LONTAR

Lontar Newsletter

Email: contact@lontar.org

May 2020

Greetings from the Executive Director

The current pandemic reinforces our belief that you can never take anything for granted. Who would have thought that in our lifetime we would be experiencing such a global-wide tragedy or that we would be staying under restricted house-bound conditions for months on end? It almost seems surreal. Well here we are, forced to change our ways, to search for alternatives, to adapt and adopt. With it, has come a constant struggle to maintain discipline in working from home and to ensure we keep to a regular routine. Most of us are doing the best we can.

Going online is what the local publishing industry has had to do in order to survive. According to the Indonesian Publishing Association (Ikatan Penerbit Indonesia/IKAPI), close to 75 percent of publishers have begun selling books on the Web since the pandemic began in early March, even though sales have barely reached 10 percent. What is encouraging, according to IKAPI, is the trend to digitize books initiated by 41 percent of publishers, despite competition from sales of pirated books, that seem to be thriving as well. To ease the plight of the publishing industry, the government has sought to help book sellers by issuing Education & Culture Ministerial Regulation No.5/2020, absolving them of any taxation on their sales during the expected duration of the pandemic.

This unwelcome intrusion on our lives has also played havoc on important international book and literary festivals, requiring their re-scheduling or outright cancellation. So, to commemorate World

Ruminations by John McGlynn

Dismay This May (or "Home")

The Idul Fitri holidays are now past but with millions of Indonesians unable to *mudik*—to go home for the holidays—because of Covid-19, there was much dismay this May in Indonesia (and much of the rest of the world) this year. This year's Idul Fitri holidays were, indeed, were unlike any that I have experienced since first coming to Indonesia: no clusters of sarong-clad boys going to the mosque early in the morning; no gaggles of giggling girls watching the boys as they passed; no invitations to friends' homes for *ketupat* and all the fixings; not much of anything at all.

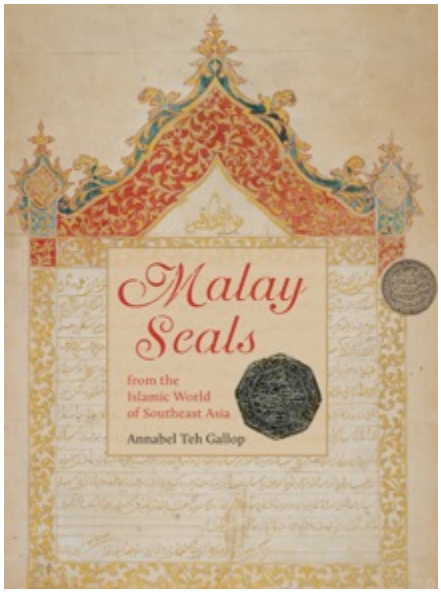
My passport is American Blue, not Indonesian Green, and my immigration documents mark me as "Katolik" not "Islam" but I, too, think of "home" when Idul Fitri comes around. And with the holiday falling in May this year, but even more so because I have been spending much of my extra free time during this period of lockdown to go through decades of accumulated correspondence and journals I am able to very clearly recall that day in May forty-four years ago when I first set foot in the clove-scented hallways of the newly-opened Halim Perdanakusuma Airport.

It was after a two-day flight from Minneapolis (with transits in Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Singapore) that I arrived in Jakarta on the night of May 31, 1976. With a scholarship from the U.S. Department of Education that would take me the following day to Malang, there I participated in a ten-week advanced Indonesian study program at the Malang Teachers' College (IKIP-Malang). The previous year I had also applied for a Fulbright grant to study *wayang kulit* in Yogyakarta and, having already been notified by the Fulbright Commission that my proposal had been approved, I anticipated moving from Malang to Yogyakarta, staying there for a year, achieving a level of brilliance in *wayang* technique never before achieved by a Westerner, and then returning to the United States to establish a cutting edge puppet theater along the lines of Peter Schumann's politically radical Bread and Puppet Theatre whose name was then synonymous with anti Viet Nam War protests. As it turned out, such dreams were not to be but I discovered something else instead.

In going through my archives, one journal in particular has captured my attention, this one containing entries from May 1976 (when I first arrived) to December 1978 (when I returned to the U.S. to go to graduate school). When reading this journal, forty-four years later, I was struck by my frequent use of the word "home"—82 times, according to a word-

Book Day on April 23, the Indonesian Literacy Association (Perkumpulan Literasi Indonesia) organized the Indonesian International Book Fair (IIBF) by featuring 30 separate events online on April 24, streamed on Zoom and YouTube daily until May 2. Some 50 literary figures were involved in the programs, discussing their books and related issues. This was followed by lively and interactive Tweets on May 17, which happened to be National Book Day, featuring public figures, academics and entertainers. Clearly, going online and resorting to digital will be an essential part of the new normal.

We at Lontar have not been exactly twiddling our thumbs. In the pipeline are a few new projects including books by Subagio Sastrowardoyo and Heru Joni Putra. (For further explanation, see below.) We are also busy devising ways to market our newest and unique publication, *Malay Seals: from the Islamic World of Southeast Asia*. Hopefully, by next month we will also be able to share with you our offline activities. Until then, stay safe and healthy.



