sup> Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Keadaan sosial parapengarang Indonesia," *Star Weekly*, January 12, 1957.

<sup>47</sup> See Pramoedya, "Keadaan sosial parapengarang Indonesia." Pramoedya tells about his living conditions at that time also in *Nyanyi sunyi seorang bisu. Catatan-catatan dari Pulau Buru* (Kuala Lumpur: Wira Karya, 1995), pp. 146–58.

<sup>48</sup> Pramoedya, "Hidup dan kerdja sastrawan Indonesia modern," p. 24.

<sup>49</sup> Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Sunjisenjap di siang hidup," *Indonesia* 7, 6 (1956): 255–268; for an interpretation see A. Teeuw, "Silence at life's noon," *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters* 49 (1964): 245–250.

exhausting struggle to survive, the loss of empathy and shared feeling in an urban world characterized by anonymity, superficiality and discontinuity. The protagonist becomes increasingly egocentric, simultaneously feeling ashamed of this transformation, and the reader joins in his cultural and psychological fragmentation. In the depths of the metropolis he has lost his ideals and the convictions that had guided him, i.e. the means of grasping his own experience and that of his fellow man, the tools that would enable him to create literature. As a logical consequence, the gift of language abandons him. Into the darkness of this crisis of life and creativity comes a woman spreading light, Dini ("flush of dawn"). She is associated with a pristine quality, simplicity, a down-to-earth attitude, willingness to help, and a strong sense of solidarity.<sup>50</sup> This was the direction (closeness to the people, practical constructive projects, cultural heritage) that Pramoedya then took in his search for a new foundation for literary commitment.

### On the Way to a Revolutionary Literature

At the beginning of 1956, Pramoedya discussed in an essay whether an "orientation towards the people" (*tendensi kerakyatan*) could lead writers out of the vicious circle of egocentricity and a socially marginal position.<sup>51</sup> He discovered this point of view in a number of young writers of the *Angkatan Terbaru* (Newest Generation), naming in particular S. M. Ardan, Ajip Rosidi, and Rijono Pratikto. Pramoedya saw in this perspective a new current in Indonesian literature which gave the authors a special position independently of the *Angkatan 45*.<sup>52</sup> Prompted by this "orientation towards the people," these young authors met with the Lekra writers who, motivated by their political convictions, had been the first to discover the life of the lower classes as a literary theme. But the literary creations of both these groups, the authors of the Lekra as well as the *Angkatan Terbaru*, were not convincing to Pramoedya, since in his opinion the perspectives remained those of tourists and the reality of the life of the people was not grasped properly. He did not blame the individual authors for this failing. Instead he drew attention to the social origins of the modern Indonesian authors, who nearly all belonged to the upper class—he also used the notion "bourgeoisie" (*kaum borjuis*)—described primarily as consisting of civil servants and academics who all were living separated from the simple people (*rakyat*) of the lower, producing classes (peasants, workers) and who therefore did not really know them. He was rather pessimistic about the likelihood that this division would be resolved. He was of the opinion that literature genuinely written from a people's perspective could not become possible in the near future. Writers would have to emerge out of the ranks of the lower classes themselves, or the social emancipation of these lower classes would have to narrow, or even close, the gap between the common people and the

<sup>50</sup> This is at the same time written in homage to Pramoedya's second wife Maimunah Thamrin.

<sup>51</sup> Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Tendensi kerakjatan dalam kesusasteraan Indonesia," *Star Weekly*, January 21, 1956.

<sup>52</sup> He clearly distinguished between this popular orientation of these still very young writers and the sentimental desire to "return to the village" as uttered by authors of his generation, e.g. Asrul Sani, who reacted with this romantic idea to the alienating effects of urban life, especially after they had lived for some time in Europe.

elite.<sup>53</sup> An orientation towards the people on an individual, voluntary basis, as had been characteristic for the *pemuda* movement, now seemed to him an insufficient basis for the social commitment of a writer.

