LONTAR

Lontar Newsletter

Email: contact@lontar.org

March 2020

Greetings from the Executive Director

We sincerely hope this message finds you safe and well-protected from the scourge of Covid-19 that is befalling countries around the world. As a result of this unwelcome development, most public activities in Indonesia have come to a sudden halt. In an effort to maintain physical distancing, all planned and scheduled programs have been nullified or postponed indefinitely. More than the inactivity and the inertia that we are having to deal with, probably the most difficult condition to adjust to is the uncertainty and the lack of a timeframe which we can use as a reference point for a resumption of normalcy. At this point, it could be even late April before the pandemic reaches a peak in Indonesia, according to some health experts. But cope we must, and judging from the many reports, stories and anecdotes shared and posted on the internet and in the mainstream media, people have found many and varied ways of continuing with their daily routines. In some households, where Netflix has not become an obsession, it is a time to reach for books bought long ago and remain unread.

One major concern is the education of children during this trying period. A form of home-schooling, something alien to most Indonesian parents, is now the only practical solution to the problem of ensuring that their children continue with their studies from home, via the internet and cell-phones. This requires the active participation of parents, particularly in managing the lessons of elementary school students , whose attention is often

Ruminations by John McGlynn

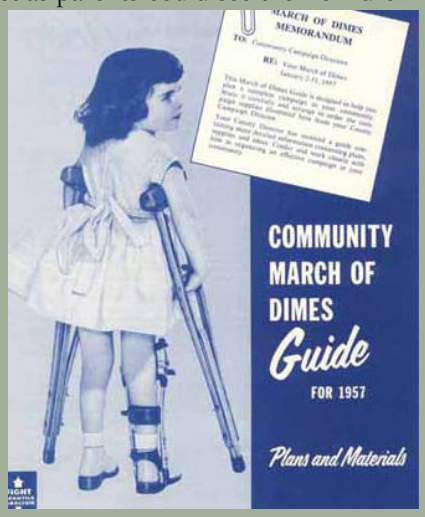
Memories of Disease

Born in 1952, I have no direct memory of the 1918 "Spanish Flu" pandemic that took the lives of up to 100 million people. My memory of that disease is a borrowed one from my Aunt Molly who told me the story of how Great Aunt Jo, a baby nurse who worked for wealthy families in Chicago at the time, sterilized bed sheets by putting them in the oven. From reading, what I do know about the disease is that, like earlier history-changing pandemics—the Bubonic Plague, Black Death, Smallpox, Cholera, etc.—the root cause of its rapid and virulent spread was human ignorance.

My first true awareness of the meaning of "disease" came in the late 1950s when a young cousin of my mother, "one of the Weitzel girls," died of poliomyelitis, which frightened my parents, whose anxiety spread to me and my siblings. There was good reason for their concern: polio was one of the most serious communicable diseases among children in the United States and they had, by 1958, eight of their own. Compared with the Spanish flu, polio was not a history-changing disease but it was a "high-profile" contagion because the vast majority of its victims were children.

Through a clever national fundraising campaign called The March of Dimes (a play on the phrase "The March of Time"), whereby, at Christmas time, children were encouraged to drop a dime into collection boxes, and whose ads featured sweet-faced boys and girls in crutches, public awareness and funding for research soared. Just as parents could see their children in those ads, I too would see one and think "That boy is me!"

Following Jonas Salk's discovery of a vaccine in 1955 and its mass production a couple years later, school auditoriums throughout the country, including the one at Cazenovia Public Grade School, were turned into immunization centers, and that is where students from Saint Anthony's, the Catholic school I attended



A 1957 March of Dimes poster (from Wikipedia).

prone to stray. Hopefully, this will also lead to more in-house book-readings and storytelling, and at the same time, encourage greater productivity among writers, poets and essayists.

In the meantime, do spare some of your time to browse through our catalogue and see if you see something interesting to order. We value your continued support.

Yuli Ismartono
yismartono@lontar.org

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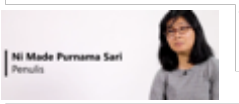
Watch our Writers Who's Who on Lontar's YouTube channel.

Joned Suryatmoko

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khneD7Dyu90

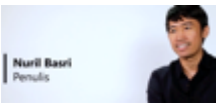
Ben Sohib

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONDkPRv_yAM



Ni Made Purnamasari

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewGbI0--KdU



Nuril Basri

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uywkkoRzEjM

were taken for vaccination. I had never seen so many people before, not even at Christmas mass; the line of parents and children stretched around the room and out the door as we waited to receive a little white Dixie cup of red liquid from one of the two nurses in immaculate white uniforms.

That nation-wide campaign was highly successful one and, within a few years, polio came to be eradicated in the U.S. The drive proved that in battling disease, research and knowledge are essential but just as important is broad public support.

On the way to adulthood, I had other encounters with disease—mumps, measles, and chickenpox—but these were no longer life-threatening. Similarly, after adulthood, and during my first years in Indonesia (1976–1979), I was felled a couple times—once by dengue fever, which was no fun—but much more vivid in my mind still are bouts of food poisoning: one that was caused by a nasty spoonful of *sambal petis* in Tretes that forced me to spend my weekend there in a thatch-walled toilet that straddled a gurgling stream; another that was due to a potent portion of *gudeg* outside the Yogya train station which kept me perched over a hole in the floor in the *peturasan* of my goat-class coach, watching railroad ties speed past my bared bottom all the way to Bandung.

