Lontar Newsletter

Email: contact@lontar.org November 2020

Greetings from the Executive Director

November is a time to contemplate the future of the next generation. World Children's Day falls on November 20 and Indonesians observe National Teachers Day on November 25. The two are intrinsically linked and it would be timely to look at how the education system has evolved since independence, 75 years ago. Sadly, despite vastly improved access to primary and secondary schooling, poor learning outcomes point to a problem with the quality of our educational system. National standardized tests administered to grade 8 students in 2019 revealed low standards of reading proficiency and mathematics. According to the OECD's 2018 PISA learning assessment survey, only 30% of 15-year-old Indonesian children reached or exceeded the minimum proficiency level in reading. This does not augur well for those of us in the literary field. Indeed, the results suggest that the quality of schooling in Indonesia requires significant upgrading to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals-4 (SDG4).

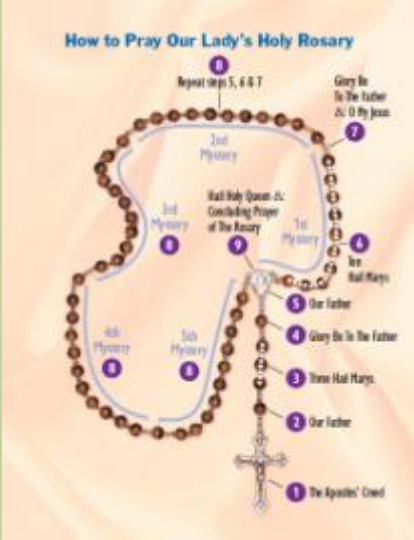
So what is the crux of the problem? Are state-imposed curricula to blame? Or is it under-trained and under-paid teachers? Many would point to the failure of local governments to allocate the

Ruminations by John McGlynn

Pain, Fun, Fear, and Devotion

In the Catholic Church, each month of the year is dedicated to a particular devotion: January to The Holy Name of Jesus, February to The Holy Family, March to Saint Joseph, and so on, but the one I remember most clearly is October, which is dedicated to The Holy Rosary. As a child that month was, for me, a time of pain, fun, and fear.

Pain was always the first to appear, settling in for a month-long spell on the first of the month. On that night, after the early-evening chores—picking up a lard-pail's worth of hickory nuts in the woods; helping Daddy with the milking of his cows; and feeding the lucky layer-hens that had survived the end-of-summer slaughter when a hundred of their brethren had gone from the coop to the cauldron and into the cooler—and following the washing of dishes and cleaning-up from what was often a one-dish meal (a kettle of chili con carne, a pot of chicken noodle soup, a baking dish of scalloped potatoes with ham, or, on Fridays, a casserole of macaroni and tuna) Mother would announce, "Time for Rosary," to which Daddy would refrain, "Knees on the floor," a joint command that prompted their seven school-age children to take their rosaries from the crucifix where they hung and to kneel beside the chairs that circled the dining table.



Like the Muslim *tasbeh*, a rosary is tool for meditation. A rosary consists of a crucifix from which hangs a "pendant" with five beads that ends with a medallion to which is attached a "loop" that is strung with five "decades" of small beads, between each of which is a larger bead. The beads of a rosary might be shiny and colorful—so pretty that my sisters would wear them as necklaces—but mine

required 20% of their budget to schools as mandated by the Indonesian Constitution. Simply speaking, the problem rests with all of the above. This is the colossal and complex challenge facing our youthful education minister, who has on many occasions promised to initiate a "total reform" of the education system. To put things in perspective, that involves 217, 270 schools and 2.7 million teachers serving more than 4.4 million students. Given the poor student performance compared with those of neighboring countries, much of the focus should be on the quality of teaching. Official data shows that barely 2.3%t of the 16,600 part-time teachers, who comprise a third of the total number, meet an acceptable level of proficiency.

The plan to improve the education system in Indonesia is off to a good start with the government recently announcing that part-time teachers would get paid on time and that their paychecks would be on a par with full time teaching staff. Amen to that.

Stay safe and remember to support Lontar in its efforts to promote literacy in Indonesia.

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was made of boring-black wooden beads that symbolized discomfort for me.

The floors in our home were made of oak slats and with no cushion between my knobby knees and the hardwood floor, as the family together first recited the Apostle's Creed, then the Our Father, followed by three Hail Mary's, a Glory Be and another Our Father, my knees would begin to ache. A half hour or more later, by the time we'd finished the entire "loop" with its fifty Holy Marys, four Our Fathers, four Glory Bes, a Fatima Prayer after every Glory Be, and ended the prayer with a Hail Holy Queen, the synovial fluid in the membrane behind my patellae would have ceased to lubricate the joints of my femurs and tibiae, thereby locking them at a 45 degree angle and causing me to wince and yelp as I struggled to an upright position. Every night of the month, this cruelty was the same. While I had been taught that the lengthy recitation of The Holy Rosary was intended as a time to reflect on the glorious, joyful, and sorrowful mysteries in the life of Jesus, my mind was only on the sorrowful.

