Lontar Newsletter

Email: contact@lontar.org January 2021

Greetings from the Executive Director

As if the unsettling pandemic wasn't enough of a burden, a series of floods, landslides, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions across the country seemed to signal yet another inauspicious new year—one that had initially begun with a nascent sense of optimism. As elsewhere in the world, the prospect of a Covid-19 vaccine seemed close at hand (despite predictable bureaucratic hassles over how it would be delivered, questions about its efficacy, and whether it had been certified as *halal*) and this hoped-for promise of a cure served to mitigate concerns over the recent sharp rise in infections, particularly in heavily populated urban areas. Now, however, the light at the end of the tunnel again seems to be a long way off.

Even with the government providing social aid to the needy and financial assistance to badly hit small and medium enterprises, state officials have forecasted a long and slow economic recovery. In turn, this will mean an uphill struggle for the education and education-related sectors, which are still trying to adapt to the new challenges brought on by the pandemic. What we did not expect to see in our school system was the reappearance of an old problem, that of religious intolerance. News media recently reported that a state-run school in West Sumatra had put into place a requirement for all female students to

Ruminations by John McGlynn

A Tale of Three Historians

Indonesia is not alone in the countries where "history" has been written to conform to notions of the powers that be. At Saint Anthony's grade school I was taught that God Himself had charted the course of U.S. history. By His guiding hand Christopher Columbus had "discovered" the Americas. *Where are the native peoples in this narrative?* Because of His will U.S. dominion extended from sea to shining sea. *How about the Chinese coolies who laid the rails that united the continent?* Even during World War II, which ended with the explosion of atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it was God, I learned, who gave those bombs to the U.S. Likewise, at Weston High School, students were not encouraged to think or ask questions; we were instructed to memorize proscribed answers.

In college, as a Fine Arts major at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee from 1970 to 1973, Western Art History was a required subject but it was not until the next year, when I switched schools and majors and enrolled in Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison that I began to acquire a non-U.S.-centric perspective of world history. Such an awakening this was! And it was there, in 1975, I first met Taufik Abdullah, a scholar and historian who encouraged me to open my eyes to other ways of looking at the world.

Pak Taufik came to Madison that summer of 1975 to teach "History of Modern Indonesia and Malaysia." I was one of only a dozen students in his class, a number that allowed for greater interaction between teachers and students and because Taufik was not that old himself—still in his thirties—talking to him was more like talking to an older sibling than a lofty professor.

Taufik was the first Muslim scholar I'd ever met and I was curious to know whether he ascribed to a view similar to that of my previous history teachers in respect to the role that God had to play in the trajectory of human history. In conversations with Taufik, I learned that though he was a man of strong religious conviction, he did not allow faith to fight with facts. "Historians are humans," he told me, "who may or may not believe in God but whose personal beliefs should not blind them to science or facts."

wear *hijab*, a clear violation of their constitutional rights regardless of whether they were Muslim or non-Muslim. Then, when non-Muslim female student at the school refused to cover their heads, they were punished. The nation-wide uproar that this action caused, compelled the Minister of Education and Culture himself to speak out against this outrage. Sadly, with intolerance having taken hold in many communities across the country, it will be a major challenge to prevent recurrences. In a 2018 survey conducted by the Syarif Hidayatullah Islamic State University at 2,237 state and private schools in 34 provinces, results showed that 53% of the teachers in those schools held "intolerant beliefs" while only 4% could be described as "tolerant."

As we enter the first quarter of 2021, Lontar continues to prepare translations for publication and have launched a "Books on the Horizon" campaign, through which we hope to obtain sufficient funds with which to publish at least twelve new titles. While there is no shortage of good causes in need of assistance in these troubled times—access to education abd the fight against religious intolerance, to name just two—we also feel that one of the greatest weapons in this battles is improved literacy, which leads to better critical thinking. That is why books are so important for the country's overall mental health and that is why we ask for your generous assistance to our cause.

Yuli Ismartono
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Teacher and student: Taufik Abdullah and John McGlynn at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1975.

With his ready smile and soft-spoken manner, Taufik appeared to be a human embodiment of the proverbial *kancil*, that Sumatran deer mouse who uses wiles to outwit the crocodiles who would have him for lunch.

The second Indonesian historian I got to know, also that summer, was Ong Hok Ham. Unlike Taufik, Ong was not a man of strong religious conviction and "faith" was a word he rarely spoke with a positive connotation. Even so, he resembled Taufik in his use of wiles and wit to make his viewpoint known. Because Ong had come to ISSI to speak at a conference and not to teach, I did not get to know him as a student but at the guest house where out-of-state students and teachers boarded, I was the naïve observer to friendly arguments between these two men. That summer, a friendship was forged between us.

