



Lontar Newsletter

Email: contact@lontar.org

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Greetings from the ED

Despite general skepticism over the Prabowo government's seemingly over-ambitious national agenda, the first 100 days turned out to be less alarming than predicted. A number of surveys by research groups showed a much less adverse appraisal than predicted, greatly helped by the free meal program for schools, the reversal of the 12% value added tax, and his refusal to pardon corruptors. The president's launching of 37 electricity projects around the country was an additional passing grade to the government's report card. To be sure there were quite a few non-starters but some go-getters deserve mention, among them is the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, led by Prof. Abdul Mu'ti, a graduate of the School of Education, Psychology, and social Work at Flinders University in Australia.

Just days after his nomination, the Minister visited a few schools around the country to assess the situation on the ground before launching his own agenda. It turned out to be quite a comprehensive modification of past programs. He set out to emphasize improving teachers' competence by enhancing the program known as "PPG" (Pendidikan Profesi Guru or Teachers Professional Education).

As a firm believer of character education, he initiated a community-based approach non-formal education aimed at strengthening communication between schools, parents and the community. Plans to establish a directorate of non-formal education is now in the works. One innovative approach innovative approach to learning will be part of the government's

Ruminations

Bang Ben – Part 1

Not to be confused with the English "bang"—a sudden loud noise—the Indonesian "bang" (pronounced "bahng") is short for "abang," meaning "older brother"

When it comes to news coverage of Indonesia in print-and digital-media, no name is more frequently cited by journalists, perhaps, than that of Ben Anderson (though "Clifford Geertz" is definitely close in the running).

Born in 1936 to Anglo-Irish parents, Benedict Richard O'Gorman Anderson is now, ten years after his death in 2015, best known for *Imagined Communities*, his 1983 publication in which he explores the origins of nationalism, but when I first met him in 1975, at the Indonesian Studies Conference, held in conjunction with ISSI, the Indonesian Summer Studies Institute, at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, he had already secured a lasting reputation through such titles as *Some Aspects of Indonesian Politics under the Japanese Occupation: 1944–1945* (1961), *Mythology and the Tolerance of the Javanese* (1965), and *Java in a Time of Revolution; Occupation and Resistance, 1944–1946* (1972). None of these, however had cemented his name in history books as much as had *A Preliminary Analysis of the 1 October 1965, Coup in Indonesia*, more popularly known as the "Cornell Paper," which he co-authored, with Ruth McVey (with "help from" Frederick Bunnell).

Just 30 years of age when he and McVey produced that work, the "Cornell Paper" debunked official Indonesian government accounts of G30S (Gerakan Tigapuluh September), the so-called "September 30 Movement," in which the murder of six Indonesian Army generals led, in the days and months to follow, to the banning of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI); the killing of up to a million or more people associated with or purported to be associated with PKI; the exile and imprisonment of thousands more suspected fellow travelers; the ouster of Sukarno, Indonesia's president; and the rise of Suharto and his militaristic "New Order" government which, in 1975, was growing only stronger (and would not be toppled for another 23 years).

In 1975, at 23 years of age, with just a few courses on Indonesian history and culture under my belt, I was superficially aware of these grim facts but incognizant of the uproar the Cornell Paper had caused in Indonesia where, in the official version of G30S, sole blame for the

program of nine super-apps for nine priority services, covering digital identification, health care, education, and social assistance.

Recently launched by Minister Mu'ti, the *Rumah Pendidikan* app is an integrated digital education service that supports participants in the education ecosystem. It comprises eight main areas categorized into two pillars. One contains spaces for teachers, students, and schools, while the other is aimed at involving parents, government, and partnerships with businesses and community stakeholders. This app is expected to reduce paperwork and make it easier to obtain data and information, which would be a big boon to teachers and students alike.

As always, Lontar stands ready to be of assistance in any effort at improving education in Indonesia. Hopefully, we can find a common ground at which reading and books, and literacy in general, can be part of the agenda.

On a final note, we extend best wishes for the Chinese New Year of the Wooden Snake and hope you will continue to support Lontar.

Yuli Ismartono

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With puppets, Holofernes, Nebuchadnezzar, and a jocular maidservant resembling Semar.

horrific events of 1965-1966 was placed on the PKI. I was also clueless about the fame (or infamy, depending on the side one was on) the Paper's authors had garnered because of their findings. I was just a wannabe puppeteer who had enrolled at U.W. to study Indonesian language and culture not as the first step towards becoming a scholar of Indonesia but rather to equip myself with elements of the skill set I would need to undertake research in Central Java on the art of *wayang kulit*. My intention was to master shadow puppet performance techniques, then return to the U.S. and establish a shadow-theater company whose dramatic repertoire would be based on Western tales and stories.