With my birthday coming in mid-October and the angel food cake and gifts that accompanied it, the month did also offer a measure of fun but with darkness descending ever earlier in the day and the naked trees transforming themselves in moonlight to wraiths with skeletal limbs and fingers, it was a time of fear as well.

Ravenous ghouls were outside and in abundance, just waiting for you to drop your guard, and if you didn't dip your fingers in holy water and make the sign of the cross before going to bed, they were likely to slip inside the house and whisk you away while you're sleeping to their haunted world. You never knew where they might be hiding: maybe in the barren trees, maybe in the dry grass beside the road.

As a knobby-kneed boy on my birthday in October 1960—prior to praying The Holy Rosary!

Oddly enough, Halloween night on October 31, precisely the time when malevolent spirits are purported to prowl, was never a scary night for me. For some

Author of the Month

Intan Paramaditha (Bandung, November 15, 1979) is a writer and scholar. After graduating from the University of Indonesia, she served as a lecturer in literature at her alma mater and then went on to complete a PhD in Cinema Studies at New York University in 2014. Intan Paramaditha's first book, the short story collection Sihir Perempuan (Women's Witchery), was one of the five finalists for the 2005 Khatulistiwa Literary Award. In 2010, together with Eka Kurniawan and Ugoran Prasad, she published Kumpulan Budak Setan (The Devil's Slaves: A Compilation of Short Horror Stories), a tribute to Indonesia's leading horror writer, Abdullah Harahap. Over the 2011-2012 period she collaborated in adapting a story from that book, "Goyang Penasaran" ("Obsessive Twist") for the artist collective Teater Garasi. In addition to fiction, she has also published academic works about cinema, gender and sexuality in journals both within Indonesia and internationally.

reason, I just knew the night was only for fun and that there was no need to worry about ghosts or witches. Perhaps because gaggles of screaming children disgusted them, they kept to their lairs and after we, the McGlynn kids, had "disguised" ourselves with brown-paper bags over our heads and Daddy had driven us to town, we were free to roam the few short streets of Cazenovia without fear of abduction. And anyway, even if there were stray ghosts about, you could bribe them with your sack of candy.

No, Halloween was fun—but it was all the other nights that were scary. When waking in the night with an urgent need to relieve myself, I would have to jump from the bed to the rug and then from my rug through the doorway in order to reach the bathroom beyond. This action had to be done in two steps only; not a single toe could touch the bedroom floor because that would rouse the ogre who rested beneath my bed. Being the littlest goat with no older brother to ward off the ogre, I would be unable to escape the ogre's claws and certain death.

Given all the fears I had as a child, I consider myself lucky to have reached adulthood. If it wasn't a monster that was going to eat me while I slept, it was my own sisters who were going to lock me in the clothes drier and spin me around till I shrank so small that I fell through the tumbler's holes never to be seen again.

I believe that we are all much more superstitious than we'd care to admit but that as we grow we use our experience and education to disguise our fears. Similarly, our childhood demons move from lairs to live in sanctuaries, dress themselves in human apparel, and appear regularly on national radio and television.

With October's end comes November, a month of devotion for the Souls of the Dead. November 1 is All Saints' Day, celebrated in honor of all the known and unknown saints in heaven. November 2 is All Souls' Day, a day to remember the souls of all the "faithful" who have passed. Though I do not count myself as especially faithful in the Catholic sense of the term, I do cherish the tradition of honoring the dead and this year, when more than 1.4 million lives have been shortened by an illness whose spread might have been stopped or at least hampered by benevolent spirits, it was a coven of demons that came to rule.

In memory of Terry Shadick

Festival Sastra Lontar

Literary Breakthrough – Menembus Batas, telah dilaksanakan secara online pada tanggal 11-15 Oktober 2020 kolaborasi dengan Jakarta Content Week (Jaktent) dengan dukungan penuh Kementerian Pendidikan dan KEbudayaan dalam program Fasilitas Bidang Kebudayaan.

Festival berisi ceramah, diskusi, pemutaran film dan ngobrol santai, bersama 76 pengisi acara terdiri dari penulis, penerjemah, akademisi dan peneliti sastra Indonesia, dan wartawan yang berdomisili di beberapa wilayah Indonesia dan luar negeri.

Acara dihadiri oleh lebih dari 6500 peserta dari Indonesia dan berbagai belahan dunia.

Rekaman acara bisa diakses di Youtube Lontar, akun Lontar Foundation.

