



Greetings from the ED

International Mother-Language Day on February 21 might have gone unnoticed and unreported in Indonesia had it not been for President Joko Widodo who greeted his Facebook followers that day with “*Pripun kabare?*”—the Javanese (his mother tongue) for “How are you?” He then went on to encourage the daily use of the more than 700 languages spoken throughout the archipelago, in addition to Indonesian, the national language.

It was in 1999 that UNESCO launched Mother Language Day in an effort to promote global recognition of the fact that language and multilingualism are vital elements in the education process and form the foundation for learning. Thus, the observance is intended to remind policymakers, educators, and parents to commit themselves to a multilingual educational system. This is especially important in regions where the dominant use of Indonesian in schools serves to exclude or marginalize students for whom Indonesian is not their mother tongue. In fact, there was a time not long ago when the use of languages besides Indonesian was discouraged, ostensibly to enforce political unity and to discourage sedition, particularly in the outer provinces.

We at Lontar have long had a deep appreciation for the arts and literature from the different regions in Indonesia and we have devoted time and resources to preserving not just the written literature but also documenting a wide range of oral traditions, from *Didong* (Aceh) to

Ruminations by John McGlynn

Giving Up

As I begin to write this rumination on 2 March 2021, I recall that it was exactly one year ago the office of the president announced the first case of Covid-19 in Indonesia. With no outside activities to mark the days and no celebrations to distinguish one week from the next, the twelve months since have sometimes (in retrospect) seemed to have passed quickly but at other times with unrelenting lethargy. Thinking back several decades, I can remember no other period in my life when a week did not pass without several openings or launches or a month when there was not a weekend in Bali, a book fair abroad, or a family reunion. Given that most of the world is in a no-travel-keep-your-distance mode, I recognize that I am not alone in my feeling this “aloneness” but awareness does not assuage the emotion.

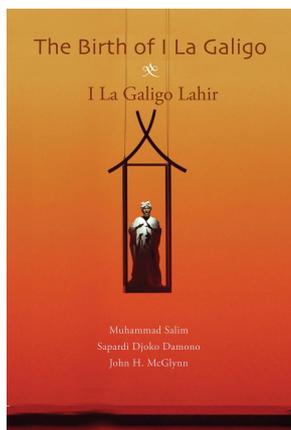
One thing that has served to reduce feelings of angst and aimlessness are monthly Zoom reunions with my nine geographically-distant siblings. Near the end of the most recent one, Colleen, the eighth child, asked the rest of us in the room, “So, what are you giving up for Lent?” Delinquent Catholic that I am, I hadn’t given much thought to Lent or its meaning for a number of years and didn’t realize that this year’s Lenten season had already begun but Colleen’s question immediately took me back to younger years when Holy Days of Obligation were as important in the planning and marking of time as have been openings, receptions, and book fairs in more recent years.

As an aside for the non-cognoscenti, “Holy Days of Obligation” are those days on which Catholics are expected to go to Mass. This includes every Sunday but outside of Easter, which marks the end of Lent and is always celebrated on a Sunday, there are nine others. The most well known is Christmas. For the McGlynn family, these days of obligation and other feast- and saints’ days very much determined the rhythm of our year; Christian rites and rituals were the way we kept track of time.

Besides the already mentioned days, they were many other days when we were expected to attend Mass. A personal favorite was Saint Blaise Day when we as suppliant would stand before

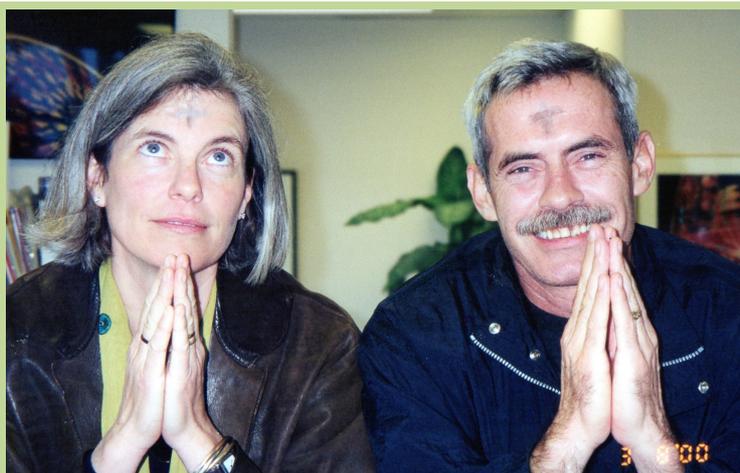
Mamanda (East Kalimantan) and from *Bonet* (Timor) to *Maengket* (Manado). We have also produced a *wayang kulit* educational package containing more than 30 hours of performances with subtitles in Indonesian and English.

