Greetings from the ED

Last week, we lost yet another national literary treasure, Professor Budi Darma, an award-winning essayist, novelist and, most of all, a hugely accomplished educator. After having spent his entire adult life teaching and imparting knowledge to younger generations, Pak Budi’s recent passing is a keen reminder of the need for Indonesian educators to adapt to change as they continue their vital work. While I am sure that Pak Budi forcefully stressed the need for students to learn from books, today’s world demands that education be conducted digitally. The process of learning through the use of computers would have evolved in time, but the Covid-19 pandemic has only accelerated the transition to a point where it is almost indispensable.

Microsoft estimated that in 2019, 171 million Indonesians used the internet. That number has continued to grow, making it the fourth largest after China, India, and the United States. Indonesian netizens have quickly discovered that their handphones can expediently provide information and entertainment and serve as a valued tool for study. Sadly, however, a study by the Digital Literacy Advocates Network (Jaringan Pegiat Literasi Digital or Japelidi) across nine Indonesian cities found that schools ranked the lowest in organizing digital literacy programs, lower than NGOs, communities, government, and universities. Researchers say there is an urgent need for school administrators to prioritize digital literacy programs if learning institutions are to produce future generations of smart, digital-savvy students.

The challenge for the government and educators is to provide equal opportunity

Ruminations

Miss Lonelyhearts (#1 in a series of 3)

A favorite author of mine in college was Nathanael West whose two darkly satirical novels, Miss Lonelyhearts (1933) and The Day of the Locust (1939), attracted me to his work. In the former, the eponymous figure of Miss Lonelyhearts is a male newspaper columnist who writes an advice column for the lovelorn and lonesome, a job scorned by his male colleagues because it was — And still is? — a job usually undertaken by women. As Miss Lonelyhearts reads letters from the desperate, he himself falls into a cycle of deep depression.

In May 1976 when I left the United States to come to Indonesia, I also left behind a partner of five years and by June 1977, after a year of almost complete abstention from any kind of intimate physical or emotional contact, I felt like writing to Miss Lonelyhearts myself. By this time, I had numerous acquaintances but no special friend of my own. Thus it was when Amran Halim, head of the National Language Center, offered me a teachers’ assistant position at a two-month intensive translation workshop to be held in Puncak, the mountainous region south of Jakarta, I enthusiastically accepted his invitation, expecting not only that the experience would serve to hone my budding translation skills but that the cool mountain air might help to refresh my lonely soul and possibly lower the heat in my loins.

The translation workshop, funded by the Ford Foundation and staffed with language experts from the University of Indonesia, the University of Michigan, Leiden University, and Ecole Francais d’Extrême Orient, brought together university lecturers from around Indonesia who taught and translated from the languages of Dutch, English, and French. This chance to work with some of the country’s experts was a serendipitous one for me.

The workshop was held at Wisma Arga Mulya, a one-story guest house and classroom complex on the outskirts of Tugu, the last desa in Puncak before the steep ascent to Puncak Pass. The complex sat smack dab on the lower border

JHM in 1977 at Wisma Arga
for digital learning throughout the country, not just in urban and developed areas where a good internet network is freely available, but throughout the nation and especially in marginalized areas. The National Digital Literacy Program, launched last May and built around the four pillars of digital media culture, safety, ethics, and competence, is a good beginning.

In recognition of his great work, we dedicate this edition of our newsletter to the memory of Bapak Budi Darma. Have a good read and remember to donate to Lontar.

Yuli Ismartono
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Upcoming Events

BY THE WAY, HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT THIS AUTHOR?
14th Online Literary Talk TemuSastra

By The Way, Have You Heard About This Author?
With Yusi Avianto Parianom,
John H. McGlynn, Jan Budweg
Opening Prof. Dr. Ardi Marwan
Date: Thursday, September 16, 2021
Time: 3 pm CEST, 8 pm WIB
Registration: https://ogy.de/BTW
Further information:
kulturhaus@indonesian-embassy.de

of the massive 2,500 hectare Gunung Mas tea plantation which forms a verdant bib on the neck of Mount Pangrango whose peak rises to 3,000 meters above sea level.