Dokumentasi Foto Festival Sastra Lontar

SURAT DARI PEJOMPONGAN

SUASANA

Bung,

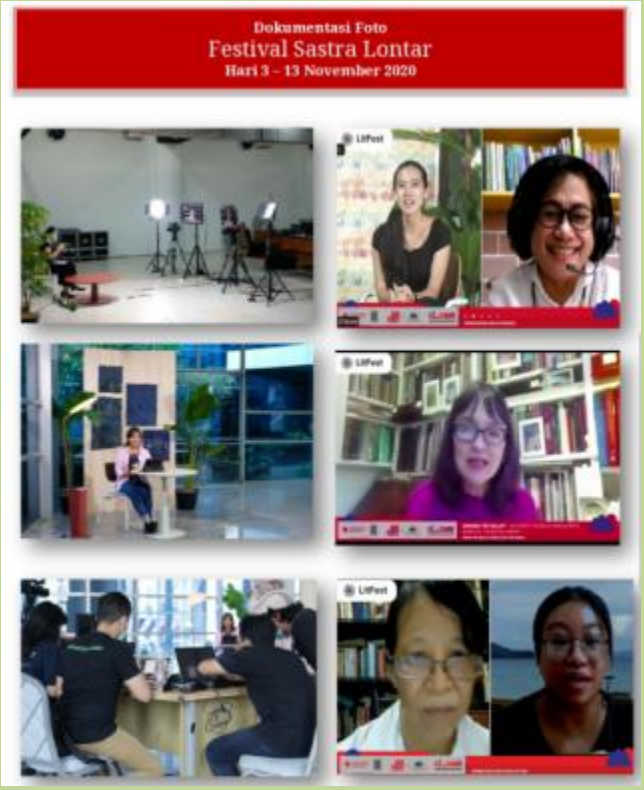
Saya tengah membaca puisi-puisi Tomas Tranströmer. Buku puisinya *New Collected Poems* terbitan Bloodax Books (2017), terjemahan Robin Fulton, baru saya bisa beli beberapa bulan lalu. Baru separuh jalan. Mungkin pembacaan ini tampak terlambat, tetapi, tidak apalah, daripada tidak sama sekali.

Bagi saya, ciri terpenting sajak-sajak Tranströmer adalah sajak suasana. Jenis sajak ini banyak juga dikerjakan dalam puisi Indonesia modern. Jika kita membaca sajak-sajak suasana yang terbaik dalam bahasa Indonesia, maka kita akan bertemu, terutama, dengan sajak-sajak Goenawan Mohamad dan Sapardi Djoko Damono.

Sajak-sajak Sapardi mengandung suasana yang kuat pada sajak-sajak bergenre "kartu pos". Sementara pada Goenawan kita menemukan bukan hanya bangun suasana yang kuat, tetapi juga musikalitas yang kemudian banyak ditiru oleh para penyair yang lebih kemudian. Dan yang tidak kalah penting: percikan permenungan.

Ciri terpenting dari sajak suasana di mana pun adalah undurnya subjek lirik dari pengujaran puisi. Penyair atau *alter ego*-nya memberi ruang dan keleluasaan kepada aneka citraan dan lukisan suasana yang hendak dibangun. Pernyataan maksud si penyair—soal yang juga penting dalam *isi* pantun—menjadi tidak terlalu penting.

Bagi saya, Tranströmer adalah pemotret suasana yang lihai. Dia bukan hanya mampu menghasilkan



aneka citraaan dari pemandangan alam sekitarnya, tetapi juga menjadikan semua itu sebagai alusi terhadap dunia yang lebih luas, atau pemikiran yang lebih mendalam. Katakanlah, filsafat yang menyeruak dari alam.

Dalam sajaknya "Solitary Swedish House" (sajak pertama dari kumpulan *Hemligheter på Vägen / Secrets on the Way*, 1958), kita bukan hanya mendapatkan lukisan suasana perdesaan yang khas Eropa Utara, tetapi juga semacam pernyataan iman yang tajam di akhirnya: "Let them feel without alarm / the camouflaged wings / and God's energy / coiled up in the dark."

Menampilkan sesuatu yang subtil dan metafisis—bahkan filosofis—dari hamparan alam benda, mungkin itulah tantangan sajak suasana. Saya merindukan itu pada sajak-sajak suasana karya penyair Indonesia mutakhir. Jadi, saya bukan hanya mendapatkan pameran citraan dan permainan bunyi yang kadang kelewat programatik, tetapi juga sesuatu yang lebih berharga dari semua itu.

Soal itu tidak mudah, tetapi mungkin.

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Connect & Donate to Lontar

To contribute to Lontar send a message to Tuti Zairati, Lontar's Chief Financial Officer at tuti_zairati@lontar.org. She will provide you with Lontar's bank details. Contributions from persons and companies in the United States are tax exempt if given through Give2Asia (www.give2asia.org)

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