After summer school ended, Taufiq and Ong returned to Indonesia and their respective positions at LIPI and the University of Indonesia. I, on the other hand, lived a peripatetic life for the next years to come and it was not until 1983, when I settled down in Jakarta, that I able to see those two historians with any regularity.

The third Indonesian historian I came to know was Nugroho Notosusanto, Indonesia's Minister of Education from March 1983 until June 1985. Born in 1930, Nugroho was a teenager at the time of the Indonesian revolution but, apparently enamored with the military, after the war, he poured his thoughts on the revolution into fact-based fiction. That is how I knew him: the author of *Hujan Kepagian* (An Early Morning Rain) and *Tiga Kota* (Three Cities), two collections of stories about the revolution.

My guess is that it was his talent as a writer and high regard for the military that brought him to the attention of General Abdul Haris Nasution, the Army's Chief of Staff, who hired Nugroho to write a history of the revolution. The result was a

Author of the Month

D. Zawawi Imron (Sumenep, Madura, East Java, January 1, 1945) studied at the Pesantren Lambicabbi boarding school in Semenep. His poetry collection *Bulan Tertusuk Ilallang* inspired film director Garin Nugroho to make a film with the same name. His poetry collection *Nenek Moyangku Air Mata* received an award for Best Book from the Buku Utama Foundation in 1985. That book and another poetry collection, *Celurit Emas*, were selected for the Center for Language Advocacy and Development (1990). He received the SEA Write Award in 2012. His other book of poetry is *Mata Badik Mata Puisi* (2012). Several of his poems have been translated into English, Dutch and Bulgarian.

tract amenable to the Indonesian Army, one that served as a counter to the Communist-Party's history of the time period.

After the overthrow of the Sukarno government by the military in 1965 and the blood bath that followed, Nugroho's first history text put him in good stead to write the government's official history of this more recent time of upheaval—which he did, in collaboration with Ismail Saleh. Their 1968 publication, *The Coup Attempt of the 30 September Movement in Indonesia*, was the first book on the subject to be published in Indonesia and was later used as the basis for the 1984 pro-military film, "The Eradication of the Treachery of the 30 September Movement of the Indonesian Communist Party." Perhaps because I subtitled the film, Pak Nugroho contacted me in late 1984 and hired me to translate his history of the 30 September Movement, which he was now calling *The White Book*, a chide to *The White Paper* put out by Cornell University which cast the Indonesian army in a dimmer light.

The White Book proved to be difficult to translate, not for linguistic reasons but because of the unabashedly biased nature of the text itself, which extolled the heroism of the Indonesian military, demonized all leftists, and offered no other story line except for the one the government's propaganda machine had been stuffing down people's throats for almost two decades. Despite my reservations, I finished the job but I don't think my translation was ever published because in June 1985 Pak Nugroho died from a cerebral hemorrhage.

It was around this time that Ong held a housewarming at his new home in Cipinang Muara and there I reunited with Taufik and Ong. I don't recall our exact conversation but I can clearly see Ong with a half-full tumbler of Scotch, me with a bottle of beer, and Taufik with a glass of juice as we talked about Pak Nugroho's recent death and the man's role and impact as a historian. After I told them about my experience in working on *The White Book*, Taufik looked at Ong and remarked, "And that is the difference between us! You and I are documentarians, mere scribblers of events. We are nothing compared to our late friend, may his soul rest in peace. That man didn't just record history, he created history!"

It was at that same moment I saw, in Taufik's broad smile and the twinkle in his eye, the deer mouse I'd first glimpsed in 1975 and then, too, that the larger truths in the words he'd spoken at that time finally dawned on me: that "history," having been written by fallible humans, is something always to be questioned and that God is on no one's side.

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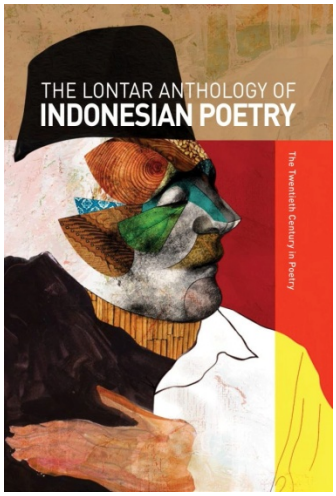
Book of the Month



It is poetry's unique facility at representing and embodying social tensions that has given this genre its power and widely appreciated status in contemporary Indonesian society. *The Lontar Anthology of Indonesian Poetry* is a landmark publication, the first comprehensive attempt to translate the many and varied ways Indonesian poets have continued to represent and interrogate such tensions in their multiple and evolving forms.

