November is the month when Indonesians celebrate their national heroes — the fallen as well as the unsung. The 10\textsuperscript{th} of the month recalls the epic Battle of Surabaya in 1945, during which thousands of men and women died in the assault that launched the four-year war of independence against the Dutch colonial government. In subsequent years, the meaning of the term “hero” was expanded to honor latter-day figures who made significant contributions to the nation’s development. But it was not until 1994, when the government declared November 25 as National Teachers Day, that the country’s three million school teachers were officially recognized for their dedication in the war against ignorance.

Unlike the victorious war of independence, the struggle to provide quality education remains a continuing crusade. With more than 50 million students and 300,000 schools, Indonesia has one of the world’s largest education systems. Yet, a shortage of one million teachers and poor infrastructure have left Indonesia ranked 54\textsuperscript{th} out of 100 selected countries in UNESCO’s 2021 Education for All Global Monitoring Report—a list topped by the U.S., Japan, European countries, and Singapore. Among ASEAN nations, Indonesia was below Thailand, Malaysia, and Brunei, and on equal terms with the Philippines and above Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Laos.

Why is the quality of education so low in Indonesia? Studies have pointed to a
number of factors, but primary among them are outmoded teaching curricula, poorly-trained and underpaid teachers, poorly-maintained school buildings, and a woeful lack of funding. Education Minister Nadiem Makarim appears to be aware of this condition and is pushing for reform in the education system through the ministry's Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) program. At a recent National Teachers Day event in Jakarta, he told the audience, “Schooling should be fun for the students as well as the teachers, in order to create innovation and creativity to make a difference.” In the end, however, it all boils down to more funding and greater political will on the part of decision makers.

Speaking of decisions, as the end of the year grows nigh, I hope all readers will consider giving to Lontar. Terima kasih sebelumnya!

Yuli Ismartono (vismartono@lontar.org)

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**The Smiling Semar from America, Movie Screening**

always and forever a kind and thoughtful person, even in the years prior to their official engagement. Her letters contain nary a word of rebuke for slights either intentionally or unintentionally committed by John, only support for his endeavors.

After Anna Marie’s marriage to John and until my move to Indonesia in 1976 when she began to write regularly to me, I have scant written proof of my mother’s kindly and supportive nature but I do have from my youth an abundance of memories of acts of kindness on her part and the loving way she nurtured me and my siblings, always showing her affection for us through her actions.

The 1986 film, *Ibunda* (Mother), directed by Teguh Karya, tells the story of a woman by the name of Ibu Rakhim, a middle-aged widow played by Tuti Indra Malaon, who sells jamu to earn a living but is only able to make ends meet with financial assistance from her wealthy son-in-law, Gatot, the husband of her oldest child, Farida.

Set in contemporary Jakarta, *Ibunda* deals with two issues: racism and adultery. Ibu Rakhim has four children and her youngest child, Fitri, is in love with Luke, a dark-skinned Papuan man who is, in the eyes of Farida and Gatot, a man of royal Javanese descent, a completely unacceptable choice. “He’s not our kind. We are not a family of mongrels, after all!” he angrily remarks at one point. Meanwhile, Ibu Rakhim’s younger son, Fikar, a rising-film star, has left his wife and baby boy to live with the female producer of a film in which he will play the leading role. (The older son, Zulkifly, who lives in Surabaya, is a minor figure and does not appear until the end of the film.)

That Teguh Karya chose Tuti Indra Malaon to play Ibu Rakhim is not surprising for she resembled Ibu Rakhim in many ways. Not only was she an upper-class Javanese, she was also refined yet humble and educated but not arrogant. She viewed people as equals, regardless of skin color or social class. Also, and not insignificantly, Tuti was a recent widow whose husband, the chief justice of the Bogor city court, was killed when struck by a bus in October 1985, not long before production of *Ibunda* began. She did not have to imagine grief for the loss of her husband. My own surprise as I watched her performance was that she was able to control her emotions.

I first met Tuti in 1984 at Teguh Karya’s home, which was just a bemo-ride away from my own home and where I was a frequent visitor, spending hours of time with the delightful cast of characters who seemed to daily converge on the back veranda of his colonial era house. Possibly because Tuti was, like me, the sixth child in a family of ten, we seemed to share a similar way of interacting with others and the two of us got along marvelously from the beginning. She treated me like a younger brother, asking me questions about me and my feelings which would never arise in conversations among mere acquaintances.

Though fluent in conversational Indonesian by this time, when
On December 4 Lontar will present, at Salihara Arts Community, a free and public viewing of a recently-completed 30-minute documentary film titled Semar Mesem dari Amerika (The Smiling Semar from America). Directed by Eva Tobing, the film focuses on the late Gregory Churchill and his dual life as a legal practitioner and collector of puppets and masks.

Produced with assistance from ABNR law firm (where Churchill worked for 26 years), and other “friends of Greg” the film was made to highlight Greg’s fantastic collections of 8,500 puppets and 550 masks and will be used as a tool both to promote the importance of cultural preservation and to show to curators at prospective homes for the collections.

In addition to the film-screening, the event will include a panel discussion with high-profile experts on cultural preservation and a condensed wayang golek performance by Ki Warsad, a well-known puppeteer and carver from Cirebon.

Registration begins at 18:00 with a light meal for all guests. For more information, go to [https://bit.ly/4p7VLl](https://bit.ly/4p7VLl)

Tuti’s husband Indra died — his death being the first of someone known to me in Indonesia — I did not know how to verbally express my sympathy. Of course I knew such platitudes as “Segala sesuatu terjadi karena kehendak Allah dan kita semua harus bisa menerimaanya dengan lapang dada” (Everything happens because of Allah’s will and we must be able to accept it gratefully) but I knew very well I would be unable to adequately express in words the sadness I felt for her.