The average temperature in in the Puncak area ranges between 12 and 22°C (53-71°F). This helps to explain why in the days before air conditioning was common in Jakarta offices (and prior to the mushroom-like growth in the late 1980s of four- and five-star hotels whose event managers specialized in entering into mutually beneficial relationships with government officials to relieve the latter of their annual budgetary allocations for meetings, conferences, and seminars) it was de rigueur for government ministries and major multinational corporations to maintain such facilities in Puncak, a convenient two hour drive from the capital.

In Puncak, unlike in Jakarta, it was possible to listen attentively to a lecture without having to constantly wipe your brow with a damp handkerchief and to write the answers to test questions without having sweat run down your arm to smear your answers. Further, when a complex wasn't being used by its high-ministry owner, it could be rented out to lesser endowed state agencies or companies to pad the owner's off-budget account.

During my first three months in Indonesia I had lived in Malang, another mountain town, but then had moved to sweltering sea-level Jakarta where, even after nine months, I still perspired heavily whenever I ventured out and into the city’s unrelenting heat. Thus, I was greatly looking forward to two months in a much cooler Tugu.

When checking into Wisma Arga Mulya in the second week of June I was not surprised to find that there was no hot water in the complex. Though expat friends who worked at the U.S. embassy and the Ford Foundation lived in well-appointed houses with water heaters in bathrooms and kitchens, the homes of the regular folk where I boarded offered no such luxury. That said, in Jakarta hot water wasn’t much needed anyway because when it’s 32°C in the shade, there is nothing more delightful than dousing your body with mini-bucket sized dippers of cold water from a water-filled bak mandi in an all-tiled bathroom.

The days at the translation workshop were long with in-class sessions in the morning, one-on-one and group sessions until mid-afternoon, and then home-work for students and grading for teachers and their assistants in the evening.

With most workshop participants being practicing Muslims, the day for them began in darkness, at 4:30 AM, the time for the first prayer of the new day. Lazy kafir that I am, I awoke later (though still in darkness), usually around 5:30 AM for a mandatory bath before breakfast at 6:00 AM. To not bathe in the morning would have been socially indefensible, even if one had spent the night in a sweater but still shivering and cursing a too-thin blanket.
Budi Darma (25 April 1937–21 August 2021) is considered to have been one of Indonesia's most influential writers. A life-long educator, he first studied at the Department of English Literature at the University of Gadjah Mada. In 1970, he received a scholarship from the East-West Center to study humanities at the University of Hawaii, before graduating with an MA from Indiana University Bloomington in 1976. In 1980, he earned his Ph.D for his dissertation on “Character and Moral Judgment in Jane Austen's Novels” from the same university. His return to Indonesia was followed by a succession of notable appointments: between the years 1984-1987 served as Dean of the English Department at the State University of Surabaya (formerly IKIP Surabaya); he was a member of the Surabaya Arts Council; and Rector of the Surabaya Teachers' Training College. Budi continued lecturing at the English Department of the State University of Surabaya until his retirement, at the age of 70, in 2007. In 1983 Budi wrote the novel, Olenka, which won several notable literary awards. Although Olenka is his best known work, Budi is also the author of several other novels and collections of short stories and essays as well.Budi was a recipient of the Satya Lencana cultural award, one of Indonesia’s highest civilian honors, bestowed on him in 2003. He received the Achmad Bakrie Award for Literature in 2005 and in 2014 the Southeast Asia Literary Council (Majlis Sastera Asia Tenggara/MASTERA) named him recipient of its top literary award.

“Glynnsping” is the farm in south-central Wisconsin where I was raised, so named by my McGlynn ancestor because of the fresh-water spring on its acreage. In Wisconsin the average temperature of spring water is 6°C (42°F), which is really quite cold, and as a child my siblings and I would compete with one another to see how long we could stand barefoot in the chilly stream. After less than a minute you’d begin to lose feeling in your toes. By the time two minutes had passed your lower legs would be numb and when you removed them from the stream they’d tingle and ache. Glynnsping spurted from a hillside less than 300 meters above sea level. At Wisma Arga Mulya, however, whose water came from mountain springs several thousand meters above sea level, the water flowing through the bath house from the bak mandi in one cubicle to the next was far, far, far colder.

