LONTAR

Lontar Newsletter

Email: contact@lontar.org

September 2021

Greetings from the ED

There was an air of excitement as thousands of elementary and secondary school students in Indonesia began attending classes for the first time after 18 months of learning from home. At the same time, there was trepidation as well among those parents and educators who felt the decision to open school doors was premature and risky, what with the threat of a third wave of the pandemic perilously looming. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology had wanted to start the back-to-school process as early as August, but under public pressure the start date was postponed, until both the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) gave the green light for limited or hybrid face-to-face learning. This means that until there is more certainty in regard to the threat of another Covid-19 wave, students will go to school a few days a week and continue their lessons from home.

Students will find in-school learning a totally different experience from the pre-pandemic days. To allay parents' fears, schools are now required to adhere to the government's strict health protocol. Students need to be masked, to wash hands frequently and keep their distance from each other. Contrary to some parents' fears, however, the government is not insisting that students be vaccinated although the country's five million teachers

Ruminations

Huff and Puff (#2 in a series of 3)

It's July of 1977 and I am at the Wisma Arga Mulya training complex in Tugu, West Java, where I am working as a teachers' assistant in an intensive translation workshop. The guest house *(wisma)* nestles on the crest of a hillock 100 meters from the winding main road that leads up the slope of Mount Pangrango and through Gunung Mas tea plantation to Puncak Pass and beyond. As the guest house is located on the western side of the mountain, early mornings are a magical time when just before 6 AM sunlight from the East begins to brighten the mountain's western flank, first illuminating Mount Salak to the southwest and then Mount Gede directly across the vast mountain valley. That's one good reason for rising early: to see this inspiring sight. Another is to sit at the top of the lane leading to the wisma with a steaming cup of coffee and watch as the ribbon-like village of Tugu come to life.

Many of the adult females who live in Tugu are employed as pickers at the tea plantation and every morning, except on Sundays, open-back trucks arrive at a pickup point on the main road below to collect the pickers and transport them to the fields. The women dress similarly, in long-sleeve shirts and loose work pants, and all carry large light-cotton bags which, when filled with leaves, will more than equal their own body size. With treaded rubber boots on their feet and cone-shaped grass hats on their heads, after they are dropped off at various junctures along the road, they set off towards "their" section of the plantation where they finished picking leaves the previous day. There, they will begin to pick again, one leaf after another, until noontime when the bellowing horn at the factory gives them permission to eat and rest. At 1 PM they will begin their tedious work again. So pampered am I, I find it difficult to imagine myself replicating their work, knowing for certain that I would soon be huffing and puffing if I were the one going from bush to bush on the 45° slope.

The sun rises quickly here and in no time at all the entire western slope of Pangrango is visible. Clumps of poinsettias, brilliant red in color, grow at regular points up and down the surrounding hills. I guess they serve as markers for sections of the plantation, visual guides for the pickers to remember where they next have to pick. The visual effect is

are required to be vaccinated before going back to teaching.

Still on the subject of education, the newly-established Indonesian International Islamic University (UIII) in Depok, West Java began its first academic year early last week. This institution of higher education, whose main agenda is to promote Indonesia's version of a moderate Islam, has 98 students from 59 countries, all of them on scholarships.

One hopes that the re-opening of schools in Indonesia is a sign of better days ahead and a resumption of other activities, such as Lontar's various projects.

Yuli Ismartono (yismartono@lontar.org)

PS: Apologies for the delay of this newsletter. Our Macbook was forced to go into self isolation at a service center due to a malignancy.

that of an immense patchwork quilt of varicolored green cloth stitched together at each corner of the quilt's patches with knots of red thread.

As I take my empty cup of coffee to the cafeteria before making my way to the classroom, I think again of the tea pickers and chastise myself for sometimes viewing my work as a translator to be a lugubrious chore. The fact is, I love translation work but what I do find dismal is having to type and retype draft after draft of a translation on my portable Olivetti Underwood.

JHM in class at the Translation Workshop

In 1975, as a second-year student of Indonesian, I began to try my hand at translating literary texts. There were two reasons for this. The first, as was just mentioned, is the pleasure it gives me, but the second and overarching reason was the scarcity of English-language translations of Indonesian literature at that time.

