



Lontar Newsletter

Email: contact@lontar.org

July, 2024

Greetings from the ED

The issue of educational justice was raised during the 40th celebration of National Children's Day in Jayapura, capital of Papua province. The choice of the venue was most appropriate given that out of Indonesia's 34 provinces, none have been more deprived of access to schooling and learning than the provinces in the country's easternmost region. The reasons often cited for this serious deficit in the nation's overall socio-economic development program—remote location, shortage of funds, unsafe environment, etc.—may have been tolerated a few years ago, but with the economy gradually improving (thanks partly to exports of minerals and oil and gas extracted from such remote areas as Papua) these shortcomings should have been better addressed. Is it a question of funding?

The government has reiterated its commitment to earmark 20% of the national budget for education. In 2023, the total education budget was reported to be Rp. 612 trillion, with Rp237 trillion for the central government, Rp305 trillion for provincial governments, and Rp69 trillion for financing. The mandate was to deliver several key priorities, topmost among them being improvement of Indonesia's education infrastructure and increased access to education at all levels, particularly in the outermost islands and underdeveloped areas. The question is how judicious spending has been, especially funds that falls under the jurisdiction of provincial governments. We sincerely hope schooling and learning can henceforth be accessible to all children equally around the archipelago.

Yuli Ismartono

yismartono@lontar.org

Ruminations

Poetics 2: Anagnorisi

In my previous "Rumination" of June 2024 I spoke of peripeteia, a turning point in a dramatic work which (often) results in a negative reversal of circumstances. (Think of *Oedipus Rex* when Oedipus realizes he has unwittingly killed his father and married his mother.) Therein, I also mentioned that, in 1976, the Fulbright scholarship, on which I had pinned my hope for a future career in theater was canceled, which, in turn instigated a change in my career path. What the connection is between peripeteia and this "Rumination" we will come to but first I would like to return to that time in my life.

It may have been in 1976 that my hope of seeing my name featured in playbills or on cinema marquees began to dim but what I now see from this vantage point, 48 years later, is that in my dilatory pursuit of a life in theater as a young man I had numerous personal shortcomings that likely would have thwarted my ambitions anyway, two of them being that I had never studied dramatic theory and had never taken acting classes. In preparation for a role, instead of conducting research into, let's say, the psychosis affecting the character Teddy in the play *Arsenic and Old Lace* (which I played in high school) or the motives behind the illicit behavior of gang members in *Threepenny Opera* (one of whom I played in college), I relied on the directors of plays I was in to tell me how to act and what to do. I was a passive actor. There was little or no process of discovery on my part.

In the summer of 1976, COTI, the Consortium for the Teaching of Indonesian, sponsored its first-ever advanced Indonesian course at IKIP (Institut Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan), the Teachers' College in Malang, East Java. I was one of the cohort of students in this guinea-pig venture and, as part of our commencement program in August, Professor John Wolff, the U.S. head of the program, asked (or "ordered," rather) the students to stage *Awal and Mira*, a short play by Utuy Tatang Sontani (which, incidentally, Lontar published in volume 2 of *The Lontar Anthology of Indonesian Drama* in 2010).

Set in 1951, two years after the end of Indonesia's war for independence, this gritty realistic drama depicts the two eponymous characters' search for humanity at a time when values in the new nation—

COMING SOON

JAKARTA CONTENT WEEK

As a runup to the fifth edition of Jakarta Content Week or “JakTent” (which will be held in November of this year), on the weekend of August 9-11, the 17,000 Islands of Imagination Foundation will, in association with the Frankfurt Book Fair, the Lontar Foundation, and other partner organizations, hold a “mini JakTent,” a series of ten events with the theme “Southeast Asia Synergy.”

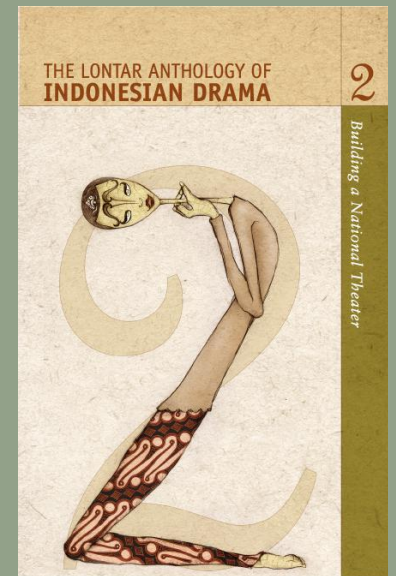
To be held at Taman Ismail Marzuki, the Jakarta Arts Center, this mini festival will feature speakers from almost all Southeast Asian countries and other countries as well.

