Greetings from the ED

Do Indonesians have a culture of reading? Not really was the finding of experts debating the issue on the occasion of the National Book Day on May 17, which coincided with the establishment of the National Library 41 years ago.

Despite the increasing number of books published over the past decade -- 20,000 volumes in 2012 and 49,000 so far this year – reading as a habitual tradition remains low in comparison to that in other countries.

According to UNESCO, Indonesia ranks 69th out of 127 countries in reading competence. Worse, only one out of a 1,000 people in Indonesia actually enjoys reading. Children reportedly read only 27 book pages in one year. Nationwide, a study by the National Library found that just 12 provinces and 28 regencies/cities make any effort to encourage more reading.

One reason for the low interest may be the difficulty in accessing books. There are not enough libraries, let alone books, to spur a wider interest. According to findings in Pustaka Bergerak, many of the books that are available in local bookstores cover uninteresting topics, particularly those published and promoted by governments.

In schools, most curricula do not provide any incentive for students to read beyond required textbooks, which in turn fails to instil in them the joy of reading.

Ruminations
What's in a Name?

As an altar boy at Saint Anthony's in my youth, when the Roman Catholic vernacular was Latin, I had to memorize all the Latin prayers of the Mass but my first true experience in trying to communicate in a foreign language was when I was in high school and the study of a foreign language was a college prerequisite. Weston Union High, located in a rural community with a low tax base and a student body population of less than 200, had only one foreign-language teacher and that was Mrs. Edith Head who taught first- and second-year Spanish. Because the school could ill afford to have her teaching only two classes a day, she was also the supervisor of detention classes where the mostly-male minor delinquents who had been caught smoking behind the gym or setting off a cherry bomb in a toilet would snicker as they made puns about her surname. In Spanish, my name in is “Juan,” of course, but I asked to be called “Patricio,” my confirmation name, because it sounded more romantic to my ear. I can’t say that by the end of two years of Spanish I was able to carry on a conversation with any fluency but the experience did pique my interest in language learning.

In September 1970, after enrolling as a fine arts and theater major at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, I signed up for French 101. Harboring dreams of becoming an artist and living in France one day, I was certain that French would be a vital tool in my rise to fame as an international artist. In my class, due to an excess of “Johns,” I was called “Jacques”—but not for very long because a burst appendix in early November kept me out of school for two weeks, after which I was unable to catch up with the rest of my peers and was forced to quit the class. Longer, however, did last the name ascribed to me by my ballet teacher: “Hubert”—which sounds downright old-fashioned in English but transforms into an altogether different moniker when lipped by a French ballerina and dance instructor.

In 1974, after transferring to the University of Wisconsin-Madison and switching my undergraduate major to Southeast Asian Studies, I began to study Indonesian. In class, Audrey Unggerer, the teacher’s assistant, called me Yahya, the name of Saint John the Baptist in Arabic and Indonesian. The following
reading and expanding their knowledge and imagination. There seem to be few inducements to invest time and resources into reading, particularly with the easy access to alternative sources of information and entertainment on television and the internet. Perhaps that could change with an increase in the publication of e-books.

Happy to report there was quite a big turnout for our fund-raising series of virtual events titled ‘Home Beyond Borders’ which attracted numerous viewers and participants from around the world. It only goes to show the growing interest in Indonesian culture and literature and further motivating us to continue with our mission.

Yuli Ismartono
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Following completion of a course in advanced Indonesian at Malang Teachers’ College (IKIP) in August 1976, I moved to Jakarta to enroll in the Faculty of Letters at the University of Indonesia. There, beginning in January 1977, I studied “History of Modern Indonesian Literature” with Widarti Goenawan, “Comparative Indonesian Literature” with Sapardi Djoko Damono, and “Literary Theory” with Boen Oemarjati. I also enrolled in an intensive Dutch language course which met three hours each day. It was this course that proved to be the most time-consuming but, ironically, much more mentally challenging than the three courses conducted in Indonesian.


Through the “Indonesia network” at U.W.-Madison and, more specifically, the assistance of the late Mannasse Malo, whom I had come to know when he was pursuing a PhD in sociology and I was secretary at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, I found accommodations in Jakarta at the home of his wife’s aunt in Pasar Minggu, which was far from the U.I. campus in Rawamangun, East Jakarta, but had several distinct advantages, one of which was that Bapak and Ibu Pattimahu, spoke Dutch as their first language. As such, I was able to practice with them at home the language I was learning in school. To my dismay, however, they called me the diminutive “Joni.”