But Pramoedya's search for a new foundation for committed literary creativity did not stop here. Even in a series of essays on the classic and modern forms of Indonesian regional literatures, he addressed the relations between autonomy and the social function of literature.<sup>54</sup> He emphasized communal aspects and integration of various fields of life as main characteristics of the traditional literatures. In his estimate, these qualities were still alive in modern Javanese literature, conveyed by the language and through the values communicated by the literary tradition. He considered the close relation of this literature to everyday life and the clear social orientation of modern Javanese authors to be exemplary.

During this period, Pramoedya also developed a proposal of his own, based on similar programs in socialist countries, in order to move literature in *bahasa Indonesia* closer to the concerns of the people's everyday life.<sup>55</sup> As he himself had realized, the social range of the modern Javanese novel was none too large, since the intimacy of this literature with everyday reality was concentrated in the genre of the domestic novel. Taking into account the ratio of regional to national language, he located the social concerns of the literature in *bahasa Indonesia* within the larger context of the political and economic development of the nation. He argued that writers should go to the country's different regions and experience the workaday world of state institutions (navy, police, etc.) and of agricultural, and above all industrial development projects. Pramoedya did not see this proposal as an element in state propaganda programs, but rather as a curative for the "negativism" of many writers. He was certainly not free of romantic projections himself, when he recommended that writers develop "healthier" perspectives by gaining spatial and cultural detachment from metropolitan life. The idea was that they should learn—in intensive confrontation with the pitiless realities of the working day—to see that the present is not merely an expression of "chaotic conditions, poverty and backwardness" and that the people "are not as lame, poor and weak as the writers themselves." This new experience should give them a positive attitude towards life, a new self-confidence, and viable ideals to generate new impulses for literary production.

In Pramoedya's view, such a proposal did not affect the autonomous status of literature in society. He displayed, however, a willingness to abandon an aesthetics of

<sup>53</sup> As an exemplary case of people's orientation in European literature, he referred to Ignazio Silone as an author coming from the lower classes; he mentioned the novels *Bread and Wine* and *Germans under the Snow*, which "describe the conflict of ideas among people of the Italian lower classes" (*rakyat jelata*) showing the protagonists not only externally, but also depicting their inner impulses. See Pramoedya, "Tendensi kerakjatan."

<sup>54</sup> See Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Sejenak meninjau kesusasteraan Djawa modern," *Star Weekly*, August 11, 1956; Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Penilaian kembali kesusasteraan daerah/klasik I-V," *Mimbar Indonesia*, September 29–October 10, 1956.

<sup>55</sup> Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Meninggalkan negativisme," *Mimbar Indonesia*, June 9, 1956. In the beginning of the year he had translated an essay of the Chinese writer Ting Ling suggesting ideas similar to those he put forward in this essay. This correlation is not mentioned in his essays. Apparently he did not want to link openly his own literary proposals with communist literary concepts. Ting Ling, "Hidup dan penulisan kreatif," *Indonesia*, 7, 3 (1956): 102–110.

autonomy by explicitly disputing the widespread notion of literature's "autarchic" nature. Since literary production, he reasoned, was bound up with societal conditions and experiences, the authors should be aware of the social situation and should also actively seek out new experiences in their society.<sup>56</sup> The proposal that writers should participate in state programs revealed a new point in Pramoedya's thinking, because previously he had always been very critical about the government and its decisions. The proposal certainly risked merging realistic description into an anticipatory prescription. This new tack may have been motivated by the more nationalistic character of politics and the more definitive statements being made by Sukarno at the time. Besides, the participation of the writer in state programs could reduce the risk of regionalism emerging out of the new orientation away from the metropolis. The binding of the writer to the state became even more evident when Pramoedya adjured writers several months later to support the development of their society in a positive spirit as "engineers of the nation's soul" (*insinyur jiwa bagi bangsanya*). They should help invigorate a "permanent revolutionary enthusiasm" in all classes of society, since this was, he claimed, absolutely necessary for the development of the young nation.<sup>57</sup> Pramoedya's literary orientation had clearly taken on a new character with these statements reminiscent of the official positions of socialist realism and betraying a tendency to bind literature closely to the state.