Three Lontar-curated events include, on Saturday, 10 August (at 7 PM) “Can the Southeast Asian Landscape Be Understood Through B-Side Stories?”; on Sunday, August 11 (at 4 PM) “What Untold Stories Lie Beyond the Recorded History of Southeast Asia?”; and, also on Sunday (at 7 PM), “Are Emerging Southeast Asian Writers Seeking to Move Beyond National Literatures?”

In addition to the above there will be panels on publishing, translation, the importance of literary festivals, and other topics as well.

Help to spread the word and hope to see you there!

For more detailed information, go to www.jaktent.com dan www.pulauimaji.org or contact the organizing committee at +62 857-7523-5032.



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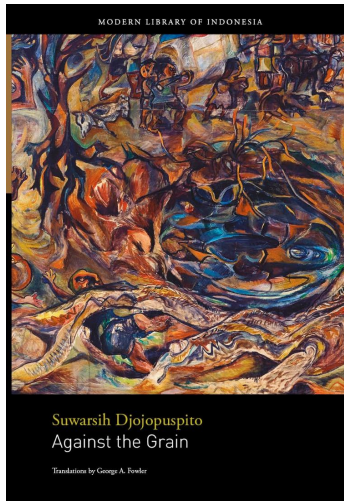
and Off-Off-Broadway productions. Instead, I played Blue Shirt, an uneducated ruffian, the antithesis to the high-born and once idealistic Awal.

All events in the play take place at Mira’s *warung* which occupies the street-side veranda of her home, a bamboo dwelling constructed after her family’s more-solid original home was destroyed during the revolution. Her *warung* is much like other coffee shops. On a wooden table shared by customers are sweets, cigarettes, and other items for sale. In front of the table is a long bench where customers sit. Differing from other *warung*, however, customers are able to sit only on the front side of the table, not around it. Instead, with the table abutting the house, Mira sits behind it and is visible only from the waist up until the end of the play.

On the night the action in the play takes place, Awal comes to the *warung* and invites Mira to meet him elsewhere, intending to declare his love for her in private. Only she, he feels, could ever be the perfect spouse for him. Most other human creatures, Blue Shirt for one, he thinks are buffoons. This isn’t the first time Awal has asked Mira to meet him elsewhere but she has refused every time. One can infer from Mira’s dialogue that she is in love with Awal but, so rankled is Awal by her refusals to meet him and so jealous is he of Blue Shirt and his mate, White Shirt, who flirt with Mira mercilessly, he doesn’t seem to hear the sound of her heartstrings.

Jumping fast forward in time, a fight breaks out between Awal and the other two men who best him and beat him to the ground. Mira threatens to douse Blue Shirt and White Shirt with hot coffee, which caused them to disperse, but she makes no move to help Awal to his feet. Awal’s anger peaks and he tears apart the *warung*, smashing the table in the process, thereby exposing Mira’s lower body whose legs are missing

BOOK LAUNCH & DISCUSSION



On Friday, August 23, Lontar will launch *Against the Grain*, the translation of a novel by Suwarsih Djojopuspito (20 April 1912–24 August 1977). Described by one literary critic as Indonesia’s first “political-feminist novel,” the book was first written in Sundanese in the 1930s but rejected for publication by Balai Pustaka, the state-owned (colonial-era) publishing house. Suwarsih then rewrote the novel in Dutch, in which language it was first published, in the Netherlands, in 1940 under the title *Buiten het Gareel* (Off Track). Ignored in Holland due to WWII and the Indonesian revolution, the book languished in Indonesia as well until the author wrote an Indonesian-language version, which was published under the title *Manusia Bebas* (Free People) in 1975.

Both Suwarsih and her novel are well worth remembering. The role women played in the Indonesian revolution has long been underestimated; so too has their struggle to find parity with men in Indonesia’s literary canon.

Join us on August 23, at Teater Utan Kayu (TUK), Jl. Utan Kayu Raya No. 68H, Jakarta Timur) starting at 7 PM. Speakers to be announced soon. Follow Lontar’s Instagram account.

Publication of this novel in English was made possible with support from DanaIndonesiana, a program sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology.



JHM as Blue Shirt and Mark Wolz as Awal in the production of *Awal and Mira* at IKIP-Malang in August 1976.

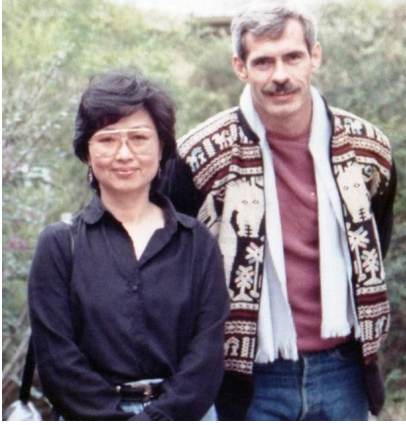
below the knee. When Mira’s home was destroyed in the war so, too, was her flawless beauty. Both Awal and Mira scream as the dream of a perfect union is shattered.

