Greetings from the ED

There is good news and bad news on the digital literacy front in Indonesia. Based on a survey of 10,000 respondents across the country held by the Communication and Information Ministry and the Kata Data Insight Center research company, the accelerated adoption of technology enforced by the two-year Covid-19 pandemic is producing positive results. Lamentably, the increase gained from all the effort of the past two years has been minimal: from 3.46 in 2020 to 3.49 in 2021. In fact, with recent index ratings placing Indonesia in the “medium” digital literacy category, we still have a long way to go before the goal of achieving anything remotely close to universal digital literacy. Moreover, of the four pillars set by the National Digital Learning Program—digital media culture, safety, ethics, and competence—safety seems to be the least understood, exposing internet users to security risks such as personal data leaks and scams.

The encouraging news is that the government conducted digital literacy training for 12.5 million people last year and plans to train another 5.5 million this year. This bodes well for students who may be forced to go back to learning from home again as a “third wave” of Covid-19 threatens to shut classrooms once more. Remote learning will become even more vital as Indonesia tries to raise its pre-pandemic literacy rate and improve the low performance of Indonesian students, as measured by the Program for

Ruminations

Somnambulism

As defined by the Journal of Sleep Disorders & Therapy, somnambulism or “sleepwalking” is “a behavior disorder that originates during deep sleep and results in walking or performing other complex behaviors while asleep.” A key symptom of somnambulism is that sleepwalkers virtually never have a recollection of the episode when they wake up.

If, when leaving Cazenovia, Wisconsin, you head southwest on Highway 58, just over a mile you’ll come to County Trunk I, a gently meandering road which leads through a small valley of just another mile in length before gradually ascending the slope of Bunker Hill. But don’t go as far as the hill... After passing the Stittleburg farm on the right, when you come to the next curve in the road, slow down and pull off to the left and you’ll be at McGlynn Drive. The drive is a narrow gravel road that ends, a few hundred yards beyond, at the home where I was raised.

“A few hundred yards” might not seem very distant in the abstract but such was not the case when I was a boy, neither in the soggy Spring when the drive became a wallow nor in the depths of Winter when waist-high snow drifts necessitated the use of tire chains and hours of shoveling snow just to be able to maneuver the car that few hundred yards. Sometimes, when WRCO weather news predicted a snowstorm during the night, my father, the local mailman who couldn’t do his job without a car, would park the vehicle at the drive’s entrance. Even with another snow storm ahead, he was pretty sure that by the time he had to go to work the next morning the Westford Township snowplow in the garage at Bunker Hill would have at least cleared County Trunk I.

A 1976 photo of Glynnspring in the winter, taken from County Trunk I.
International Student Assessment (PISA), which places Indonesia among the seven worst performing countries in 2018. Experts maintain that besides targeting the students themselves, the government should also focus on providing teachers with the relevant digital literacy training if they are expected to be effective educators, particularly in remote and inaccessible areas around the country.

We at the Lontar Foundation wish all our friends and supporters a roaring success in this Year of the Tiger.

Yuli Ismartono (yismartono@lontar.org)

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Cuci Gudang!

Lontar is cleaning its warehouse (cuci gudang) and offering super large discounts of up to 90% on yellowed or slightly damaged copies of books we cannot sell through our retail outlets.

For further information, send a request for the list of titles on offer to	
tuti_zairati@lontar.org.

As an aside, it was because of these yearly phenomena that on one hotter-than-a-hundred summer day in the mid-1960s when a sweat-drenched road crew from the Richland County roads service department was applying a new layer of gravel and tar on County Trunk I, my father sauntered to main road and confided to the foreman that there was a shade tree and a crate of chilled beer at the top of the drive with his crew’s name on it if, by chance, they might kindly consider spreading gravel on our driveway as well—which they did, leaving 24 empty bottles behind. Thereafter, our private drive was redesignated as a public road which meant the township was responsible for its grading in Spring and snow-clearage in Winter.

As a child, I was a somnambulist—In fact, I still am—and, occasionally, I had my mother pulling out her hair from thinking of what I might try to do next in my sleep. Outside my bedroom and just above the baseboard in the hallway is a clothes chute with a 1.5 square foot opening where we would throw our used towels and dirty clothing which would then fall to the cement floor of the basement twenty feet below. One night my mother woke me as I was attempting to throw my clothes down the chute—with them still on me! Another time, I slumbered down the stairs to the kitchen in middle of the night, turned on the gas stove, and began to pop popcorn—but with no fire in the burner or popcorn in the pan, just gas filling the air with combustible fumes.