The novel *Sekali peristiwa di Banten Selatan* (It Happened in South Banten) was an attempt to realize these ideas.<sup>58</sup> The author briefly outlined his intentions and his literary program in the foreword. Pramoedya wanted to make a constructive contribution to the development of the society. He wished to communicate the social ideal of *gotong royong* to a broader public.<sup>59</sup> He saw himself as a voice for people of the lower classes who were not in command of the communicative instrument represented by literature. The plot of the novel was described as fictive. It was determined by on-site experience, later events, i.e. the activities of Darul Islam (rebels fighting for an Islamic state) in the region, and socio-political developments in general. Thus, the

<sup>56</sup> In the discussions of that period, this idea was not new. The *Konfrontasi* intellectuals, who were close to the PSI, in particular Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana and Soedjatmoko, had also discredited the pessimism and concentration on individual experience in the work of many Gelanggang authors—in their view this attitude had Western European roots. But in contrast with Pramoedya, they didn't emphasize the encounters with the lower classes, but demanded very generally the presentation of the active individual in a newly independent and therefore radically changing society. See S. Takdir Alisjahbana, "Tjara berpikir jang statis membawa kita kedjalan buntu," *Pudjangga Baru* 12,12 (1951): 209–13; Soedjatmoko, "Mengapa Konfrontasi," *Konfrontasi* 1 (1954).

<sup>57</sup> Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Ke arah sastra revolusioner," *Star Weekly*, December 29, 1956.

<sup>58</sup> Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Sekali peristiwa di Banten Selatan* (Jakarta: Departemen Tenaga Kerdja, 1959, 2nd ed. Bukittinggi: Nusantara, 1963). The archaic title, using with *sekali peristiwa* ("once upon a time") a scene opener of traditional Malay written compositions, recalls the bond of traditional literature to society. Formal elements of the novel conform to the didactic and political intentions of the author. Pramoedya stated explicitly that the text could be easily transformed into a dramatic version. The final passage inspired by Chinese agitprop-operas is an innovative element in the context of Indonesian literature. Already in 1959 the Lekra published a dramatized version with an altered title: *Orang-orang baru di Banten Selatan. Drama dua babak, disadur ke dalam bentuk drama oleh Dhalia*, (Jakarta: Lekra 1959).

<sup>59</sup> The idea of *gotong-royong* in the political context of the time bore two aspects: first it indicated a method of village development, and secondly it referred to the cooperation of all bigger parties at governmental level as recommended by Sukarno. Pramoedya agreed to both ideas.

work is an amalgamation of studies by the author, reports, and imagination, tied together by Sukarno's political ideology. Here for the first time, Pramoedya had decided against the standards of autonomous literature in his own creative practice. The author appeared to have found a position in harmony with the perceived social situation. He also seemed to have overcome his isolation, even more since he had found a new channel for distribution, with the initial publication arranged and funded by the Ministry of Labor.

### Political Commitment and Association with Lekra

The novel *Sekali peristiwa di Banten Selatan* was written during a period when Pramoedya placed great hopes in Sukarno's will and power to accomplish a basic reformation of society. In 1957, he had cooperated with Lekra members to support Sukarno's concept (*konsepsi*) of an Indonesian form of democracy which would offer all major parties and representatives of professional groups the opportunity to participate in the political and governmental decision making (*gotong royong, musyawarah*). Here as well, Pramoedya's primary concern was with a moral and cultural renewal of society; he expected a rejuvenated and clean government and new initiatives to overcome the political and social stagnation.<sup>60</sup> He also associated the *konsepsi* with the hope that his concerns in the area of cultural policy could now be realized. A new goal was added to previously formulated demands: the use of literature to form and strengthen national identity.<sup>61</sup>

Pramoedya's enthusiasm for the *konsepsi* had been ignited by a journey to the People's Republic of China some months earlier, where he participated in the commemoration of the death of Lu Hsun. It was Pramoedya's second visit to a foreign country, for he had lived as guest of the Dutch Foundation for Cultural Cooperation, *Sticusa*, in Amsterdam for several months in 1953. While he judged this stay in the Netherlands to have been unprofitable for his work as an Indonesian writer, the journey to China left a long-lasting impression on him, not only because of the economic and social progress he witnessed, but rather more because of the high esteem and support which he saw was given to literature and the writers in China. Having returned to Indonesia, into a climate of crisis and impending change, he chose to side with Sukarno, hoping that his *konsepsi* could turn developments in a similar direction.