In book form, we have published a bilingual (Indonesian and English) version of *The Birth of I La Galigo*, the epic Bugis legend. We have also published *In the Small Hours of the Night*, a collection of 24 short stories originally written in Sundanese, the first of its kind ever to be translated into English. One of our future titles is *She Wanted to be a Beauty Queen*, the first ever anthology of modern Javanese fiction ever to be translated into English.



That so little literature from regional languages has NOT been translated either into Indonesian or foreign languages is sadly telling and while we applaud the president's encouragement to nurture and preserve the many languages of this country, without a professional and well-funded translation program, future generations of Indonesians and their foreign brethren will forever be deprived from knowing the histories and legends that have enriched regional cultures or even the modern work being produced today.

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A photograph dating from Ash Wednesday in 2000 when JHM dipped his finger in cigarette ashes to anoint himself and his sister, Colleen.

the Communion railing at Saint Anthony de Padua Church and Father Bornbach would hold a crossed pair of beeswax candles to our necks while intoning a mantra-like prayer to prevent objects from ever becoming stuck in our throats. How one measures the efficacy of this ritual, I do not know, but Grandma McGlynn often told me of a boy my age who got a wish bone caught in his throat and whose life was saved only through Saint Blaise's intervention. Grandma Schauf's iteration was that of a boy much like me who fell asleep when chewing bubble gum and surely would have died if Saint Blaise had not prevented the wad of gum from blocking the boy's thoracic passage. How wondrous, I thought, to be able to evade death with just candles and a prayer!

As titillating as Saint Blaise Day was for me, the Lenten season as a whole trumped all other religious holidays with the exception of Christmas, of course, when the materialistic and the profane edged out religiosity. And though Lent is supposed to be a somber period for reflection, penance, and repentance, I spent more time trying to unravel the mystery of its rituals than dwelling on my venial discretions.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, six weeks before Easter, and previous to that day, the Franciscan sisters at St. Anthony's would have gathered the now-shriveled palm fronds which had adorned statues of saints and doorway lintels since Palm Sunday of the previous year. (Palms not being native to Wisconsin, I mused where they might have come from. My hunch was the Holy Land—unaware as I was that California was a more likely source.) They then would have burnt the palms in a metal container to reduce them to ash, after which the conjurer-priest would have sprinkled the ashes with holy water and incense turned the mixture into a potent slurry that he would the next day smear with his right thumb on foreheads of the faithful in the shape of a cross while saying "from dust you came and from dust you will return."

Author of the Month



Subagio Sastrowardoyo (Madiun, East Java, February 1, 1924–Jakarta, July 18, 1995) wrote poems, short stories and literary reviews and was an educator. He taught at several schools in Yogyakarta, including the Faculty of Letters at Gadjah Mada University; in Bandung at the Army Staff and Commando School (SESKOAD), and in Australia at Salisbury Teachers College and Flinders University. His short stories were published in *Kejantanan di Sumbing* (1965). He published several collections of poems: *Symphoni* (1957), *Keroncong Motinggo* (1975), *Hari dan Hara* (1982), *Simfoni Dua* (1990) and *Dan Kematian Makin Akrab* (1995). His literary reviews were published in *Bakat Alam dan Intelektualisme* (1972), *Sosok Pribadi dalam Sajak* (1980), *Sastra Hindia Belanda dan Kita* (1983), *Pengarang Modern sebagai Manusia Perbatasan* (1989) and *Sekitar Soal Sastra dan Budaya* (1992). His short story “Kejantanan di Sumbing” received first prize from *Kisah* magazine in 1955; *Sastra Hindia Belanda dan Kita* received an Award for Literature from the Jakarta Arts Council in 1983; and *Pengarang Modern sebagai Manusia Perbatasan* received an award from the Buku Utama Foundation, an organization associated with the Ministry of Education and Culture, in 1992. In 1991 he received the SEA Write Award.

I was enthralled by the ceremony and attempted to wear that sign of the cross on my forehead as long as I could, taking care when washing my face to wipe around the cross to prevent its erasure. I firmly believed this outward symbol of faith affirmed my inner sanctity.

After Ash Wednesday services and our return to Saint Anthony’s class rooms, our teachers, the nuns, passed out the flat makings of a mite box in which to store the alms we gathered before Easter, which they purported would be used to save the souls of pagan babies. These colorful make-your-own boxes which we had to fold on dotted lines and crimp tabs had the shape of Animal Crackers boxes and side panels that featured a radiant Jesus with outstretched hands, enfolding within them a vast number of pagan babies of color. These were the children who would benefit from the pennies, nickels, and dimes that we gave up to save young souls who, through no fault of their own, had been born in non-Christian regions.