As mentioned above, anagnorisis is that moment in a play when a character makes a critical discovery, when a character’s awareness of the reality of a situation changes from ignorance to knowledge. On stage, as Aristotle posits in *Poetics*, anagnorisis (knowledge) leads to *peripeteia* (a turning point) which, for him, was the mark of a superior tragedy. (Again, think of *Oedipus Rex*.)

At the end of “*Peripeteia*” I mentioned that the cancellation of the Fulbright scholarship promised to me was a turning point in my life. But did it lead to tragedy, I then asked. I also mentioned that the official reason given for revocation of the scholarship was that I was already in Indonesia. Later, however, in a conversation with Donna Culpepper, the U.S. Cultural Affairs officer in charge of the program, I learned that the real reason was that with 1977, the following year, being an election year, the government was leery of giving permission to a foreigner to conduct research on *wayang kulit* and to work with *dalang* (puppet masters) who, traditionally had been used by performance sponsors to influence politics.

So it was that while my dream of becoming a puppeteer was shattered, I continued my study of Indonesian and, over time, transformed myself from the passive actor I had once been into a more active player as well as the director on life’s real stage, first as a translator and then a publisher which now, 48 years and several hundred publications later, I see as no tragedy at all.

John McGlynn (john_mcglynn@lontar.org)



Dewi Anggraeni Fraser with JHM in 1993

Dewi Anggraeni Fraser (16 April 1945–19 July 2024), author and journalist, departed the world this past month.

Born in Jakarta in 1945, Dewi obtained a Masters degree in 1969 from the University of Indonesia and then, in 1978, a diploma in education at La Trobe University in Australia where, in 1972, she had earlier married her life partner, Eric Fraser.

A decades-long long correspondent for *Tempo* magazine, Dewi was also a regular contributor to *The Jakarta Post* and had several novels, novellas, and collections of short stories to her name, in addition to a long list of non-fiction work published in a wide variety of journals and anthologies.

Drawing on her lifetime of experience in crossing cultural boundaries, Dewi's writings often explore the problems of understanding and accommodation that individuals encounter as they attempt to maneuver in worlds that are at once their own but, in the eyes of others, not their own.

The challenges that Dewi herself encountered because of her Chinese heritage are evident in much of her work. So, too, is heartfelt empathy for marginalized peoples: domestic help, migrant workers, victims of the atrocities of 1965, and many more.

Bless you, Dewi, and forever rest in peace.

Surat dari Pejompongan

BEBAS

Kawan Moer,

Manusia Bebas karya Suwarsih Djojopuspito adalah roman tentang pertarungan. Lebih khusus lagi, sebuah patahan yang karenanya ia yang memilih jalan itu menyatakan “selamat tinggal” kepada kehidupan kaum amtenar yang nyaman. Itu juga bisa bermakna, persetan dengan kemewahan, di bawah matahari Jawa yang panas, dengan udara kolonialisme yang terus memberat.

Tokoh semacam Sudarmo, misalnya, berhenti dari sekolah hukum—yang kelak akan memberinya gelar Mr. (*Meester in de Rechten*)—demi memilih dunia kaum pergerakan sebagai guru sekolah. Sekolah liar pula. Yang sewaktu-waktu bisa ditutup oleh pemerintah kolonial.

Pilihan itu sudah pasti tidak akan membuat nyaman hidup Sudarmo. Apalagi ia sudah berkeluarga dengan Sulastri. Mereka adalah pasangan suami-istri yang sama-sama berjuang dengan satu keyakinan bahwa kemerdekaan bisa lebih mudah dicapai jika masyarakat kita menjadi cerdas dan bebas dari kemiskinan. Mereka sama-sama “hidup di luar jalur”. Itulah makna lain “manusia bebas”.

Tapi, kemiskinan seperti Malaikat Maut yang terus menguntit mereka. Kapan ada kesempatan, menyergaplah ia. Bukan hanya mengancam pasangan Sudarmo-Sulastri, tetapi mengancam siapa saja yang memilih hidup di luar jalur. Kaum yang dalam roman ini disebut “proletar intelek”.

Namun, roman ini bukan melulu perkara kaum pergerakan, tetapi juga romantika rumah tangga. Sulastri adalah seorang istri yang mesti mendampingi suaminya dalam keadaan senang dan susah. Dia harus siap menjadi pemadam bagi suaminya yang sering kebakaran (jenggot) karena sikapnya yang nonkompromistis.