<sup>60</sup> Pramoedya referred to some shortcomings in the *konsepsi*, but generally approved of it as concurring with his own ideas about the sociopolitical situation. He explicitly supported the participation of the PKI, because this party, unsullied by corruption and abuse of power, till now had "never betrayed the people." He expressly disassociated himself from his former judgement on the PKI and its role in the Madiun rebellion. See Pramoedya, "Djembatan gantung dan konsepsi Presiden," *Harian Rakjat*, February 28, 1957; also Pramoedya, "Pedoman kehidupan kesenian Indonesia (dalam rangka pelaksanaan dan pengisian konsepsi Presiden)," *Harian Rakjat*, March 23, 1957.

<sup>61</sup> Ajip Rosidi, a younger author of the *Angkatan Terbaru* and supporter of the *konsepsi*, pointed in a similar way to the opportunities for new and active cultural policies and for a betterment of the social circumstances of artists. Ajip Rosidi, "Seniman sebagai sapi perah," *Siasat*, May 29, 1957 and Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Hidup mengarang di Indonesia," *Republik*, June 1, 1957.

But Pramoedya became very disappointed in the actual results of the *konsepsi*, in the beginning particularly regarding cultural policies.<sup>62</sup> This fact moved him closer to the Lekra. Another thing that facilitated his move to the left was the ideological shift within Lekra, which had—in accord to the positions of the PKI—formulated in 1955 a new manifesto placing it closer to the nationalist camp. Over the years, Lekra had also demonstrated considerable openness and flexibility and had overcome its originally marginal position in the literary field. Since the mid-fifties, Lekra had approached Pramoedya on various occasions; enjoying cordial relations with some of its members, he had cooperated with the organization several times. In 1959 he was a guest speaker at Lekra's first national congress and was elected to the executive board in spite of the fact that he was not yet an official member.

In his speech to the national congress, Pramoedya gave two main reasons for his willingness to cooperate with Lekra.<sup>63</sup> The size and efficiency of the organization impressed him as well as its efforts in the field of literary communication (publications, translations, presentations, readings, discussions, etc.). He further mentioned the politico-cultural goals he had in common with the Lekra and hoped that the country's largest cultural organization would be able to exert considerable influence on cultural policies.

Moreover, he found in Lekra and its ideology a firm platform, which could integrate visions of the past and future to help create a coherent picture of present experience, and could help bind the writer to a sociopolitically important group, but not directly to state and government. In his speech, Pramoedya congratulated the Lekra artists on their "good fortune" (*bahagia*), because with their art and convictions they had the means to develop a "close relationship with the people" (*berhubungan mesra dengan Rakyat*). He contrasted this with the untenable position of the "lonesome" (*sunyi*) free-floating artist who is driven from one pseudo-problem to the next. Pramoedya expressly confirmed that this described his own negative experience when he was suffering under the illusion that creative individuality was the determinate characteristic of modern art.

Pramoedya brought to this new world-view basically the same ideals that had guided his thinking in the fifties, the difference being that he now embedded them in a clearer political context. In his view, the challenge of the time was to achieve a humane, democratic nation primarily through the social emancipation of the lower classes, the nation's majority. He demanded solidarity among the people and between all peoples. He also maintained the idea that only an individual who works for the good of all will develop into a true and mature personality full of self-confidence, courage, optimism, vigor, and inventiveness. He appealed to citizens to exert common efforts in the struggle against outdated hierarchies and exploitative structures. The socialism at the end of this path was conceived as a radical antithesis to the feudal past, to colonial rule, and to imperialist-capitalist exploitation. The image was that of a

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<sup>62</sup> When in 1960 following publication of his book, *Hoakiau di Indonesia*, Pramoedya was detained for several months, he also became suspicious of the political development of China and the role that the military played in politics during Guided Democracy.

