



# Lontar Newsletter

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March, 2024

## Greetings from the ED

It's official. The much-vaunted Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) curriculum will be the national education syllabus for the 2024/2025 school year. Nadiem Makarim, Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology made the announcement recently, ending speculation on whether the program would get off the ground, given its myriad attendant challenges. But following the latest results of the National Assessment survey on schools which have adopted the curriculum, the decision was made to go ahead and launch it this year. According to the Minister, the program has impacted positively on students attending those schools: their literacy as well as numeracy scores improved significantly. This achievement occurred even in schools where the students usually lagged behind those with normal scores. To date, about 300,000 schools or 80 percent nationwide, including 6,000 schools in remote areas are following the new curriculum. The ministry is allowing the 20% of schools who have yet to adopt the program a transition period of two to three years, depending on the remoteness of the regions in which they are located.

Nevertheless, it will be an uphill battle. Experts maintain the new curriculum is a total game-changer that will not only affect the students, teachers, and parents but also their communities. In fact, if this independent learning initiative is to achieve the objective of improving the quality of education in preparation for the future, it will need the participation and collaboration of all concerned. Students need to have their mindsets changed; teachers need to be trained

## Ruminations

### The Thresher

My father never owned a thresher, that utilitarian piece of farm equipment used to separate grain seed from stalks and husks. The cost wouldn't have been warranted, not when most of Glynnspring's 80 acres of arable land were devoted to the cultivation of alfalfa and corn, primary fodder for the cattle, swine, and fowl he raised. To thresh the oats he grew, it was more cost-efficient to rent a machine for a nominal fee from a neighbor who did own one.

I remember a day in my youth walking through the small oat field on the hillside behind the barn, stubble under my feet, after the harvested sheaves had been stooked to keep the grain heads off the ground as they dried. Reaching the top of the slope and looking down at the field, the conical shocks dotting the field looked to me like teepees, homes of the Indian families who had previously occupied the land. (In late Spring, when the fields were plowed, we'd sometimes find white flint arrowheads sticking from the mounds of overturned earth beside the furrows.)

I remember, too, going back to the same field a couple weeks later, after the sheaves had withered and the shocks had dried. They'd been gathered, loaded onto an open-back wagon and pulled by tractor to a spot near the granary where my father, with the help of a hired hand, was now feeding them into the trough of a threshing machine. My mouth was agape as the automated machine, with its internal shakers and fanners, miraculously crushed the stalks and separated the seeds from the chaff, with the seeds falling through a grate into a gunny sack attached to the base of the legged thresher and the dust-like chaff being spewn from the mouth of a giraffe-necked metal tube to form what looked like a large ecru-colored ant hill several yards distant.

The first six weeks of this year I was in the Midwestern United States—in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Missouri—during which period of time two events stirred in my mind thoughts about the vagaries of existence: the peaks and valleys; the capriciousness of relationships; the uncertainty surrounding the ultimate finality. The first event was the second marriage of my youngest brother, Luke. All of his nine siblings had managed to make their way to Kansas City for his exchange of vows with Hazzan Tahl Ben-Yehuda and at a photo session prior to the ceremony, before smiling



Source: dribbble.com

to focus on students; parents must be actively involved in school programs and the community; and the local government, in particular, must ensure its support.

It is now generally accepted that a new system of learning is needed to provide children and youth with the skills necessary to succeed in a rapidly changing world. This must begin right from the start, such as using local languages during the early primary grades before commencing to study in Indonesian, the national language, Studies show students who are allowed to follow their lessons in their mother tongues tend to do better. Projects are already underway in some provinces to support literacy programs using local languages as transition languages.

Launched alongside the Merdeka Belajar curriculum is the interesting concept of *Merdeka Berbudaya* (Freedom of Cultural Expression), aimed at instilling students with a sense of national pride alongside that of their own local traditions. All of the above require close monitoring and supervision, particularly schools in remote areas. This will probably be the government's biggest challenge going forward.

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



The McGlynn siblings (from left to right): Mark, Jane, Christine, Maureen, Luke, Kathleen, Colleen, Eileen, Mary, JHM

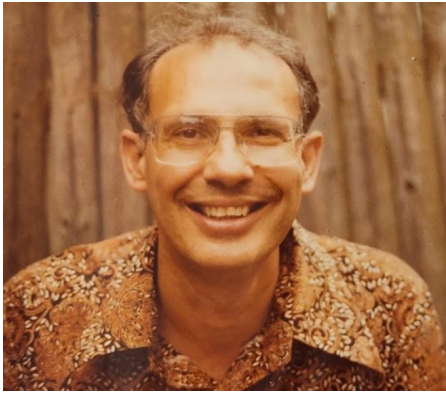
at the camera, I looked around at the ten McGlynn siblings and silently marvelled at the sight. With ages ranging from 63 to 78 and a combined life span of 642 years, how incredibly fortunate we were to be there, in that one place, together.