Yuli Ismartono
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Back row (l to r): 1) John U. Wolff (U.S. Program Director; 2) Bapak Baraja (R.I. Program Director); 3) Mark Woodward?; 4) ……?; 5) Widodo; 6) Linda Magnetti; 7) John Bowen; 8) Sunaryo; 9) Rebecca ……..?; 10) Wilson Manik; 11) Virginia Crockett. Front row: 1) Brad Palmquist; 2) Jim Schiller; 3) Hadi HD; 4) John McGlynn; 5) Mark Wolz; 6) Mutohar

Attention readers: I am unable to positively identify a number of people in the photo. If anyone can help fill in the blanks (or correct a mistaken identification), please let me know at john_mcglynn@lontar.org.

frequency application. Though very often the word was used in the sense of "house" and referred to my places of residence in Malang and Jakarta, almost as frequently I used the term to denote a more metaphysical place: Glynnspring (my parent's farm), Cazenovia (my home town), and Wisconsin (my home state). From the entries in this journal, it is very apparent that at the beginning of my stay in Indonesia "home" was the place where I felt I belonged and to which I inevitably would return. I cite a number of examples:

- *In this big and quiet house, with Joan Baez on the stereo I could be back home if I didn't know there was one servant sweeping the yard, another cooking, another washing, and yet another cleaning.*
- *When the smell of burning leaves wafts into my nose, or the night air causes me to shudder, those are the times when lovely memories of my home in Wisconsin in autumn emerge.*
- *Having been struck down by dysentery, I had, between the toilet and the bed, plenty of free time to review and assess my personal fears and longings. Simply put, I feel like a person without a home.*
- *Am now living with the Pattimahu family in Pasar Minggu. The most refreshing thing about this family is that they like to argue, which makes the place feel much like my family home.*
- *Not really having a place where I can sit down and feel like I'm in "my" chair, I am a man without a home at the moment and feeling very moody, grouchy, depressed.*

Author of the Month

Hanna Fransisca

Hanna Fransisca (Singakawang, West Kalimantan, May 30, 1979), born Zhu Yong Xia, writes poetry, short stories and plays. Her compilations of poetry are *Konde Penyair Han* (2010), for which she was selected as the Outstanding Writer of 2011 by *Tempo* magazine, and *Benih Kayu Dewa Dapur* (2013). She has also published a collection of short stories titled *Sulaiman Pergi ke Tanjung Cina* (2012). Hanna is active in various social-cultural activities that present the richness of Chinese Peranakan (or Straits Chinese) culture both in Jakarta and her hometown.

Book of the Month

A Man Bathing and Other Poems
By Hanna Fransisca
English translations by Joan Suyenaga
German translations by Nele Quincke

- *I met an American man, Gary, who teaches English at the Embassy school here. It was refreshing to be able to say "Home is Wisconsin" and not have to explain where Wisconsin is.*

An interesting aspect of this journal is that as the months pass the number of entries diminishes and their average length grows shorter; by May 1978, two years after my arrival, there were no more than a few entries per month. I suppose, that is not surprising. By this time, I had established a network of friends and was spending more nights out than in, going to virtually every event there was at TIM, the Jakarta Arts Center. I was doing more and more translation work, including economic surveys to feed my stomach as well as literary work to feed my soul. I had already translated a compendium of Indonesian and Malaysian poems for the ASEAN Poetry Festival that was held at TIM in 1978 (*The ASEAN Poetry Collection: Poems from Indonesia and Other ASEAN Countries*) and was working on several manuscripts that would be published within the next few year: a pre-revolution Indonesian novel (*Shackles*); the first ever English-language anthology of poetry by Indonesian women authors (*A Taste of Betel and Lime*); and a collection of stories on conflict and its impact (*Reflections on Rebellion: Stories from the Indonesian Upheavals of 1948 and 1965).*

By September 1978 I had decided to return to the U.S. to pursue a higher degree in Indonesian literature and had begun to make plans for my departure. In an entry from that month I write:

I'm thinking of winter. Do I own a winter coat? I can't even remember. I'm not going to be prepared at all for Wisconsin's December cold. Maybe I should have a coat made before I go home. Home…?

The ellipsis and question mark after the final "home" in that entry are telling. Indonesia was no longer a place where the foreigner in me could only observe life; it was a place where I could live and a county to which I could contribute. It was home.

John McGlynn
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Forthcoming Publications

And Death Grows More Intimate

Subagio Sastrowardoyo (John H. McGlynn, translator)

Subagio Sastrowardoyo (1924-1995) first began to publish in the mid 1950s and is seen by many literary critics and historians as one of the most important Indonesian poets to have emerged on Indonesia's literary scene after Chairil Anwar. His poetry runs a gamut of themes, from the intensely philosophical, to the erotic, all the way to poems of great social concern. Subagio was a co-founder of the Lontar Foundation and, in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of his death in July this year, Lontar will publish a historical collection containing translations of much of his best work, 80 poems dating from 1957 to 2015.

(Photo courtesy Saras Sastrowardoyo)

Will Badrul Mustafa Never Die?—Verse from the Front

Heru Joni Putra (George A. Fowler, translator)

Heru Joni Putra, born in West Sumatra in 1991, is one of Indonesia's rising literary stars. Publication of his first book of poetry in 2017 (*Badrul Mustafa Badrul Mustafa Badrul Mustafa*) garnered him the honor of being named as *Tempo* magazine's Arts Figure for that year. Heru's poetry, while influenced by Minangkabau literary traditions, offers both a fresh and subversive view of those same traditions. Heru's sensibility towards language is intense and in this book, speaking through the character, Badrul Mustafa, Heru displays a sardonic and often humorous view on self importance and piety.

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

Hanna Fransisca
https://youtu.be/rSBzQ7-Jzzw

Hikmat Darmawan
https://bit.ly/3gswBep

Mona Sylviana
https://bit.ly/2M5tcEe

Sabda Armandio
https://bit.ly/2XTSk6D

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