I have many fond memories of the semester I lived in the Pattimahu home. The cost of rent was Rp. 30,000 per month (approximately US$ 300 today) which was far more than most students could afford to pay but as I was teaching English 6-8
Mario F. Lawi (Kupang, Timor, 1991) writes poems, short stories and essays that have been published in newspapers and literary anthologies. Mario has also published a solo collection of poems, Memoria (2013) and a book of short stories, Malaikat Hujan (2012), Memoria (2013), Ekaristi (2014), Lelaki Bukan Malaikat (2015), Mendengarkan Coldplay (2016), and Keledai yang Mulia dan Puisi-Puisi Lainnya (2019). He was twice nominated for the Khatulistiwa Literary Award for his books, Ekaristi and Mendengarkan Coldplay. Ekaristi was also selected as Tempo magazine’s Book of the Year in 2014.

hours a week at Rp. 2,000 per hour (US$ 20 today) to a well-heeled Parks Department official and a Naval officer who was to be consigned to the Indonesian embassy in London, I could afford the expense. Further, the rent included both laundry and (if I were home) three full meals a day and if Ibu Pattimahu had a hobby, it was baking for never a day went by when there was not a snack waiting for me on dining table under a netted food cover when I came home from school. After a quick “Hoe gaat het me U?” to her in greeting, I’d scarf down the scrumptious cheese-flavored kastengels, pineapple-filled nastar cookies or whatever it was she had prepared that day.

Yet another advantage to the Pattimahu home was my expansive bedroom and study area on the second floor of the house, two sides of which were open-aired and looked over a grove of hairy fruit and jackfruit trees. Especially when it rained, the sound of rain on roof tiles harkened me back to the diminutive bedroom of my youth whose inside door to a tin-topped porch became a timpani in times of tempest.

Similar to my parents at the time, this Ambonese-Manadonese couple were in their mid-fifties and had numerous offspring, with seven children of their own. These things, too, reminded me of home, much as did their steady stream of conversation around the dinner table and their bent for engaging in playful argument about most anything at all. The one thing, however, that reminded me most of home was Mrs. Pattimahu herself who could have been my mother’s twin when, before each meal, she made the Sign of the Cross and bowed her head deep in prayer. And just as my mother would say, in English, "Bless us, O Lord, and these, Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.” Ibu Pattimahu would intone, in her Indies-accented Dutch, “Zegen ons, Heer, en deze spijzen, die Uw milde hand ons geeft, door Christus onze Heer. Amen.”

From religious services I attended with the Pattimahu family, I knew that Ibu Pattimahu could just as easily recite Christian prayers in Indonesian and one day I asked her why she chose to pray in Dutch. She told me, “I speak to God in the language in which I feel most comfortable—which is Dutch. I believe that there is one God even He does have as many names as there are languages in this world. Likewise, He recognizes all His children’s names no matter which one they might go by.”

So very true, I then realized. Whatever my language or race and regardless of my name, be it John, Juan, Patricio, Jacques, Hubert, Yahya, Jan, or Joni, I knew that He would know my voice and make no distinction when I called.

John McGlynn
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Bui Ihi: The Cooling of the Harvest and Other Poems

By Mario F. Lawi
Translated by John H McGlynn

Lawi’s poems are a calm and intimate read that indulge in the use of metaphoric descriptions of nature and free owing verses. This collection evokes his religious upbringing and traditions within his family and community while intertwining a sort of confessional exploration on the role and process of being a poet.


Tetapi, sejatinya, keharuan adalah modal utama dalam penulisan puisi. Di Indonesia, terutama.

National Poetry Day was commemorated on April 28, to coincide with the death of one of Indonesia’s foremost poet, Chairil Anwar. The Lontar Foundation was invited by the Depok Highfield Secondary School to be a resource person on Indonesian literature, specifically its poetry. Lontar was represented by Yuli Ismartono (Executive Director), who introduced Lontar and its activities and Zen Hae (Assistant Director of Publications), who spoke about poetry to senior students of the school.

Dan yang lebih penting lagi, keharuan itu kemudian diawetkan dalam puisi, atau menjadi tenaga pendorong utama dalam puisi. Itulah, mungkin, yang oleh Asrul Sani dahulu disebut sebagai “puisi emosi-senata”. Ia mengecam puisi emosi-sentama, tetapi juga tidak bisa keluar sepenuhnya dari terungkunya.