In the Spring semester of 1974, when I enrolled as a Southeast Asian Studies major at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, I went to the university library to borrow books of Indonesian literature in translation. To my amazement I found in the library's collection of more than six million titles no more than a handful of books in English on the subjects of Indonesian language, literature, and culture. As I recall, there was only one Indonesian novel in translation: *Twilight in Jakarta* by Mochtar Lubis, translated by Claire Holt.

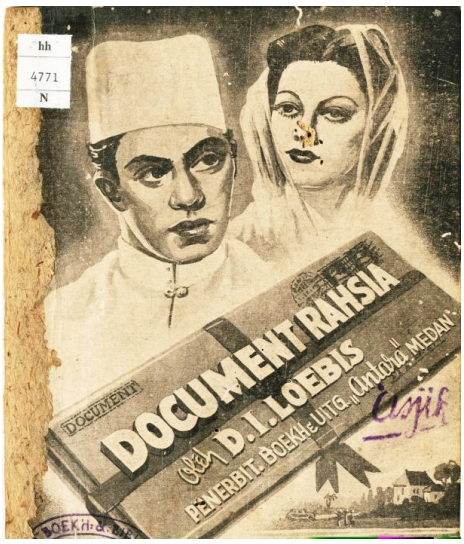
In 1975, after having proved my ability to type 80 words per minute, I was hired as secretary for the Center for Southeast Asian Studies. The position was only half-time but because of the Center's facilities—an office of my own with central heating and air conditioning—I usually spent more than 40 hours a week in the office. Best of all, I had the use of a new IBM Selectric II typewriter with interchangeable typeballs which made it possible to use an array of fonts in a single document. Instead of a horizontal moving carriage that you had to manually return to the left side of the page after each line, the Selectric had a platen that turned to advance the paper but did not move horizontally. No more tired right arm! All the more wondrous is that the carriage held both a typing ribbon cartridge and two small spools for a correction ribbon. No more white-out correction fluid either! I could now produce a clean document in a record amount of

Forthcoming

One of Lontar's forthcoming publications is *The Secret Document*, a pre-Revolution detective novel by D.I. Loebis. This will be the first "Medan novel" ever published in English.

The Secret Document

a detective novel by D.I. Loebis



Little has been written about the "Medan novel," so termed because most were published in Medan, North Sumatra. The Medan novel is important for several reasons:

- The Medan novel represents an antithesis to the domination exercised by the Batavia-based colonial government;
- The Medan novel helped to foster such anti-hegemonic views as anti-imperialism and anti- colonialism while at the same time fostering feelings of nationalism.
- The Medan novel served to increase the activity of independent local publishers which, in turn, helped to spread literacy to a larger segment of the local populace.
- Medan novel publishers actively sought to bring together writers from throughout the archipelago, an act that contributed to the growth of nationalism.

Translated by Mary Zurbuchen, *The Secret Document* is a fascinating romp through past times.

time. I decided then and there to compile and hopefully publish an anthology of Indonesian short stories in English translation.

Translation Workshop Participants (l-r): 1. Hasan Alwi 2. ……? (Man with glasses) 3. JHM 4. ……? (Man in Safari suit) 5. Eddy Masinambow? 6. ……? (Short man) 7. ……? (Man with a peci).

Attention readers: *I am unable to identify many of the people in the photo. If anyone can help fill in the blanks, please send a message to me.*

At the translation workshop, when lessons end at 3 PM, I go to my room where on a doily-decked table on the outside terrace will be a metal-capped glass of hot tea and a small napkin-covered plate whose contents is determined by the day: fried bananas on Monday, eggs rolls on Tuesday, rissoles on Wednesday, and so on. I scarf the food and cringe as I take my first sip of the highly sweetened tea but drink it anyway. On most days I then go for a walk and, sometimes, a run in the plantation but at this height above sea level and with the incline of the hill so steep, I soon find myself winded.

At around 3:30, the same trucks that collected the tea-pickers in the morning trudge back up the hills again to pick up the workers and take their bags of leaves to the Gunung Mas tea factory to be weighed. The trucks then return the workers to the pickup point from where they will plod back to their homes for several hours more work preparing the evening meal for their families and keeping an eye on their children as they do their homework even though the lessons are indecipherable to them.