<sup>63</sup> "Pidato Pramoedya Ananta Toer," *Harian Rakjat*, February 21, 1959.

harmonious society that overcomes social disparities and fragmentation by employing modern technology collectively, opening to all equal chances for happiness.<sup>64</sup>

This firm position at the side of the people was for Pramoedya a source of meaning in life. He continued to demand that artists communicate an image of objective reality, but the truth hidden beneath the surface of everyday life was now bound up for him with the dynamics of social forces. The foundation of aesthetic creation in social reality came to replace its former metaphysical basis. He called upon the artists to turn to "social praxis" (*laku*), and he defined the prerequisite for creation of great literary works being the decisive "step" (Jav.: *laku*), in which the author binds himself to serve the historically important forces in society.<sup>65</sup>

### An Indonesian Form of Socialist Realism

These basic considerations led Pramoedya to declare his support of socialist realism in a detailed seminar paper in 1963.<sup>66</sup> The main object was not a theoretical discussion of this aesthetic program but a revision of the literary canon. He aimed to rectify history by reintegrating into the canon that part of the literary tradition which had been suppressed by colonial cultural policies. The further objective was to look for exemplary works that could guide the contemporary creation of literary texts supporting society on its way to socialism. He defined his recommended literary concept in orthodox terms as a correct representation of reality in its revolutionary development by authors using a special style of realism with romantic traits. Literary texts should provide the readers with a clear awareness of their situation and help them harmonize their own actions with the possibilities of emancipation and progress inherent in the historical situation. Enumerating further characteristics Pramoedya referred to "militancy" and spoke of writers working in "accordance with the socialist battle lines." This effort could proceed in a variety of places and times; socialist realism seemed to him workable in places where the socialist struggle had not yet taken on the form of a conscious effort.<sup>67</sup>

This broad definition of the term allowed Pramoedya to research in Indonesian literary history for texts representing such a revolutionary tradition.<sup>68</sup> He based his judgement on the content of the texts. He discovered "revolutionary" works mainly in early literary texts in *lingua franca* Malay published outside of the colonial publishing house, Balai Poestaka. The official canon (Balai Poestaka works, along with texts by the *Pujangga Baru* generation and the *Angkatan 45*) provided little useful material. His judgement of the Balai Poestaka publications and the texts of the "universal

<sup>64</sup> "Pidato Pramoedya Ananta Toer"; Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Kebudayaan. Sastra Indonesia masalah dan haridepan," *Harian Rakjat*, December 31, 1958.

<sup>65</sup> Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Pada mulanya adalah laku. Sedjumpun essay penjabut Kongres Lekra mendatang," *Harian Rakjat*, January 17, 1959.

<sup>66</sup> Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Realisme Sosialis dan sastra Indonesia (sebuah tindjauan sosial)," (Jakarta: mimeo., 1963).

<sup>67</sup> Pramoedya, "Realisme sosialis," p. 7.

<sup>68</sup> He made use of studies that he had done together with a team of students at the Universitas Res Publica, partly published in the feuilleton *Lehtera* (edited by Pramoedya) of the daily *Bintang Timur*. The Lekra efforts to rectify the literary history can also be seen in Bakri Siregar, *Sedjarah Sastra Indonesia Modern*, (Jakarta: Akademi Sastra dan Bahasa Multatuli, 1964).

humanists" (Gelanggang authors and younger writers associated with the periodicals *Kisah* and *Sastra*) was negative across the board: the texts, he said, reflected colonialist and imperialist interests. The works from the *Pujangga Baru* period and the time of the national revolution were termed "bourgeois patriotic literature" and not discredited so harshly. The true revolutionary tradition, however, had not been revived until the Lekra authors of the fifties began work—this was his view. Among his own works, Pramoedya now found that only *Perburuan* met his standards. Regarding aesthetic form, his judgement was less cohesive and politically consistent—the same could generally be said of Lekra. When Pramoedya defended forms that deviate from the norms of bourgeois aesthetics (i.e. forms based on the "Aesthetics of the Slogan" or the Lekra texts of the early fifties), he did it half-heartedly and qualified such texts as first steps of a development to come.