Tetapi sebagai seorang perempuan ia adalah pribadi yang luar biasa, yang pemikirannya tentang kemerdekaan dan kebebasan layak diutarakan di ruang-ruang sidang kaum pergerakan. Ia adalah pengecam nomor wahid akan komunalisme. Aku kutipkan pokok-pokok pikirannya:

“Semua orang ingin sama dalam pikiran dan gerak-gerik mereka. Massa, gerombolan kambing melulu. Tak diperbolehkan mempunyai pendirian dan anggapan sendiri. Dengan begitu kita lebih menjauhi lagi kemerdekaan kita.”

Dengan segala pikiran bebas dan perlawanan kaum pergerakan, pada akhirnya *Manusia Bebas* adalah roman tentang kehampaan hidup. Kaum pergerakan yang bercita-cita mulia harus menemui kenyataan bahwa kehidupan pribadi mereka sebenarnya sangat tidak menarik. hubung

IN MEMORIAM



Achadiati Ikram
(credit: Goodreads Indonesia)

Achadiati Ikram (30 November 1930–21 July 2024), one of Indonesia's most senior and preeminent philologists and the "mother" of almost all contemporary Indonesian philologists is no longer with us. Her passing is deeply mourned.

Born in Tuban, on the north coast of East Java, "Ibu Ikram" as she was called most of her adult life, entered the Faculty of Letters at the University of Indonesia (UI) in 1950 and there received her training from three academic pioneers: Hoesein Djajadiningrat, RM. Ng. Poerbatjaraka, and Prijono. In fact, it was Prijono, the university's first dean of its Faculty of Letters who recruited Ikram as a lecturer in Indonesian literature at the university six years later. Ikram would go on to obtain her PhD in philology with a dissertation on the classic *Tale of Sri Rama* and though she travelled extensively and participated in numerous international seminars during her long career, UI was, from the beginning until the end, her home base.

Lontar's connection with Ikram began with its work on *Illuminations: The Writing Traditions of Indonesia*. Throughout the long process of bringing that book into print, Ikram was a frequent source of advice. She will be dearly missed.

Hubungan suami-istri menjadi hambar, bahkan jika salah satu dari mereka kelewat menurutkan kata hati, selesailah semua mimpi-mimpi indah perkawinan mereka.

Harus pula kukatakan, Kawan, bahwa inilah ironi tajam dari dunia pergerakan kaum nasionalis kita. Mereka kelewat bersemangat hendak membebaskan manusia di luar sana dari kemiskinan dan kebodohan, tetapi mereka abai akan hubungan antar-manusia di antara mereka, sebuah hubungan yang telah mereka resmikan atas nama Tuhan.

Mereka yang terombang-ambing antara cita-cita mulia dan kehidupan keluarga mereka, antara nonkompromistis dan kompromi di sejumlah titik. Kehidupan pada akhirnya tidak bisa ditempuh dengan keras-kerasan, tetapi mesti diimbangi dengan menahan diri dan menempuh jalan yang lebih mungkin. Berkompromi tidak ada salahnya, sejauh itu tidak melenceng dari cita-cita kaum pergerakan.

Ada sebuah penghiburan dari roman ini dan itu diucapkan oleh Sudarmo kepada Sulastri. Aku kutipkan, Kawan: "Jangan berputus asa, *endedispereertniet*, kata orang Belanda, yang memuji Coen pahlawan mereka. Kita ini disebut proletar intelek, Tri. Apakah itu tak membuat kita gembira? Kita betul-betul proletary intelek biar pun kita kadang-kadang mendapat tempat berlindung di rumah tokoh burjuis."

Dengan sudut pandang yang dingin dan kritis pada setiap tokohnya, Suwarsih memotret satu zaman yang khas dalam sejarah nasional kita. Meski sering kali orang mencari hubungan langsung antara Sulastri dan Suwarsih, sang pengarang telah mendesain romannya sebagai karya yang mandiri. Tidak ada pembelaan yang sifatnya sentimental kepada tokoh-tokoh baik itu, untuk perempuan sekalipun. Setiap tokoh dibiarkan menemukan nasibnya yang serba-tidak terduga dalam pergolakan zaman kolonial.

Roman ini berakhir dengan satu keadaan getir. Masing-masing menyadari kesulitan hidup mereka sebagai pengajar di sekolah liar, nasib umum kaum pergerakan di "zaman normal". Tetapi, mereka tidak bisa lari dari sana. Mereka seperti dikutuk untuk tetap bersetia, mengajar dan menulis, menerbitkan selebaran untuk menyadarkan masyarakat. Tidak bisa berhenti dari semua itu—meski sekadar untuk membuat kue. **Zen Hae** (zenhae@lontar.org)

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