From where I stand on the hillside I scan the darkening valley below. My eyes then move up the hill to Pangrango, looming over all. From a Sundanese linguist in the translation workshop I learned that the name of the mountain is thought to have originated from two Old Sundanese words, "pang" and "rango," which together means, "That which huffs and puffs." While that adage would refer to the past volcanic activity of the mountain, I think of my pampered self and then of the weary women in the homes below.

John McGlynn (john_mcglynn@lontar.org)

Author of the Month

Kuntowijoyo

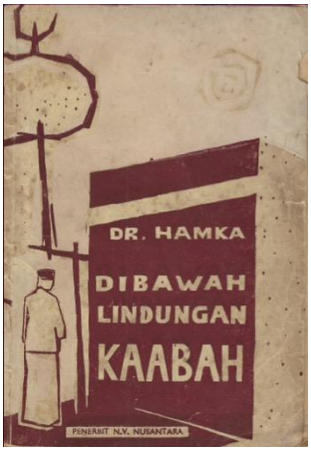
(Yogyakarta, September 18, 1943–Yogyakarta, February 22, 2005) wrote novels, short stories, poetry, plays, research articles and essays on culture and history. After graduating in history from Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, he became a lecturer in history there and also continued his studies at the University of Connecticut (MA in American history) and Columbia University (PhD in history) in the United States. His writings first appeared in Sastra and Horison magaz ines. His novels are *Khotbah di Atas Bukit* (1976), Pasar (1994), *Impian Amerika* (1998) and *Mantra Penjinak Ular* (2001); his short story collections are *Hampir Sebuah Subversi* (1999), *Dilarang Mencintai Bunga-Bunga* (1999) and *Waspirin & Satinah* (2003); his poetry collections are *Suluk Awang Uwung* (1975), *Isyarat* (1976) and *Makrifat Daun, Daun Makrifat* (1995); and his plays are *Rumput-Rumput Danau Bento* (1969) and *Topeng Kayu* (1973). Anthologies that include his short stories are *Pistol Perdamaian* (1976), *Laki-laki yang Kawin dengan Peri* (1995) and *Anjing-Anjing Menyerbu Kuburan* (1997). He received several awards for art and literature, including second prize in a script-writing contest sponsored by the Jakarta Arts Council for *Topeng Kayu*, the Award for Art from the Regional Government of the Special Province of Yogyakarta (1986) the Award for Literature from the Center for Language Advocacy and Development and the SEA Write Award for *Dilarang Mencintai Bunga-Bunga* (1999).

Surat dari Pejompongan

KAKBAH

Di Festival Sastra dan Gagasan Salihara (LIFEs) yang tengah berlangsung, orang-orang membicarakan kembali Hamka dan Ali Audah. Tapi, untuk kali ini, aku akan bercerita tentang Hamka. Bagiku, Hamka adalah pengarang yang membawa watak populer yang pas untuk zamannya. Ia adalah salah seorang pengarang Medan yang terpenting—sehimpunan pengarang yang dikenal dengan buah karya berupa "Roman Medan" yang termasyhur itu, tetapi tidak terakomodasi oleh Balai Pustaka di Batavia.

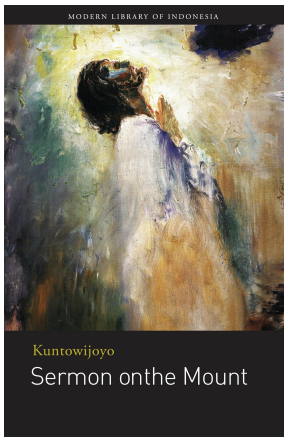
Ya, pengarang-pengarang Medan ini memainkan berperan penting dalam menghidupkan Medan dengan kesusastraan—di samping kemajuan ekonomi-perdagangan yang ditopang oleh perkebunan tembakau di Sumatra Utara—kala itu namanya masih Sumatra Timur. Karya mereka umumnya novela yang diterbitkan secara berkala. Mereka mengarang untuk para pembaca yang setia menanti karya mereka. Jika Yoesoef Sou'yb—rekan segenerasi Hamka—menghasilkan "cerita detektif", Hamka menghasilkan cerita-cerita melodrama.