Prior to the workshop I had daydreamed that I might meet someone there with whom I could bond emotionally so as to soothe my lonely heart but with most of the “students” being much older and married, I soon realized that any thought of emotional nourishment would once more again have to be put on hold. At the same time, in the guest-house bath cubicle, even as I tried not to shiver and shriek as I doused water over myself, I also knew that I would not have to worry about combustion in my loins.

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**Surat dari Pejompongan**

**RAFILUS**

Kawan Moer,

Tokoh fiksi yang akan kuceritakan berikut ini bukanlah kaum tertindas atau ia yang mencoba melawan ketidakadilan hidup. Ia bukanlah pahlawan yang layak dibanggakan. Apalagi diberi penghormatan yang lebih dari yang semestinya ia dapatkan. Sebaliknya, ia adalah tokoh yang kerap dikecam sebagai penjelmaan iblis, atau robot, tetapi nasibnya sia betul. Mati ditabrak kereta.


Dalam fiksi Indonesia modern, mungkin hanya Budi Darma salah satu atau satu-satunya pengarang yang berhasil menciptakan tokoh yang penuh keunikan dengan tindakan-tindakan yang tidak terduga seperti itu. Bahkan, melawan kewarasan umum—dan kita dibuatnya terhibur karenanya. Melalui Rafilus dan tokoh-tokoh sejenis itu kita mendapatkan tokoh yang unik bukan hanya karena rupa fisiknya, tetapi juga perwatakannya secara keseluruhannya.

Akan tetapi, watak yang unik ini sebenarnya bukanlah kekuatan yang akan mengendalikan atau mengubah cerita secara keseluruhannya. Tokoh ini unik tetapi ia tidak bisa melampaui keunikan alias absurditas nasibnya di kemudian hari. Tokoh yang semula digadang-gadang sebagai penjelmaat iblis atau robot ini mengalami nasibnya sebagai antihero. Ia kalah oleh nasib yang lebih berkuasa atas dirinya.

Bahkan pengarang kemudian menjadikan nasib Rafilus itu sebagai semacam permainan yang tanpa belas kasihan. Ia yang telah mati karena tertabrak kereta, untuk kedua kalinya, menjelang permakaman, kembali
Hanna Rambe (Jakarta, November 23, 1940) began her career as a journalist and English teacher. She worked for Indonesia Raya daily newspaper until 1974, contributed regularly to Intisari magazine (1972–1977) and reported for Mutiara magazine (1977–1992). She has written children’s stories, stories for teenagers, novels, short stories and biographies. Her novels include Mirah dari Banda (1983) and Pertarungan (2002). Mirah dari Banda was translated into English and published by Lontar in 2010. She has also written several biographies, including Lelaki di Waimital (1981) and Terhempas Prahara ke Pasifik (1982).

By Hanna Rambe
Translated by Toni Pollard
Rp. 150,000


Rekaman acara dapat diakses di link berikut: https://youtu.be/jOGqUmnt9FI

Lontar mendukung pertunjukan secara online drama “Pentjoeri Hati” karya Kwee Tek Hoay yang dipерsembahkan oleh Kelompok Pojok, 27-29 Agustus.

Pengarang seperti ingin menghukum atau menamatkan kekuatan negatif tokoh-tokohnya. Dengan kata lain, kekuatan itu dihabisi agar hidup manusia lain, yang dianggap “normal”, bisa berjalan tanpa gangguan. Tokoh-tokoh unik yang memikat pembaca dimatikan oleh pengarang dengan berbagai cara.

Pada akhirnya, kita menemukan satu moral kepengarangan yang tidak main-main. Segala yang jatang atau berpotensi menjadi jatang dan merusak tatanan hidup secara keseluruhan, mesti diakhiri, agar dunia “normal” berubah menjadi yang lebih leluasa dan manusia-manusia yang mungkin semula tertindas oleh kehadiran si antagonis bisa berkembang lebih baik lagi.

Begitulah, dalam novel ini kita menemukan dua hal yang berlawanan. Secara penokohan Rafilus sangat unik, tetapi secara moral cerita ia cenderung berpikah hanya kepada yang baik, yang “normal”, yang normatif secara keseluruhan. Yang unik-unik biarlah memancing keheranan pembaca, tetapi toh pada akhirnya semua itu akan berakhir dan kita mendapatkan dunia cerita yang “damai”, “normal”, tanpa “orang aneh”. Zen Hae, zenhae@lontar.org

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