The subject of Indonesian politics was not my concern. Nor, for that matter, were Indonesian language, literature, and culture *per se*. But then came Ben who would, over time, play a pivotal role in the trajectory of my career.

I am blessed to have had five loving older sisters when I was young; I was well looked after by them, especially during my pre-school years. Being the first male child in the brood of ten eventually born to John and Anna Marie McGlynn brought with it several benefits. One: no hand-me-downs! Unlike my second to fifth older sisters who were "re-gifted" items of apparel one or another older sister had outgrown, my shirts, trousers, and shoes, were always new. No castoffs for me! Two: a bed and bedroom of my own (at least until the time my parent's seventh sprout, another boy, outgrew the baby bed and usurped half of "my" bed for himself). Three: the attention showered on me by family members simply because I was a boy, the first son and potential name-carrier for my family. Even so, despite these benefits, I sometimes longed for an older brother, one who would shield me from hecklers in the schoolyard when I fouled a ball or missed a catch, one with whom I could speak about puzzling, male-related stuff my older sisters might not want to think about. I looked at the male-dominant households of my first cousins—the Sheafors with 3 boys and 1 girl; the Schaufs with 5 boys and 2 girls; and the Tom McGlynn family, with 8 boys and 1 girl—and ignorantly wondered about what was in the waters at Glynnspring to make my parents produce so many girls.

UPCOMING EVENT

The play *Aduh*, whose translation (by Cobina Gillitt, under the title “Ought”) is included in *New Directions*, volume 3 of *The Lontar Anthology of Indonesian Drama*, will be performed at Taman Ismail Marzuki, the Jakarta Arts Center, on February 20 and 21.

Written in 1973 and first performed in 1974, a little more than 50 years ago, this play marked a turning point—a “new direction”—in Indonesian dramatic art, moving away as it did from realistic drama to a theater of the absurd. The play revolves around issues of death and tension between the individual and society and is sometimes compared to Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*.

The play, to be performed by members of Teater Mandiri, one of the oldest theatrical companies in Indonesia, will be preceded, the day before, by a day-long acting workshop.

For more information about tickets and the workshop, contact Oyya at 08517 1535 076.

Besides Ben Anderson, another speaker at the 1975 Indonesian Summer Studies Conference was Arief Budiman, the well-known Indonesian political activist who had recently been forced to flee Indonesia and was now in the U.S., preparing to pursue a PhD in Political Science at Harvard University. Arief, as I came to hear from him, had gotten his start in political activism in 1963 as a signatory of “Manikebu” (Manifesto Kebudayaan), the “Cultural Manifesto” which was subsequently banned by the Sukarno government. In 1972, he had been imprisoned for a month because of his involvement in a demonstration against the building of Taman Mini, the “Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature” theme park, a brainchild of President Soeharto’s wife, which was seen by students as a waste of taxpayers’ money. More recently, in 1974, he had been imprisoned for a much longer time, following the “Malari Incident” (Malapetaka Limabelas Januari). What had initially been a peaceful student-led demonstration against corruption, high prices, and inequality, had been turned into mayhem, possibly by agents provocateurs. In the end, eleven protestors were killed and hundreds of buildings destroyed.

At Wisma Indonesia, the ISSI guesthouse where students and conference speakers stayed, Arief enthralled the students with his stories about the New Order government’s high crimes and misdemeanors and the significant role Indonesian students had played in Indonesian history. (So much for not getting to know about Indonesian politics!) Students like me thought wistfully about the many demonstrations we had been involved in against the ongoing Vietnam War. Did we, mere students, have the power to change anything? It didn’t seem so, not with the American War Machine going at full throttle.

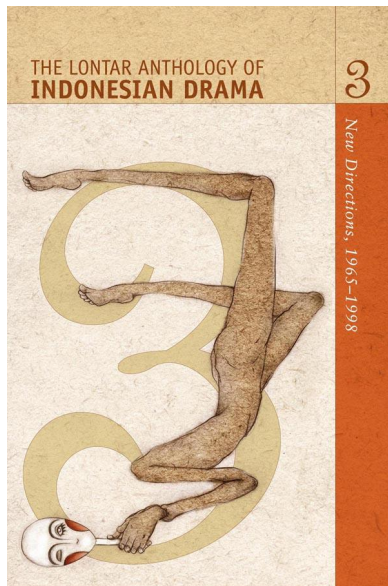
I can’t remember the first time I had a one-on-one conversation with Arief but when he learned of my interest in *wayang kulit*, all talk of politics faded. He asked to see what I had done. I showed him slides of my puppets. He asked what I was working on. I told him a story based on the Book of Judith. He clapped when I told him about my intention of studying *wayang* performance technique in Central Java. “Then you must meet Ben,” he insisted. “Ben knows more than any non-Javanese about Javanese culture.”