Whenever misfortune befell a family in our community, my mother would immediately don her apron and cook up a pot of soup or bake a pumpkin pie to take to them. Recalling this, I roasted two chickens to take with me when I went to Tuti’s home to convey my condolences to her and her three daughters. Sustenance for the body if not for the soul.

When greeting Tuti in the doorway of her home, with Indra’s shrouded body lying on a bier in the living room behind her, I uttered a customary platitude to which she replied in kind — Maybe, “Terima kasih, John, atas doa dan dukungan yang telah kalian berikan. Maafkan suami saya atas segala kesalahan yang tak sengaja dia lakukan” (Thank you, John, for your prayers and support. Forgive my husband for any faults he may have unintentionally committed.) But then, when seeing the covered container I had placed on the ground before my sembah of greeting, she asked what it was. Lifting the lid slightly, fragrant steam from the baked chicken escaped. Her eyes glistened as she then hugged me tightly and I knew there and then she understood the words I could not voice.

The final scene in Ibunda is a masterpiece, a several-minutes-long pan shot of Ibu Rakhim’s family gathering in the grounds outside her home. Wordless, but telling us that through actions and not just words resolution of conflict is possible. Then, as that final image fades out, a line of dialogue from the script in which Fikar is to star appears on the screen: “Ibu, buku yang habis kaubaca, kini mulai kubaca, baru halaman pertama.” (Mother, the book you have finished reading, I have only begun to read and now just turned the first page.)

John H. McGlynn  [john_mcglynn@lontar.org]
Since its founding 35 years ago, Lontar has relied on the kindness of others for its continued operation yet has, over the years, produced a body of work which includes translations of literary work by more than 650 Indonesian authors.

This is no small fete and all donors deserve a big round of thanks — but we need your help to keep on going! The negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on philanthropy has been far-reaching and our coffers are depleted. Only your generosity can help Lontar continue to shine a spotlight on the richness of Indonesian culture and enhance Indonesia's position on the global cultural stage.

Lontar has in the pipeline an exciting list of future publications but whether they will be published depends on your assistance.

We will not describe here each of the more than a dozen future titles but we will mention that the list includes a number of “firsts.” She Wanted to be a Beauty Queen will be the first-ever anthology of Javanese short stories in English translation. Suwarso and Warsiyah will be the first-ever Javanese novel in English translation.

**The cover of the first Indonesian edition of Manusia Bebas (Free People).**

We make this point for a reason... In Lontar’s decades-long mission to introduce Indonesia to the world through literary

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**Surat dari Pejompongan**

**WAYANG**

Kawan Moer,


Karena aku tidak ingin jadi mangsa makhluk menjijikan dan kepingin hidup lebih lama—setidaknya hingga saat surat ini kutulis—aku batal menonton wayang ruwatan itu. Lagian, ayahku yang adalah guru mengajiku melarang aku menonton wayang. Aku tidak tahu persis alasan pelarangannya, tetapi, kadang, ayahku tidak terlalu suka pentas wayang yang menjadi kegemaran kakekku yang adalah penganut kebatinan.

Tetapi, beberapa tahun kemudian, ketika remaja, temanku yang diruwat itu mati karena sakit.


Dari mengenal wayang yang sangat terbatas itu, aku kemudian paham kenapa ada istilah “semata wayang”. Karena, wayang kulit, terutama, hanya punya satu mata, yang jika dilihat dari sisi kiri dan kanan adalah mata yang itu-itu juga. “Anak semata wayang” artinya anak satu-satunya.

Jika ada anak yang suka mengadu domba kawan-kawannya atau menjadi biang kerok, ibuku selalu bilang “Jangan jadi Dorna!” Tentu saja, itu karena dalam wayang Drona atau Durna adalah guru anak-anak.
translations, Lontar has endeavored not only to publish literary work of historical importance but has also attempted to ensure that our list of titles is representative of Indonesia’s ethnic diversity, in which regard, On the Night of the World Cup Final, a future title, will be the first novel by a Timorese author in English translation.

We have also been consistent in making sure women feature high on our list. Free People by Suwarsih Djojopoespito, first published in Dutch in 1940 is one of the most important works about the Indonesian revolution to ever have been published yet both the book and the author have long been overlooked. The same is true of the 1949 novel, Widyawati, by Arti Purbani.

Help us to make sure their voices will be heard by giving to Lontar today.

Zen Hae, (zenhae@lontar.org)

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Pandawa sekaligus Kurawa. Ia juga tokoh bermuka dua, bisa mengadu domba, dan oportunistis. Itulah sifat-sifat buruk manusia yang mesti dihindari. Dan orang Betawi semacam ibuku—yang kemudian naik haji dan tekun mengaji—mengambil pelajaran moral itu dari dunia perwayangan.

Sejatinya, wayang adalah ensiklopedia budaya yang sangat lengkap dan ke sanalah kita menengok jika kita mencari model-model karakter manusia. Itulah kenapa para penggubah sastra, teater, film atau seni lainnya tidak habis-habisnya menggali dari keadalaman khazanah Mahabharata atau Ramayana. Seorang penulis yang menggubah perseteruan abadi dua keluarga, tidak akan bisa tanpa membaca sejarah keluarga Pandawa dan Kurawa. Tentang kesetiaan dan pengorbanan istri yang mencapai taraf absurd, lakon Shinta Obong sudah lebih dari cukup.


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