



# Lontar Newsletter

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February, 2024

## Greetings from the ED

Now that the dust has settled over the recent general elections, the big question is when the new administration takes over, what will become of current programs and policies of the outgoing government? Will they be continued or replaced by new ones? Of particular interest will be how vital education programs will fare under the Prabowo Subianto administration. If his campaign promise to continue President Jokowi's programs are to be believed, then we will assume innovative programs like Freedom to Learn (*Merdeka Belajar*) will stay its course. And will the government further commit an increased allocation for education? More funds and resources are urgently needed if the current low-standard of literacy and numeracy among school children around the country is to be raised. Only 4 out of the 34 provincial schools have average grade 12 exam score above the minimum passing score of 55 in 2019.

Good teachers are key to effective student learning, yet the nation is presently short of one million instructors if it aims to provide education equitably. To be more specific, Indonesia is very short on able and qualified teachers. There are more than 400 teacher training schools, producing more than enough candidate teachers required by the public service system, but many of them do not seem to meet the needs of modern schooling. This is acknowledged by the World Bank, which states that the focus in recruiting new teachers should be on quality not on quantity, hence the need for more good teacher training institutions. Sadly, the teaching profession does not attract many

## Ruminations

### The Little Red Table

The original configuration of my family's rectangular-shaped home, built in 1924 with four entrances, one on each side of the house, was still unchanged in the 1950s when I was a boy. The least-used entrance was that to the North Porch on the northern side of the house, a screened porch which provided extra play-and sleeping-space in warmer months but was inutile during times of inclement weather (which, in Wisconsin, means a good six months of the year). The next least-used entrance was the "front door" of the house, on its western side, facing the curved gravel driveway that lead from County Trunk I to the parking area above the house on its south-eastern side. This entrance, too, was rarely used, except in summers when Mother would flee the heat of the kitchen to sit on the stairs of the small front porch to shuck peas, snip beans, or husk the corn we were to have for dinner. Then there was the basement door, on the southern side of the house, which had a small inner landing with two steps on its far side leading upward and into the kitchen and a downward stairway to its left which lead to the basement below where, in winter months, snow-covered boots were deposited at the foot of the stairs. The most-used entrance was the back-porch door, or "back doors" rather, at the rear of the house. The first back door, a screen door, opened into a screened porch which served in summer as a dining area and in winter as an extra freezer where Mother stored stacks of shoe boxes and lard pails filled with fudge, date-filled cookies, seafood candy, Penuche chews, and a host of other sweetened delights. With the driveway ending closest to this entrance, this is the one that was most commonly used. Besides, one of the two doorways into the house from the back porch opened onto a "mud room" with a sink for washing dirty hands and two walls with rows of coat hooks on boards where everyone, family members and guests alike, hung coats, hats, and scarves. (The other door led directly into the kitchen.)

But what does all this malarkey about doors have to do with "the little red table," the title of this rumination? Very little in fact, except to better acquaint the reader with the layout of my family home and to set the stage for where the little red table was located. Doorways and the hallways they open onto are generally meant to be free of obstacles, to provide unfettered access to the rooms beyond. Generally, this makes

candidates. First, because of the low salaries, particularly if teachers do not immediately get civil service status. Only 40 percent of the teacher work force have been hired by the government. The rest consist mostly of part-time teachers, recruited by private foundations or district offices. Unlike government-hired teachers, they get no supplementary allowances or benefits, such as health insurance and housing allowance. Furthermore, many teachers refuse to be posted in remote areas unless they receive additional pay. This often explains the unequal distribution of teachers around the country. To be fair, the government has made efforts improve the quality of teaching, but extensive problems persist.

Then there is the issue of funding. In 2023, the government allocated a Rp 612.2 trillion (about US\$40 billion) budget for education, an increase of about Rp 69,4 trillion over the previous year. However, this amount is shared by two other ministries: the religious affairs ministry and that of home affairs, whose programs contain educational components, often leaving the education ministry with insufficient funds to cover its own programs and activities. Our hope is that the newly-elected government will make education a priority in its agenda.

Lontar will be coming out with new books this year, so please continue to follow our activities via website <https://lontar.org/> or our newsletter. We greatly appreciate your support and contributions to achieve our objective in promoting Indonesian literature to the world.