From January to August, 1980, prior to my enrollment in graduate school at the University of Michigan, and during the summer of 1981, I worked as an escort-interpreter for the U.S. Department of State, serving as a guide and translator for official Indonesian visitors. During these weeks-long trips, I visited almost every major city in the country, with each trip always including several days in Washington, D.C. and days of time in New York

March 1981 working as an escort-interpreter in Washington, D.C., with Adi Sasono (right) and Said Budairy (center). Photo taken by Lukman Harun

Book of the Month

World Poetry Day was on March 21, so we selected **The Lontar Anthology of Indonesian Poetry: The Twentieth Century in Poetry** as book of the month.

In Indonesia poetry enjoys a status far and above all other genres. And as all major historical issues are articulated and negotiated through poetry, this anthology o ers a vivid portrait of twentieth-century Indonesia as seen through the lens of its poetry. *The Lontar Anthology of Indonesian Poetry: The Twentieth Century in Poetry*, presents a wide-ranging selection of twentieth-century poetry with more than 325 poems by more than 180 authors, the largest collection in English translation ever published.

Available in
English (xxviii + 598 pages)
Indonesian (xxx + 796 pages)
@Rp. 300.000

Authors of the Month

180 Authors of Lontar Anthology of Indonesian Poetry, from Mohammad Yamin (1921) to Inggit Putria Marga (2000)

Editors:
John H McGlynn, Deborah Cole, Dorothea Rosa Herliany

City and either San Francisco or Los Angeles as well. Official appointments and sightseeing took up much of the day but late at night, after the visitor had his requisite fix of steamed rice for dinner and was ready to retire, I'd explore the urban nightlife: D.C. discos, clubs on Christopher, cowboy bars in the Castro. I met a huge number of people on these trips, many of whom became close friends and some of whom were soon to die.

The first case of AIDS in the United States was announced in June 1981. I remember the summer of that year very well as friends began to report rumors of a "gay disease." At first it was called "4H"— which did not refer to the organization for rural youth but to "heroin users, homosexuals, hemophiliacs, and Haitians." The press also called it "GRID," short for "Gay Related Immune Deficiency." Not until 1982 did it come to be called AIDS.

Unlike in the 1950s, there was no public outcry for government response to this deadly disease. There was no fundraising campaign making use of cherubic children to soften hearts and wallets; there were only skeletal men whose bodies were covered with blotted purple lesions as well as preachers and popular entertainers calling the disease God's retribution for sin. Profound government neglect and public apathy can be blamed for the spread of this disease which, thirty years later, has thus far taken the lives of 32 million people.

I came back to Indonesia in September 1981 grateful that I had not contracted AIDS. I was also hopeful that the blatant disregard for human life I had witnessed in the U.S. would not be repeated in my second home, but I was proven to be wrong. In the years to come, leading officials and religious leaders observed blindly as more and more Indonesians died. Moral and god-fearing Indonesians need not worry, they said, because God was on their side. But disease-bearing bacteria are anarchists and atheists who side with no one. And now, in this time of covid-19, in these days of sequester and seclusion, I see from my juxtaposed memories that, as in the campaign to eradicate polio but not in the response to AIDS, hope rests on social solidarity.

John McGlynn
John_mcglynn@lontar.org

March Activities

Lontar Welcomes Assistant Director of Publications, Zen Hae

Zen Hae writes poetry, short stories, and literary criticism. He graduated from the Department of Indonesian Language and Literature at IKIP Jakarta (now State University of Jakarta). He has produced three books: a collection of short stories *Rumah Kawin* (*The Wedding House,* KataKita, 2004), a book of poems, *Paus Merah Jambu* (*The Pink Whale*, Akar Indonesia, 2007), and a trilingual edition of his short stories *The Red Bowl and Other Stories* (Lontar, 2015). *Paus Merah Jambu* was one of the top five of the Khatulistiwa Literary Award 2008 and was named "Best Literary Work of 2007" by *Tempo* magazine. He is co-editor of the two-volume *Lontar Anthology of Indonesian Short Stories: Short Fiction from the Twentieth Century* (Lontar, 2017). He was writer-in-residence in the Czech Republic from September to November 2017 and supported by National Book Committee, Ministry of Education and Culture Republic of Indonesia.

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On the Record: Video Documentaries on Indonesian Literary Figures and Indonesian Traditional Performances

In remembering National Film Day on March 30, Lontar is re-introducing its collection of 57 video documentaries on Indonesian writers and 30 pieces of footage on Indonesian traditional stage performances. These visual productions have been screened at various panel discussions around the country and become learning materials at schools and universities. Some of these documentaries can be accessed from the following Lontar Foundation's YouTube account:

https://www.youtube.com/user/LontarFoundation

LONTAR'S ART EXHIBITION of paintings by Robert Pearce will resume following the end of the Covid19 pandemic. The following is one example:

Antifragile Butterfly
Book pages, joss paper, acrylic paint, archival glues and varnish on aluminium composite; 65 cm x 85 cm; 2020.

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Sale of Lontar Publications Continues

You don't have to come to Lontar to buy a book; you can order Lontar's books online https://lontar.org or via telephone 021 574 6880, WA 0821 1408 1166
or email contact@lontar.org

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Lontar's website is online now at https://lontar.org