The broad definition of socialist realism and the new canon linked to it gave to creative authors plenty of leeway. Pramoedya himself based his artistic production mainly on early *lingua franca* texts which stood out, in his view, because of their intimate links with the social and political concerns of the reading public of that time. One of his own works influenced by this new orientation is the novel *Gadis Pantai* (The Girl from the Coast).<sup>69</sup> In the selection of the material (motives, themes, style) he went back to the newly rediscovered tradition. There is a clear message in the work, which depicts the contradictions in feudal/colonial society and the solidarity and resourcefulness of the village population. Although the novel is set in the past, this message bore relevance for the contemporary reader. Also, regarding the medium of publication, Pramoedya followed the *lingua franca* tradition, choosing a serialized form of publication in the nationalist daily press. In this way, he deliberately changed—and widened—his audience. Like his historic predecessors, Pramoedya was open to popular materials; he intentionally erased the borders between serious, trivial and folklore traditions.<sup>70</sup>

In conclusion, we may say that Pramoedya did not radically deny all bourgeois aesthetic ideas, but he did try to find solutions, valid for that time, to some of the problems posed by autonomous art. He thought how to address and alleviate the marginality of literature in society and the isolation of the writer. Allying himself with left-wing nationalism, the writer found a place at the side of the people whom he saw as the dominant force in the nation during its struggle for progress. Using mainly the feuilleton as medium, Pramoedya joined in the discussions of the political public, and did his best to assist in the elevation of social consciousness and the formation of a new Indonesian identity by contributing the voice of literature. That this new orientation

<sup>69</sup> First serialized in *Bintang Timur*, July 21–October 24, 1962, revised edition (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1987).

<sup>70</sup> Contrary to Pramoedya's novel *Bumi Manusia*, the various stylistic elements of the novel *Gadis Pantai* are not really tied together to a harmonious unit. The first part is mainly oriented towards the bourgeois novel, with realistic depiction full of details and description of the psychological development of the female hero. On the other hand, the part set in the hero's village is based on the model of the adventure and/or crime story, mixed up with traditional aesthetic elements. Particularly the psychological description of the female hero has been praised by foreign critics, not least because in this novel of his Lekra period he meets the standards of bourgeois realism. Since "social novels" have become generally accepted as part of the literary canon in many countries, the inharmonious structure of this novel is not usually judged as a shortcoming. See S. Scherer, "From Culture to Politics," pp. 238–253 and A. Teeuw, *Pramoedya Ananta Toer. De verbeelding van Indonesië*, (Breda: De Geus, 1993), pp. 193–207.

would have some effect on aesthetic standards was unavoidable. Because Pramoedya now came to see literature as bound up with the questions of its time, the social content of a text became the primary determinant of its value. He did not articulate a complete alternative aesthetics; he did, however, manage to surmount the split-up of literature into "serious" and "trivial" by recognizing the popular and the entertaining aspects of many works as legitimate elements. Pramoedya deliberately turned away from the tendency inherent in autonomous art to develop an esoteric formal language and was willing to answer thematically and aesthetically to the expectations of the reading public. Thus, prompted primarily by his own experiences of the marginal role of literature in society and of economic exigencies, Pramoedya resolved the disparity inherent in his earlier concept of literature between social commitment and the autonomy of art in favor of commitment.

Since Indonesian authors today are once again questioning the concepts of the aesthetics of autonomy, the political dimension of the literary dispute of the sixties should no longer be in the foreground. The question should rather be whether or not the politically committed artists of those years found useful solutions to the problems tied up with the autonomous status of art, and if so, whether their solutions might not be relevant today. Clarification of this matter presupposes a free and open discussion in which divergent opinions are not discredited and harshly excluded as illegitimate.