Later that evening, after the festivities were over and the wedding couple's invitees had returned to homes and hotel rooms, when looking at the photos of the ten siblings Luke's daughter Molly had taken on my cell phone, I began to reflect on my own non-familial friends and the many thousands of people I had come to know since my arrival in Indonesia as a young adult. "Knowing" a large number of people is not unique. Most everyone "knows" hundreds of people but what possibly makes my circle of friends somewhat unique is the wide range of personalities and professions found therein.

During my early years in Indonesia, from 1976 to 1987, the country was a messy greenhouse in which all sorts of plants grew together and often cross pollinated. And I, as a rupiah-poor but not completely unsightly academic-turned-translator, was forever amazed when finding myself dressed in an off-the-rack long-sleeve batik shirt and clinking glasses at festive functions in fancy surroundings where the melange of guests might include successful businesspeople in smart business attire, high-level government officials in more humble looking safari suits, multi-lingual diplomats in saris and turbans, a smattering of film and television stars, and other more shady celebrities in darkened eyewear. In my bed at Luke's home that night, when looking at the photos of his wedding, I began to wonder who among those people were still in my life today.

As the years passed, and especially after 1987, the year I co-founded Lontar, because of my work with the Foundation I often served as the contact person for scores of foreign private and governmental organizations that were operating programs in or organizations that were operating programs in or intending to undertake work in Indonesia. But of all those people I worked with, how still dine at my dinner table?

## IN MEMORIAM



*Alan Steves in the 1970s*

ALAN M. STEVENS (1935-2024) died Thursday, March 14 of cardiac arrest in New York City. He graduated from the Bronx High School of Science, where he won a citywide French competition. After graduating from Columbia University in 1956, he went on to a PhD in linguistics at Yale, specializing in phonology and Indonesian languages. His 1960 field work in Madurese started a long career of research, writing, and travel. In 1967, he co-founded the linguistics department at Queens College, CUNY; he taught there and at the CUNY Graduate Center for more than 35 years. With A. Edward Schmidgall-Tellings, he co-authored *A Comprehensive Indonesian-English Dictionary*, which is today the standard in its field. After retiring from academia in 2005, he devoted himself to Indonesian and Malay translating, interpreting, and consulting until his death.

Alan's dictionary includes entries that are technical, non-standard, slang, *bahasa gaul*, and even those that are *lorok*. He always maintained that "you can never have too many dictionaries," as sometimes a secondary definition would be included in one book, but not others. Or, the way a definition was worded in one book might be subtly different from others and spark a revelation in the researcher's mind.

Every English-language translator of Indonesian is indebted to Alan.

*Thanks to Roggie Cale for preparing this obituary.*

I have organized international speaking tours and been a mover behind international seminars and exhibitions. As a literary program coordinator, over the years I have organized hundreds of events in Europe, Asia, and North America. And as a publisher, I have worked with a thousand or more authors, translators, editors, and other related personnel. But again, how many from among them are still present in my life today?

These questions about the transitoriness of relationships came to the front of my mind several weeks later when, during the last week of January, I called at the home of my first cousin, Jim McGlynn, and his wife Lisa. Jim had been diagnosed with prostate cancer several years before. Since that time, the cancer had metastasized and Jim had undergone countless rounds of treatments and therapy. Now, it seemed, he was in the final stage of his "adventure," as he often referred to it. And it was. Less than a week later, Lisa announced to family members that Jim had passed. This was the second event I referred to above.

When entering the funeral home on the day of Jim's internment, I was astounded by the large number of people who had come to pay their last respects to Jim. Just 66 years of age at the time of his death, Jim's survivors and loved ones were many.

In Western art, Death is commonly personified as a skeletal figure wielding a scythe with which to collect the souls of the dying. But in our lives, I now see, it's not only the dead or dying whose loss we must mourn. It is the living, too, all those who for whatever reasons are no longer in our lives today, the friends of yesteryears with whom we shared meals and laughter with but who, after a too-brief shared span of time, were simply no longer there. So it is that Death may be a reaper but Life itself is a thresher which ever so resolutely reduces our field of shocks to a precious pile of seeds we must strive to nurture and defend.