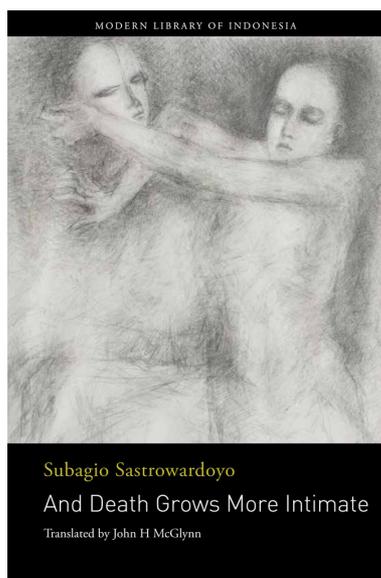
The nuns’ gave each class a monetary target and if our class could together collect US\$ 30 we would have the right to choose the baptismal name for the pagan baby whose soul we had saved. This was 1961 and I remember that when my class achieved that target we voted to give “our” baby the name “John Fitzgerald Kennedy” in honor of the country’s first Roman Catholic president.

Home from school on Ash Wednesday night, the first question Mother would ask, “So, what are you giving up for Lent?” Annually, we’d shout “Watermelon!” or other foods that were not to be found at that time of the year, but Mother would then inveigle us to give up something we really would miss—doughnuts, watching television, or harassing a younger sibling. This was so that in the weeks ahead, until Jesus had arisen from the dead on Easter Day, whenever we got a hankering for the thing we had given up we would be reminded of the far greater hardships that those less fortunate than us are forced to bear.

So it was at our family meeting that when Colleen asked, “So, what are you giving up for Lent?” I was going to answer, “Watermelon!” but Mary, the fourth sister, preempted me and said, “I have thought about this and I am not ‘giving up’ anything! In these times, with so many deaths and so many people out of work, let’s drop the ‘up’ and focus on ‘giving’ instead.” And isn’t she right: instead of thinking of ourselves and our personal, often trivial, troubles, isn’t it the time—Isn’t it always the time?—to be giving instead?

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Book of the Month



Subagio Sastrowardoyo (1924–1995) was a poet, short story writer, essayist, and literary critic. During his writing career of more than 45 years, Subagio published a wide range of work but it was his poetry and essays that have most served to enrich and expand discourse on modern Indonesian poetry. It was he who introduced, and then consistently produced, poetry embedded with intellectualism. The current trend in intellectualdiscursive poetry can be traced to the poet's pioneer work in the mid1950s.

Critical recognition of his work first came in 1955 from the literary journal *Kisab* for his story “Kejantanan di Sumbing” which was followed in 1967 by an award from *Horison* for his poem “Dan Kematian Makin Akrab.” In 1970 the Indonesian government bestowed on him the Anugerah Seni award and, in 1991, he was named a recipient of the SEA Write Award. Posthumously, the Indonesian government awarded him the Satyalancana Kebudayaan medal for his significant contribution to Indonesian culture.

Rp. 150,000

Paperback: 148 pages

ISBN: 978-623-7150-12-1

Surat dari Pejompongan

SOEMAN

Saudara Anu,

Kasihlah waktumu sedikit untuk cerita detektif. Jangan kau berasyik-masyuk dengan cerita yang tinggi-tinggi niatnya, yang bukan hanya berbunga-bunga cara pengungkapannya, tetapi hendak mencapai filsafat atau ilmu jiwa manusia di dalamnya. Masuklah ke dalam cerita yang alurnya mengalir cepat dan mengejutkan. Bahasanya tangkas pula, tidak mendayu-dayu macam roman-roman terbitan Balai Pustaka itu.

Cobalah kauterka, siapa sebenarnya tersangka pencuri anak perawan yang dipanggil “Si Nona” atau “Cendrawasih” dalam karangan Soeman Hs? Beribu maaf, bukan maksudku mempersamakan seorang gadis dengan segenggam emas-berlian, tetapi ini kupinjam langsung dari judul buku *Mentjabari Pentjoeri Anak Perawan* karangan Soeman Hs yang diterbitkan Balai Pustaka pada 1932.



Soeman Hs.