Kenapa kusebut "cerita melodrama". Cerita-cerita Hamka, sebutlah *Di Bawah Lindungan Kaabah* (1938), adalah cerita yang sangat berhasil memainkan tegangan antara "yang baik" dan "yang jahat". Ia juga memasang tokoh yatim-piatu sebagai tokoh kunci dalam cerita melodrama, yaitu Hamid, yang adalah pencinta sejati Zainab. Namun, yang jahat dalam hal ini bukan hanya lembaga adat, tetapi juga kemiskinan keluarga Hamid.Maka berlakulah tradisi merantau sebagai mitos untuk mengubah nasib dan peruntungan di dunia. Hamid pun membebaskan diri dari pusaran duka lara itu menuju Tanah Suci. Di akhir kisah, matilah ia di bawah lindungan kakbah.

Dalam kasus ini, Hamka telah memegang kunci-kunci terpenting cerita melodrama: pertentangan kaum kaya dan kaum miskin, kasih tak sampai, perantauan—berkelana dalam fiksi sila—sebagai obat sakit hati. Hamka paham benar memainkan emosi pembaca. Dalam pengantarnya untuk kumpulan cerita *Di Dalam Lembah Kehidupan*, misalnya, ia menyatakan ". . .adala kumpulan airmata, kesedihan dan rintihan yang diderita oleh segolongan manusia di atas dunia ini." Ia menyuguhkan kita kisah-kisah seolah diambil langsung dari kehidupan

Book of the Month



By Kuntowijoyo
Translated by Joan Suyenaga

Sermon on the Mount is the story of one man's spiritual fulfillment. The story is told through the eyes of Barman, an older man whose son moves him to a luxurious vacation home in the mountains where he is expected to live out the rest of his days in peace. A young and attractive women is assigned to care for him. Though all of his physical needs have been accounted for, Barman is in need of spiritual sustenance and thus begins his quest.

nyata pembacanya.

Yang juga harus kita beri nilai lebih adalah bahasa Indonesia Hamka. Bahasa Indonesia Hamka jauh lebih plastis, lebih lentur, ketimbang bahasa Indonesia para pengarang Minangkabau yang bernaung di bawah lindungan Balai Pustaka. Ia menggunakan bahasa Indonesia yang lebih berorientasi kepada pembaca yang beragam-ragam, lebih populer, kurang mengandung warna lokal Minangkabau, terutama dalam langgam kalimat dan ungkapan tradisional. Struktur bahasa Indonesinya ringkas dan mengena.

Di Bawah Lindungan Kaabah—yang versi Inggrisnya akan diterbitkan Lontar dengan judul *'Neath the Shelter of the Kaaba* berdasarkan terjemahan Ian Rowland—adalah novela yang mengaduk bentuk-bentuk novel epistolarik, catatan autobiografis, cerita perjalanan, dan semacam petikan berita dari kawasan Hindia Belanda—bahkan kesadaran metafiksi di dalamnya. Dalam bentuknya yang ringkas cerita itu dengan sangat baik memainkan pelbagai anasir pembentuknya dan bentuk itu akhirnya diterima dengan baik oleh pembaca. Seolah-olah cerita ini adalah kisah nyata yang dituturkan oleh seorang pencerita anonim kepada sahabatnya yang entah di mana.

Dengan gaya penceritaan yang memikat dan bentuknya yang ringkas, novela ini pada akhirnya adalah juga cerita tentang sastra pinggiran yang berhasil menjadi sastra arus utama. Dari khazanah "Roman Medan" yang semula dipandang sebelah mata, ia berhasil memikat hati redaktur Balai Pustaka. Belum lagi karena ia mengandung unsur didaktisme yang sama-samar saja di akhir cerita—sesuatu yang hampir tidak dikuasai oleh pengarang didaktis di kemudian hari.

Kapan-kapan, aku ingin juga bercerita tentang *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck*, roman Hamka yang terbit semasa dengan *Di Bawah Lindungan Kaabah.* Roman yang juga sangat mengharu-biru pembaca—tetapi juga memancing reaksi segolongan kaum dan menuduhnya sebagai "jiplakan". Tapi, nantilah, jika waktuku cukup luang.

Kawan Moer, kudengar musim gugur sudah tiba di kotamu. Ya, itu suasana musim yang mengharukan, bukan?

(**Zen Hae**, zenhae@salihara.org)

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