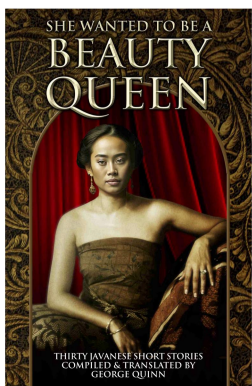
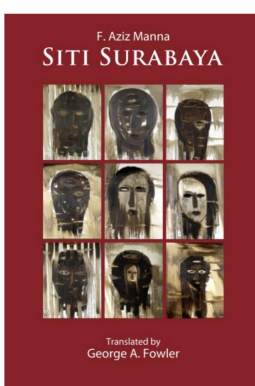
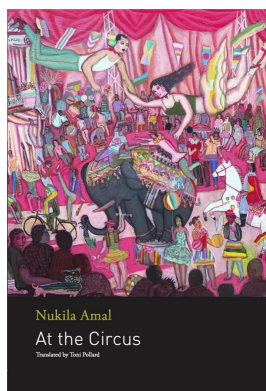
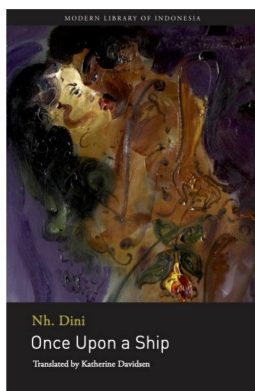
With "old" friends (and the years we met): JHM, Vic Bottini (1983), Jed Frost (1978), Richard Howells (1982), Keith Hargreaves (1986)

*Dedicated to Jim McGlynn (11 July 1957–4 February 2024) and Vic Bottini (23 January 1949–9 February 2024). May they rest in peace.*

John McGlynn ([john.mcglynn@lontar.org](mailto:john.mcglynn@lontar.org))

## BUKU LONTAR DI AMAZON

Buku-buku terbaru Lontar sudah bisa dipesan di lokapasar Amazon. Buku-buku tersebut adalah novel *Once Upon a Ship* karya Nh. Dini (9786237150183) berdasarkan terjemahan Katherine Davidsen; kumpulan fiksi pendek *At the Circus* karya Nukila Amal (9786237150190) berdasarkan terjemahan Toni Pollard; buku puisi epik *Siti Surabaya* karya F. Aziz Manna (9786237150206) berdasarkan terjemahan George A. Fowler dan bunga rampai cerpen berbahasa Jawa *She Wanted to be a Beauty Queen* berdasarkan terjemahan dan suntingan George Quinn (9786237150213). Jika anda ingin memesan buku-buku tersebut, cara yang paling cepat adalah dengan menyetik nomor ISBN buku di mesin pencari Amazon. Selanjutnya pemesanan akan diproses sebagaimana mestinya.



## Surat dari Pejompongan

### MULTATULI

Kawan Moer,

Beberapa hari ini aku membaca buku *Multatuli yang Penuh Teka-teki* karya Willem Frederik Hermans. Buku ini diterjemahkan oleh H.B. Jassin dari bahasa Belanda *De raadselachtige Multatuli* dan terbit oleh penerbit Djambatan pada 1988. Aku suka terjemahan Jassin kali ini. Kalimat-kalimat dalam buku ini dijelmakan dalam bahasa Indonesia yang bertenaga, lancar dan bersih. Seakan-akan sang pengarang Willem menuliskannya langsung untuk pembaca berbahasa Indonesia.

Buku ini adalah biografi Eduard Douwes Dekker yang dalam sejumlah karangannya memakai nama pena Multatuli, terutama dalam bukunya yang terkenal *Max Havelaar*. Novel ini juga diterjemahkan Jassin dengan bahasa Indonesia yang enak dibaca. Seakan-akan Jassin adalah spesialis penerjemah Multatuli, sebagaimana Gregory Rabassa yang memilih fokus terjemahan pada karya Gabriel García Márquez.

Untuk membaca buku ini, setidaknya pembaca telah membaca *Max Havelaar*. Atau, jika mau ada perbandingan, boleh juga membaca *Mitos* dari Lebak karya Rob Nieuwenhuys yang diterjemahkan Sitor Situmorang. Buku terakhir ini membaca secara kritis peran Eduard Douwes Dekker di Lebak selaku asisten residen. Bahkan, membongkar mitos Multatuli sebagai tokoh antikolonialisme dalam keterlibatannya sebagai asisten residen di Lebak. Sebaliknya, ia justru mendukung kolonialisme Belanda. Tapi, biarlah, soal ini kuceritakan lain waktu.