Namun, apa yang kusebut keharuan di situ sebenarnya semata-mata keharuan visual, hasil persepsi indra pelihatan. Mata kita menangkap pemandangan yang menarik perhatian dan batin kita kemudian mengolahnya sedemikian rupa sehingga kita merasakan jiwa kita gembira, ekstase atau yang sejenisnya. Apakah kita juga mempersepsi pemandangan itu dengan indra kita yang lain, misalnya pendengaran, perabaan, penghiduan, pengecapan?

Dalam puisi Indonesia, sekali lagi, kita akan menemukan lebih banyak pameran imajinasi visual, ketimbang imaji auditif dan imaji taktil. Konon, untuk sampai kepada kualitas puisi yang indrawi (sensuous), sudah semestinya kita juga mendayagunakan indra-indra kita yang lain itu. Dalam prosa realis pelukisan dengan mengandalkan indra pengecap dan penghidupan akan menghasilkan kualitas realisme yang lebih kaya, ketimbang hanya mengandalkan indra pelihatan atau pendengaran.


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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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**AIFIS-MSU Conference on Indonesian Studies**

Conference Dates: June 23-26, 2021

The American Institute for Indonesian Studies (AIFIS), in collaboration with Michigan State University (MSU) Asian Studies Center, will hold the inaugural Conference on Indonesian Studies. The Conference seeks to expand research dissemination, activities, as well as collaboration on Indonesian studies. The event will be held in a virtual format with a goal of building and connecting networks of scholars and academic communities from a range of disciplines—within applied sciences, social sciences, and arts and humanities based in Indonesia and the United States, as well as Asia Pacific and other global contexts.

The AIFIS-MSU Conference on Indonesian Studies features scholars with academic backgrounds and research expertise in history, culture, anthropology, sociology, language, and arts, and those advancing understandings of the ways that historical, sociocultural, economic, and political contexts shape contemporary and historical issues in Indonesia.

Keynote Speakers:
**Prof. Dr. Aquarini Priyatna (Padjajaran University)**
Title: Writing Women, Women Writing: Feminist Voice in Indonesian Literature

**Prof. Dr. Don K Emmerson (Stanford University)**
Title: Scholarship, Autonomy, and Purpose: Issues in Indonesian Studies

The virtual conference will livestream special panels on Conducting Research & Research Collaboration in Indonesia and Future Directions of Islamic Studies; special arts performances including Sumbanese Dance and a virtual wayang performance with English Translation; and a documentary screening from the Indonesian Pluralities Film Series.

For the most up-to-date information and please visit the AIFIS-MSU Conference on Indonesian Studies website.
Thank You!

Lontar extends official thank you to all official partners, presenters, hosts, outreach personnel, behind-the-scenes staff, and everyone else who participated in the past month’s “Beyond Home Borders” fundraising festival. We had set a very ambitious fundraising target: securing enough donations to keep our doors open for 12 more months AND cover publication costs of at least 12 titles. Although we didn’t reach the first part of that goal we did raise enough funds to cover outstanding costs for nine titles and enough additional funds to guarantee the publication of four more titles. We couldn’t have done this without you!

Two BHB events originally scheduled to be held in May will now be held June 23-26 in conjunction with the upcoming “Indonesian Studies Conference,” which is being co-organized by AIFIS (American Institute for Indonesian Studies) and Michigan State University. Those two events are the screening of “The Grand Offering of the Kings,” a wayang kulit film, and the premier performance of the English-language version of “Oh,” a monologue by Putu Wijaya. (For more information about this conference, go to: Asian Studies Center: AIFIS-MSU Conference on Indonesian Studies.) Because of this postponement, we have extended our fund-raising deadline to the end of June. I hope all of you will try to convince more of your friends to give to Lontar. Terima kasih sebelumnya.

Photographs from six of the events follow.

“The Nutmeg’s Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis,” with Amitav Ghosh
Hosted by Margaret Scott

“My Second Life in Tibet: Environmental Protection and Social Movements on the Plateau of Tibet,” with Arahmaiani
Hosted by Astri Wright

“Magic with Mushrooms: Homemade Pasta with Foraged and Domestic Mushrooms,” with Loretta Keller and Colleen McGlynn
Hosted by Meg Taylor
“My Night in the Planetarium: Wisdom from Living in Two Worlds,” with Innosanto Nagara
Hosted by Rachel Cooper

“An Evening of Song with Teresa James”
Hosted by Andrew Weintraub

“Balinese Delicacies,” with Jazz Pasay
Hosted by Mary Sue Milliken