Paperback: 598 pages
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Surat dari Pejompongan

LOKAL

Saudara Anu,

Seorang pengarang memanfaatkan warna lokal untuk mencapai kewajaran cerita—bukan sebaliknya.

Saya kira, masalah bermula ketika sastra Indonesia modern menggunakan bahasa Melayu sebagai tenaga pengucapannya. Dengan bahasa Melayu yang sebelumnya telah menjadi *lingua franca* para penulis roman masa 1930-an hendak memastikan representasi dunia keseharian di Hindia Belanda ke dalam fiksi berlangsung baik-baik saja.

Roman-roman terbitan Balai Pustaka punya tampilan yang kurang-lebih sama. Umumnya mereka berkisah tentang masyarakat Minangkabau dan Melayu—dengan sedikit selaan dari Minahasa dan Bali. Di luar soal keseragaman fokus pada "roman adat", tidak banyak nuansa yang terlihat pada gaya bahasa pengarangnya. Tidak ada gaya pribadi pengarang yang benar-benar khas.

Salah satu penyebabnya adalah hasil kerja gunting penyunting yang itu-itu saja, yang gaya bahasanya telah diterakan sebagai langgam bahasa Balai Pustaka. Nur Sutan Iskandar salah satunya.

Ketika Aman Datuk Madjoindo memanfaatkan "Logat Jakarta" dalam cerita anak-anak *Si Doel Anak Betawi* (1932) ia sebenarnya tengah mencari jalan keluar dari keseragaman fokus dan gaya itu. Ia mengambil fokus cerita anak-anak di Betawi. Meski bahasa Betawi yang digunakan Aman masih bisa diperdebatkan, paling tidak, ia berhasil mencapai kewajaran dengan memasukkan ragam bahasa percakapan yang akrab dan realistis.

Sebelum itu, seluruh tokoh cerita, baik yang hidup di alam Minangkabau, Melayu, Minahasa dan Bali, berbicara dalam bahasa Indonesia yang nyaris baku. Sesuatu yang tidak wajar, sebenarnya, mengingat ragam bahasa baku hampir tidak pernah pergunakan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Tokoh-tokoh *Si Doel* menjadi hidup karena mereka menggunakan bahasa percakapan sehari-hari mereka sendiri—bukan bahasa yang disuntikkan dari kitab tata bahasa dan kamus.

Rumus ini kemudian diulang oleh S.M. Ardan dan Firman Muntaco. Kita tahu, dua pengarang ini adalah yang paling berhasil memainkan warna lokal Betawi dalam cerpen dan sketsa mereka. Bedanya: Ardan lebih berambisi menjadi bagian dari sastra Indonesia, Muntaco lebih memilih menjadi tonggak dalam sastra Betawi. Keduanya dapat nilai.

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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Mereka beruntung karena bahasa Betawi adalah salah satu dialek bahasa Melayu yang kemudian menjadi bahasa Indonesia. Perbedaan antara bahasa Indonesia dan bahasa Betawi tipis saja. Keberuntungan semacam ini tidak didapatkan oleh pengarang yang mencoba menegaskan warna lokal dengan memasukkan ragam kelisanan bahasa non-Betawi.

Sebagai penutut bahasa Betawi—yang sering mengaku sebagai "warga asli Jakarta"—bolehlah Saudara berbangga hati.

Sekarang ini, ada beberapa novel etnografis yang mencoba menegaskan warna lokal dengan menggotong begitu banyak penanda budaya setempat. Mungkin maksudnya hendak mencapai lukisan yang realistis. Akan tetapi, bagi saya, jika semua itu bisa dikatakan dalam bahasa Indonesia, kenapa tidak. Bukankah salah satu amanat novel berbahasa Indonesia adalah mendayagunakan semaksimal mungkin bahasa itu sebagai bahasa sastra.

Novel jadi kurang lincah dalam berbahasa, meski kaya dalam kandungan etnografisnya. Terlampau ingin eksotis atau apa adanya, barangkali.

Akhirul kalam, Saudara mesti tahu ini: Fiksi realis sekalipun bukanlah salinan mentah-mentah dari dunia keseharian kita. Ia hasil rancangan, konstruksi, pengarangnya. Ia sebuah fiksionalitas yang khas, otonom.

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Upcoming Event

Thursday, 25 January 2021, 4:00 p.m. Jakarta time (GMT +7)

Registration link: bit.ly/fortranslations