Sebagai biografi, *Multatuli yang Penuh Teka-teki* adalah biografi Eduard yang paling lengkap dan kritis yang ada dalam terjemahan Indonesia. Tentu saja, dalam bahasa Belanda ada sejumlah buku yang membahas Multatuli dan bagaimana pengarang itu menghasilkan *Max Havelaar* dan pengaruhnya kemudian dalam kesusastraan Belanda abad ke-19.

Namun, untuk pembaca yang hendak mengetahui siapa itu Multatuli dan bagaimana pengarang itu menghasilkan novelnya, cukuplah membaca buku ini. Sebab, kepentingan yang lebih besar lagi tentang sosok seorang pengarang, biasanya hanya diperlukan oleh seorang peneliti sejarah atau sejarawan sastra, bukan pembaca umum.

Yang bisa kita nikmati dalam buku ini, tentu saja, sebagaimana sudah kukatakan tadi: terjemahan yang baik. Hari-hari sekarang, tidak semua penerjemah memiliki kecakapan seperti ini. Kita mendapatkan banyak sekali buku-buku terjemahan, tetapi semua itu hadir dalam bahasa Indonesia yang buruk. Penerjemah seakan-akan tidak mengenal bahasa Indonesia sebagai bahasa sasaran terjemahan, yang karenanya, kita juga patut ragu apakah penerjemah itu mengenal pula dengan baik bahasa sumber terjemahannya.



*Multatuli yang Penuh Teka-teki* membawa kepada kita kepada sebuah studi tentang tokoh sastra yang penting. Dan yang juga penting diingat bagaimana para kaum intelektual Belanda masa itu, atau aristokrat kolonial secara umum, memandang Hindia Belanda sebagai negeri jajahan. Apakah mereka, misalnya, mengenal dengan baik tradisi pemerintahan lokal yang sudah berjalan jauh sebelum kolonialisme Eropa. Itulah kenapa penilaian Multatuli terhadap Bupati Lebak Raden Adipati Karta Nata Negara—lebih tepat: permusuhan mereka—bukan tidak mungkin dibayang-bayangi oleh biasa peradaban Eropa, terutama terkait cara pandang mereka terhadap negeri jajahan dan manusianya. Singkat kata, bagaimana Barat melihat Timur.

Di samping bias-bias seperti itu, studi kritis tentang tokoh penting dalam lapangan kehidupan memang selalu menarik. Aku berharap studi kritis tentang tokoh-tokoh sejarah kita—bidang kebudayaan tanpa kecuali—makin banyak dilakukan orang. Studi kritis bagiku penting untuk membongkar mitos-mitos yang menyelimuti tokoh-tokoh yang selama ini sudah telanjur dipuja-puji, atau mereka yang selama ini telah dibenci sampai ke ubun-ubun.

Tapi, studi kritis tentang Multatuli dalam buku ini juga penting karena ia bukan melulu menampilkan fakta-fakta sejarah atau dugaan dari kiri dan kanan, tetapi juga bagaimana fakta dan dugaan itu dihadirkan dengan satu *narrative* yang hidup. Kita bukan hanya membaca sejarah seorang tokoh, tetapi cerita, ya, kisah yang hidup dan mengalir yang membuat kita seakan-akan tengah membaca fiksi.

Nah, kemampuan ini yang menurutku juga masih kurang pada sejarawan kita. Bukan sekali dua dalam buku sejarah tokoh yang kita dapatkan adalah sebuah pemerian tentang tokoh yang kelewat kering dan membosankan. Tampaknya, penulisnya kurang membaca sastra! Ada sekali kutemukan dalam buku *Pemberontakan Petani Banten* karya Sartono Kartodirdjo sebuah uraian sejarah yang hidup dan penuh gelora. Jarang-jarang kita dapat buku sejarah yang seperti ini kan?

Kadang-kadang aku kepingin juga menulis orang-orang sepertimu, Bung. Rasanya, ada juga yang menarik dari kisah hidupmu. Siapa tahu sejarah hidupmu akan ada yang membacanya. Siapa tahu lho ya. **Zen Hae** ([zenhae@lontar.org](mailto:zenhae@lontar.org))

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