Yuli Ismartono ([yismartono@lontar.org](mailto:yismartono@lontar.org))



Two photos taken before 1950 showing the entrances to the family home at Glynnspring, the left showing the front and basement doors, the right showing the back-porch door and the North Porch.

them otherwise unusable. Further, with six children at Glynnspring, beginning with my birth in 1952 (and the addition of four more children in the years ahead) there was almost no all-weather free space in the house except one corner in the foyer off the putative “front-door.” This is where the little red table sat. This is also where I learned many lessons in life.

Though none of my older siblings were able to confirm for certain, provenance of the little red table is attributed to Great Uncle Tom McCarthy, a master carpenter. What they could authenticate, however, is that Santa Claus delivered the table to Glynnspring in December 1950. What is also certain, and is testified by its durability to this day, the table was made for lasting use and was not just a plaything. Additionally, the table’s dimensions were suitable for comfortable use by most three-to seven-year old children when learning to draw, read, and write.

Many of my first and fond memories involve the written and spoken word. I think of afternoons when, after the noonday meal, Mother would invite my sister Jane and I to the master bedroom where she would lie in the middle of the bed with the two of us snuggled at her sides as she opened a book, propped it on her chest, and read to us until we (and she as well) nodded our heads in sleep. Naptime dreams were about Scuffy the Tugboat, the Big Bad Wolf, and Hans Brinker. Many an evening I would sit on the floor of the living room beside the overstuffed arm chair in the corner, putting together Tinker Toys even as I stared in awe at my father to see him flip through page after page of pictureless tomes as the ash that dangled from the tip of the cigarette in the corner of his lips threatened to fall on the floor. And summer days at Grandma McGlynn’s home nestled on her lap with her ample bosom as my pillow while listening to her relate tales about Ali Baba and other characters from *Tales from 1001 Nights*. Oh, how I wished the rag rug beneath her rocker could be turned into a flying carpet that would take me with Aladdin on his adventures! But most clear in my mind to this day are free hours on weekends seated at the little red table in the corner of the front foyer as one older sister or another played schoolmarm, this one teaching me the letters of the alphabet, another helping me practice to write, and yet another, at a later time, having me read sections of books they had been

## FEATURED AUTHOR



Soni Farid Maulana (Source: Wikipedia Indonesia)

Our featured author this month is the late Sundanese poet and journalist, Soni Farid Maulana, who was born February 19, 1962 in Tasikmalaya, West Java.

A graduate of ASTI (The Academy of Indonesian Arts and Dance), Soni began working as a journalist at *Pikiran Rakyat* in 1990. In 1996, Soni helped to establish a cultural section of the paper under the name *Khazanah* and later became its senior editor. The segment became a weekly focus for new works, particularly poetry and short stories, as well as notes on cultural matters.

Outside his work as a cultural commentator, Soni had a well-deserved reputation as a poet. Between 1989 and 2019 he published 22 collections of poems but he also wrote short stories, a novel, a two-volume book on the development of poetry in modern Indonesia, as well as a host of other literary works.

While initially Soni's poetry was lyrical, he also moved to encompass social themes. Such poems were often written in the immediate aftermath of events, articulating what many ordinary people were perhaps grappling with, at that time. He was also a poet for whom "family" was an integral thread in his poetic expression.

He died at the much too early age of 60 in November 2022.

*Thanks to Ian Campbell for much of the information found herein.*

gifted or had borrowed from Elm Grove school, the one room school house across the field from Glynnspring where the first four of my sisters went to school.

Maureen, the oldest, related the tale of *Little Women* whose characters bespoke the value of independence, responsibility, ambition, and friendship; Eileen read to me *Heidi*, which served to open my eyes worlds outside my own; Kathleen told me the story of *The Boxcar Children*, four orphans who through teamwork and empathy, created a home for themselves in an abandoned boxcar. Mary, meanwhile, gushed over the adventures of Trixie Belden, a girl of courage, kindness, and optimism. Jane, the fifth sister and closest to me in age was more a fellow student than a teacher but even she had lessons to teach me, the first one being the need to respect other people's possessions and their privacy.

Very much older now, and maybe just a tad bit wiser now, I am thankful for the many teachers I had when I was young—parents, grandparents, teachers, and siblings—and the many books and oral tales from which I learned. At the same time, recognizing my continued need to learn, I long for nothing more than a little red table in the corner of my room where, as Virginia Woolf might suggest, I would be able to think, write, and create without interruption and interference. Shouldn't every household a little red table of ones own?



A photo taken on sister Jane's birthday in February 1957. She is preening in front of the little red table where I am seated and crying because she would not let me draw in the book she'd been given for her birthday.