Within the immediate family, my most talked-about parasomnia episode took place in the darkness of a very cold February morning when I was eight or nine years old and the driveway was blanketed with three feet of snow. Apparently that morning I got out of bed, dressed myself in my school clothes, put on my wool coat, mittens, rubber boots, stocking hat, and gloves, then left the house and trudged through the snow bank down to County Trunk I where, it seems, I expected the yellow school bus to pick me up shortly thereafter.

My mother, having been awakened by the racket my actions caused and wondering who might be moving about so early, first inspected the three kids’ rooms and when finding empty my half of the bed I shared with my brother, Mark, then proceeded to look for me on the ground
In January, Lontar is pleased to have participated in the 31st edition of the Doha International Book Fair which ran from the 13th to the 22nd of the month. DIBF is one of the oldest and largest international book fairs in the Middle East and enjoys a good reputation due to the high demand from Arab, Gulf and other countries participating in it. The Fair has gained international acclaim following its success in attracting the largest and most important publishing houses of the world.

The Indonesian stand at DIBF was arranged and staffed by the Indonesian Embassy in Doha which, in Lontar's view, represents growing recognition on the part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the importance of cultural diplomacy.

Because of the ongoing pandemic, Indonesian publishers were unable to send representatives to the fair. Nonetheless, it is very important that “Indonesia” and Indonesian books were featured there because Indonesian publishers, Lontar included, are seeing a rise in interest from Middle Eastern countries in Indonesian titles. This is evidenced by the ever larger number of translations from the Indonesian into Arabic. Following DIBF the books from Lontar and other Indonesian publishers were donated to a mini-library at the Indonesian embassy which caters to the interests of Indonesian residents and friends of Indonesia in Qatar.

…sleepwalking in the realms of madness and death.

...a cold blast of air coming from the cellar way. She discovered the outside door to be ajar. Hastily, she put on her own winter clothing and traced my trail through the snow bank and down to the main road...

I have no recollection of the incident—not until Mother told me about it after carrying me still asleep back to the house—and do not know how long I had been huddled by the mailbox waiting for the bus to come before my mother found me. I am, however, very much aware of how quickly double-digit subzero temperatures can cause frostbite or worse and recognize that I could have caused true damage to myself by my actions.

Perhaps the most famous sleepwalking scene in history appears in Act V of William Shakespeare's play, The Tragedy of Macbeth. As anyone who has studied English classic literature knows, the play dramatizes the damaging physical and psychological effects of political ambition on those who seek power for its own sake. In this play Macbeth receives a prophecy from a trio of witches that he will one day become King of Scotland. Consumed by ambition and spurred to action by his wife, he murders the king and takes the Scottish throne but is then haunted by guilt and paranoia. Forced to commit more and more murders to protect himself, he soon becomes a tyrannical ruler. The bloodbath and consequent civil war swiftly take Macbeth and Lady Macbeth into the realms of madness and death.

It is then, in Act V, that Lady Macbeth becomes wracked with guilt from the crimes she and her husband have committed. At night, in the king's palace, a doctor and a gentlewoman are discussing Lady Macbeth's strange habit of sleepwalking when Lady Macbeth enters in a trance with a candle in her hand. Bemoaning the murders that she and her husband have perpetrated she tries to wash off imaginary bloodstains from her hands, all the while speaking of the terrible things she knows she pressed her husband to do.

I am often perplexed by the actions of others, be they friends, neighbors or, most often, government leaders. I have frequently regretted my own actions but recognize that the acts we commit, whether we are awake or asleep when we commit them, are ours to be blamed or take credit for.

John McGlynn (john_mcglynn@lontar.org)
Dengan ini aku hendak membicarakan fiksi-fiksi karya Iwan Simatupang.