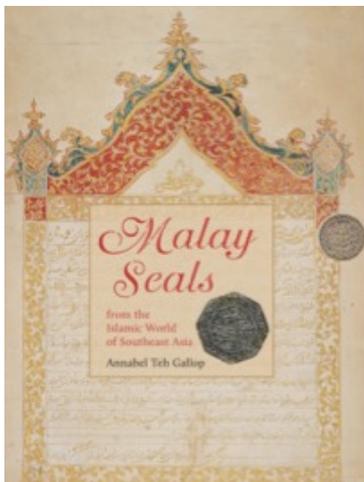
Cerita Soeman Hs itu digubah secara ringkas. Novela, bukan roman. Panjangnya menyerupai roman-roman picisan yang diterbitkan secara berkala oleh sejumlah penerbit di Medan, Bukittinggi, Padang dan Solo. Kisahnya bergerak maju dari masalah putusya tali kasih antara Sir Djoon dan si Nona. Usut-punya usut, Gadi, ayah si Nona, sudah menerima persekot 600 dolar dari seorang pengusaha peranakan Hindi bernama Tairoo. Maka, dimintanya anaknya putus dari Sir Djoon.

Belakangan ada kabar lebih mengejutkan: Si Nona diculik. Maka, Sir Djoon membaktikan dirinya untuk mencari si pencuri anak perawan itu. Hasilnya?

Kau mesti membaca tuntas cerita yang digadang-gadang sebagai pemula dari cerita detektif dalam sastra Indonesia modern ini. Ya, resep membaca cerita detektif adalah kita mesti membaca seluruhnya, dalam sekali duduk; tuntas dalam sekali pukul. Itulah daya tariknya. Kita belum akan berhenti sebelum kita tahu siapa di balik semua ketegangan ini? Dan bagaimana kasus itu diselesaikan?

BOOK REVIEW

Excerpt from a book review by
Henri Chambert Loir on *Malay
Seals in Arts Asiatiques*.



“The seals—and maybe this is the biggest surprise of this work—deliver, through their shape, graphic form, decoration and the content of the inscriptions, so much information on the status of persons, structure of states and social functions, that this catalogue and the accompanying commentary read like a discourse on the history of the Malay world. The somewhat unprepossessing title of the book is belied by a luxurious presentation and superlative refinement, orchestrated by an expert in the formatting of complex texts, Paul Luna. What could have been an austere catalogue is in fact an art book that we could even take for a coffee table book. Yet nothing is sacrificed from the thesis which is the origin of the work: the usual technical apparatus of an academic work (index, maps, tables, lists, notes, bibliography) is presented in an impeccable way, and the text itself, of flawless erudition, is a masterpiece of conciseness, clarity and elegance.”

https://news.efeo.fr/archive/3OwWCniPl/r1_0YP-JQ/SyGHfcwWk7

Saat perbincanganku dengan Koko Hendri Lubis dalam sebuah podcast produksi Komunitas Salihara tempo hari, Koko bercerita bahwa dalam khazanah “Roman Medan”, cerita detektif adalah salah satu primadona. Serial *Elang Emas* karangan Joesoef Sou’yb adalah salah satunya. Kelak, ada lagi yang menarik, yaitu *Document Rabsia* (1941) karya D.I. Loebis.

Cerita detektif adalah perihal ketangkasan menyusun plot dan bagaimana kejutan itu disiapkan. Tentu saja, mesti ada satu kasus yang membuat pening kepala karena sulit dipecahkan di awal kisah. Selanjutnya, si detektif—dalam hal ini Sir Djoon sebenarnya bukan detektif, tetapi mantan kelasi kapal yang banyak akal—akan menelusuri, menyingkapkan apa-apa yang tersembunyi dan menyelesaikan kasus itu di akhir cerita. Jika perlu ditambah bumbu, itulah kisah asmara—yang dalam cerita serial *Nick Carter* menjadi sangat erotis.

Sebagai pemula, Soeman sebenarnya menerapkan formula dari roman-roman detektif Barat yang sudah lebih dulu ada. Misalnya, serial pertualangan Sherlock Holmes gubahan Arthur Conan Doyle. Bedanya, Soeman adalah pengarang yang punya hasrat mendidik pembaca. Memang, agak aneh juga ramuan cerita detektif Soeman karena ada bumbu didaktisme (Islam) di dalamnya. Dia hendak berdakwah juga, sebagaimana Hamka di masa yang sama.

Namun, tentu saja, posisinya menjadi penting. Sebab, cerita Soeman yang satu ini memberi kita ketangkasan seorang tukang cerita, kedekatan kepada dunia keseharian dan dipegangnya cinta sebagai yang terpenting dalam hidup manusia. Berbeda dari roman-roman Balai Pustaka lainnya yang ciri-cirinya telah kusinggung serba-sedikit di awal. Ditambah, tidak ada sikap anticolonial di dalamnya.

Yang tidak kalah penting, Soeman memberi kita humor—genre yang dia sadap dari Muhammad Kasim, gurunya. Tanpa humor, apalah artinya karya sastra yang tinggi-tinggi itu.

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