John McGlynn ([john\\_mcglynn@lontar.org](mailto:john_mcglynn@lontar.org))

## Gamelan is Dead

My country where the sun rises and sets,  
where lizards and buffalo bathe in the rice  
paddies'mud,  
stained by my blood, riven by a vengeful  
hatchet.  
There you've constructed industrial machinery  
whose rumbling  
grinds like a pestle in a mortar, depriving me,  
in my own granary,  
of my workday: the source of my livelihood.  
My country  
where the sun rises and sets  
to paint tropical rain forests being burned to  
extinction  
by big city savagery that gnaws at the gizzard  
of our very  
existence.

Ominously sway the dairy cows  
in rhythm with the whip crack of civilization,  
in rhythm with the working hours,  
dragging capitalism's wagon, until factories  
decimate cemeteries. Listen—  
a city yhat ruthlessly abducts maidens in the  
dead of night  
damages the moon so it swoonds in the avenue  
  
Now you no longer recognize the odor of the  
air you  
breathe. No longer hear the cries of the poor  
bursting from a mass history, sunburnt,  
rain-struck, ground down by darkness,  
residing in metropolitan alienation and  
loneliness.  
Dark and deep. Oh, my country

*Soni Farid Maulana*

*Translated by Deborah Cole*

## Surat dari Pejompongan

### PANTUN

Kawan Moer,

Kali ini aku membaca kembali kumpulan pantun Melayu yang bukunya pertama kali diterbitkan Balai Pustaka pada 1920. Buku ini menghimpun tidak kurang dari 1.575 bait pantun Melayu. Dari yang berkait-kait hingga yang lepas-lepas. Mulai dari pantun anak-anak yang cenderung lugu, pantun muda-mudi yang berkasih-kasihan dan patah hati, hingga pantun orang tua yang cenderung menasihati, apalagi dalam perkara iman dan kesehatan.

Yang menarik dari buku ini adalah telaah Ch. A. van Ophuijsen tentang pantun Melayu dan kecenderungan orang menggunakan bahasa berkiasan dalam pergaulan sehari-hari di Nusantara, bukan hanya di tanah Melayu, tetapi juga di Minangkabau, Mandailing dan Bugis. Namanya memang berbeda-benda, ada pantun, ada ende-ende, ada umpama, tetapi fungsinya selalu sama: untuk mengungkapkan perasaan seseorang melalui perlambang.

Dalam ende-ende orang Mandailing, misalnya, seorang pemuda membawakan seorang gadis sejumlah daun yang jika disusun secara berurutan nama daun-daun itu akan menimbulkan asosiasi bunyi kepada apa yang hendak dikatakan si pemuda. Misalnya, daun sitarak, hadungdung, sitata, sitanggis, podom-podom dan pahu. Si gadis yang dikirim daun ini—dengan catatan: dia cukup arif bijaksana—akan memahami semua itu sebagai perlambang dari perasaan si pemuda. Dalam bahasa Indonesia maknanya kurang-lebih begini: “Sejak kita bercerai, tiadalah dapat saya tertidur jikalau belum lagi mengeluarkan airmata.”

Dalam pantun, apa yang terjadi dengan dua baris pertama juga begitu. Dua baris pertama itu biasa disebut sampiran, sebuah perlambang, untuk maksud pemantun yang akan dikatakan pada dua baris terakhir. Sampiran bisa jadi tidak masuk akal, tetapi asosiasi bunyinya penting untuk pernyataan maksud pemantun di dua baris berikutnya. Misalnya, “Jika bukan karena bulan, mana mungkin meninggi hari.” Sampiran ini berpasangan dengan “Jika bukan karena tuan, tiada mungkin saya kemari.”

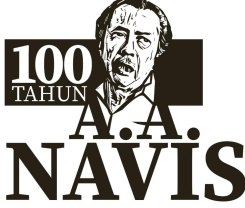
Jadi, dalam pantun yang sangat penting adalah asosiasi bunyi, antara sampiran dan isi.

Soal inilah yang kemudian diolah kembali dalam puisi modern berbahasa Indonesia. Puisi Amir Hamzah atau Chairil Anwar atau Sitor Situmorang, bahkan Goenawan Mohamad dan Nirwan Dewanto, memainkan kembali asosiasi bunyi dalam pantun pada puisi modern gubahan mereka. Itulah kenapa puisi-puisi dalam kompleks kekaryaannya penyair-penyair ini sangat melodius, berima dan enak didengar. Bahkan, jika kelak semua itu dinyanyikan.