Iwan muncul dalam situasi kesusatraan Indonesia yang tanpa panteon angkatan sastra dan sudah telanjur muncul polarisasi dalam pemikiran dan penciptaan seni. Karyanya yang awal terasa sekali ingin menampilkan warna baru. Terutama karena ia merasa tidak cukup dengan realisme yang vulgar. Ia hendak menjangkau manusia yang bukan lagi berdarah-daging, tetapi manusia dengan gejolak pikirannya yang meluber ke mana-mana, yang—maaf-maaf—didesakkan pengarangnya dari rak-rak bukunya sendiri.

Mungkin ada juga benarnya jika para penelaah sastra menyebut fiksi-fiksi Iwan Simatupang dipengaruhi oleh gerakan sastra yang muncul di Prancis, “Nouveau Roman” (Novel Baru). Jika pada masa sebelumnya Rijono Pratikto maju dengan genre “cerita serem”, fiksi yang memasang hantu dan dunia gaib, maka Iwan maju dengan fiksi yang tokohtokohnya berpikir dan bertindak secara merdeka, kelewat berani dan melawan arus, dan akhirnya, menjadi “orang nyentrik”—atau, musuh masyarakat.

Namun, yang terjadi pada Iwan sebenarnya, bukan hanya tokohtokoh yang kelihatan berpikir, berdiskusi dengan tokohtokoh lain, tetapi juga bagaimana pengarang mendesakkan sebanyak mungkin bacaan (filsafat)-nya ke dalam cerita. Tokoh-tokoh cerita itu tidak cukup hanya berpikir dan bertindak secara rasional dengan segala risikonya—jika kau ingin aku kasih satu istilah filsafat, itulah “eksisstensialisme”—tapi tokohtokoh menjadi corong pikiran pengarangnya yang kelewat vulgar.

Tentu saja, dengan mudah kita menemukan bayang-bayang Meursault dalam Orang Asing karya Albert Camus pada tokoho pelukis yang jadi tuang kapur dalam Ziarah-nya Iwan. Yang membedakan adalah tokohtokoh bertindak sebisa mungkin tanpa embel-embel pemikirannya filsafat, tetapi tindakannya itulah yang mewujudkan sikap...
Iwan Simatupang (1928–1970) is widely recognized as one of the most original and important of all Indonesian authors.

Kooong (which, in Indonesian, is the sound a pigeon makes, much like “coo” in English) was the last of Iwan Simatupang’s four novels. Originally written for a competition for young adult literature, it is a simple, almost childlike, work, which nevertheless has its own unique profundity. Much of the book is taken up by Pak Sastro’s comic search for inner freedom and personal authenticity, symbolized by his mute pet pigeon. The bird has no call. The background to Pak Sastro’s search creates a vivid picture of rural Javanese society and the communal values it upholds at its best.

Like all of Simatupang’s works, Kooong contains his crazy sense of humor, his fascination with the ridiculousness of death, and his enormous respect for the so-called lunatic who lives outside the borders of conventional society. The novel stands on its own two pigeon feet. It is both funny and serious. But you cannot fully understand Iwan Simatupang’s other novels, or his distinctive outlook on life and death, until you have read this book. It is a book for teenagers and adults alike.

filosofis si tokoh. Sementara Iwan masih harus mendesakkan sejumlah jargon filsafat dan penyifatan yang mengacu kepada kompleks pemikirannya selama ini.


Si tokoh kita telah terlempar dari desa transmigran yang pernah ia tinggali dan ia bakar, pindah ke kota, menyusuri jalan raya, dan seterusnya.

Itu pula yang kita temukan pada si tokoh kita dalam Merahnya Merah. Tidak ada posisi yang sifatnya menetap dan semuanya akan berakhir di jalanan. Sikap anti-kemapanan membuat tokoh itu terbuang terus-menerus, dari kepasturan, dari kompi pasukan, dari algojo, dari rumah sakit jiwa, dari kehidupan di gubuk-gubuk pelacur, dan kelak menemui ajahnya dalam sebuah duel.


Selalu ada keterlemparan yang dialami si tokoh dari kehidupan yang diidealkan, tetapi dengan itulah ia menemukan kegelandangan sebagai jalan dan pandangan hidupnya. Gelandangan yang selama ini dipandang sebagai masalah sosial perkotaan, telah diberi harga yang baru, diberi status intelektualisit. Selalu ada sinar pemikiran orang sekolahan dalam setiap pendapat si gelandangan—bahkan, pada pikiran mantan pasien rumah sakit jiwa. (Zen Hae, zenhae@lontar.org)