## PERINGATAN



BADAN PENGEMBANGAN DAN PEMBINAAN BAHASA  
KEMENDIKBUDRISTEK  
2024

A.A. Navis bernama lengkap Haji Ali Akbar Navis lahir 17 November 1924 di Kampung Jawa, Padang Panjang, Sumatera Barat, merupakan seorang budayawan sekaligus sastrawan terkemuka. Beragam karya-karyanya berkisar seputar masalah manusia dan kemanusiaan seperti penderitaan, kebahagiaan, kegetiran serta harapan.

A.A. Navis sudah menulis 65 karya sastra dalam berbagai bentuk. Seperti “Robohnya Surau Kami” yang berhasil dinobatkan sebagai cerpen terbaik dalam majalah *Kisah* pada 1955. Cerpen “Saraswati, Si Gadis dalam Sunyi” yang juga ditetapkan sebagai cerpen remaja terbaik oleh Unesco/Ikapi pada 1988.

Untuk memperingati 100 tahun AA Navis sebagai Perayaan Internasional di UNESCO pada 2024, Pusat Penguatan dan Pemberdayaan Bahasa, Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa Kemendikbudristek, akan melaksanakan rangkaian kegiatan sastra dan literasi, baik di tingkat maupun internasional pada sepanjang tahun 2024. Beberapa kegiatan yang telah dirancang akan digelar pada November bertempat di kantor pusat UNESCO, Paris dan Perpustakaan, Jakarta. Film *On the Record* produksi Lontar tokoh sastra A.A. Navis berjudul *Satiris dan Suara Kritis dari Daerah*, akan diputar pada acara tersebut.

Untuk informasi lebih lanjut dan terbaru mengenai acara, kunjungi sosial media [badanbahasakemdikbud](https://badanbahasakemdikbud) dan website <https://badanbahasa.kemdikbud.go.id/>

Namun, asosiasi bunyi bukanlah satu-satunya sumbangan pantun kepada puisi modern. Yang tidak kalah penting adalah situasi dalam sampiran yang jika ditilik secara tajam akan menampilkan pemandangan surrealistik. Sesuatu yang nyaris tidak berhubungan, tidak masuk akal, tapi lantaran jukstaposisi, berhimpun dalam satu kendali irama pengucapan. Contoh yang paling gampang dariku adalah sebuah pantun anak-anak di Betawi. Begini: “Teng keroweng ketimun bonteng, kuda lari di atas genteng, cap cip cup bondol ijo, kaki kuncup berak melinjo.”

Apa makna ungkapan “teng keroweng ketimun bonteng”, kecuali “ketimun bonteng” yang berarti ketimun yang sudah tua, biji-bijinya cocok untuk dijadikan bibit. Bagaimana pula kita membayangkan situasi “kuda lari di atas genteng”? Tentu tidak masuk akal toh? Langsung ambruk atap rumah yang dilanda kuda itu. Dan seterusnya.

Singkat kata, di situ bermain bukan hanya asosiasi bunyi, tetapi juga surrealisme.

Tentu saja, puisi modern menyerap anasir pembangunnya dari mana saja. Kuatren di belahan bumi sana juga punya watak seperti pantun. Tetapi asosiasi bunyi dan surrealisme adalah sumbangan penting pantun untuk puisi modern berbahasa Indonesia. Itulah kenapa para penyair yang kusebut sebagai contoh tadi menjadi cemerlang karena mereka menguasai pantun dan memainkannya kembali dalam bentuknya yang modern.

Jadi, jika ada penyair Indonesia hari ini yang hendak mencapai sesuai yang baru—ah, apa mereka punya hasrat itu?—bagus juga jika mereka membaca kembali secara saksama pantun dalam perbagai khazanah budaya di Nusantara. Tentu, bukan hanya pantun, apa pun yang mungkin, untuk membuat puisi berbahasa Indonesia menjadi lebih berkembang-meninggi lagi. Pencarian memang harus diarahkan bukan hanya ke warisan masa silam, tetapi ke dunia luar yang lebih luas.

Hanya mereka yang tiada lelah mencari, akan menemukan sesuatu yang bernilai—meski sesuatu itu tersembunyi di planet jauh yang belum diberi nama oleh manusia.

Ah, apakah aku terdengar sedang menggurui? Taklah. Toh semua ini berguna buatku juga. Buatmu? Setidaknya. **Zen Hae** ([zenhae@lontar.org](mailto:zenhae@lontar.org))

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