The shadow of a prototypes for the character Judith.

“Ben who?” I asked. Arief looked at me with his mouth agape.

John McGlynn (john_mcglynn@lontar.org)



The upcoming revival of the play *Aduh* by Putu Wijaya at Taman Ismail Marzuki, the Jakarta Arts Center, serves as a reminder of the important role the performing arts, especially theater, have played in Indonesian history.

Beginning in the mid-1960s, Indonesian theatre implicated itself in national politics as both a critique of prevailing social conditions and an ironic (and mostly unwilling) participant in a wider national construction of Indonesian cultural identity. The plays included in *New Directions*, volume 3 of *The Lontar Anthology of Indonesian Drama*, show the dynamic range of new directions taken in playwriting during the political period known as The New Order under the leadership of President Soeharto.

Containing 14 plays, including *Moths (Kapai-kapai)* by Arifin C. Noer, *The Last Woman (Perempuan Terakhir)* by Wisran Hadi, on up to *Marsinah Accuses (Marsinah Menggugat)* by Ratna Sarumpaet, these “new directions” in Indonesian drama provide a fascinating window into a society in transition caught between the legacy of tradition, the challenge of repression and censorship, and a strong desire for democratization.

Surat dari Pejompongan

TUNDA

Kawan Moer,

Aku pernah menonton pentas lakon teater *Aduh* karya Putu Wijaya sebanyak dua kali. Yang pertama pada awal 2000-an di Taman Ismail Marzuki oleh Lab. Teater Syahid—yang telah berubah menjadi Lab. Teater Ciputat. Yang terakhir, tahun lalu, aku menontonnya di Salihara yang diproduksi oleh Teater Mandiri dengan sutradara Putu Wijaya.

Meskipun banyak orang menandai lakon ini sebagai lakon absurd, bagiku tidak sepenuhnya. Memang ada soal dengan alur cerita—ya, sebab bagaimanapun lakon ini masih bercerita—yang bergerak ke mana-mana. Berhadapan dengan seorang yang mengaduh kesakitan dan hampir mati, kita diharapkan mesti menolongnya. Itu adalah anjuran moral yang baik.

Tetapi, dalam *Aduh* orang yang mengerang kesakitan dan hampir mati itu justru menjadi bahan permainan orang-orang. Apa yang dibayangkan sebagai perbuatan baik, menolong orang yang kesakitan, sama sekali tidak terjadi di sini. Masing-masing orang dalam lakon ini justru berdebat tentang bagaimana menolong orang yang kesakitan tersebut. Jadi, perbuatan baik di sini tertunda, dan selalu ditunda, untuk dilaksanakan sebab orang-orang terlampau banyak berwacana tentang bagaimana seharusnya menolong orang.

Niat baik yang tertunda itu pada akhirnya tidak membuat siapa pun menyesal.

Pada titik ini muncullah apa yang kita namakan sebagai absurditas. Sebuah peristiwa mencapai perkembangan yang tidak bisa kita pahami sepenuhnya. Kenapa orang-orang itu masih tetap berdebat dan yang kesakitan itu pun terus-menerus mengaduh. Seakan-akan ia bukan hendak meminta pertolongan, tetapi sebaliknya, meneror mereka yang masih sibuk berdebat. Yang sekarat pada akhirnya tidak bisa dianggap remeh. Ia justru memegang kendali penuh untuk membuat orang bingung bagaimana menemukan cara untuk menolongnya.

Dalam karya-karya Putu Wijaya yang seperti ini memang menjadi nyaris permanen. Penonton dan pembaca tidak tahu lagi mau kemana gerakan cerita yang sedang mereka nikmati itu. Apa yang kita saksikan dalam novel *Stasiun*, misalnya, kurang-lebih begitu. Sebuah perjalanan berkereta yang tanpa akhir, yang pada setiap stasiun muncul persoalan baru. Kita sebenarnya tengah dihadapkan pada semacam susunan kisah yang bisa kita pilih secara sembarang, untuk kita nikmati secara bagian per bagian, bukan sebagai sebuah keseluruhan.

Dengan kata lain, tidak ada finalitas—itu jika aku boleh menggunakan pengertian yang Heideggerian. Yang ada adalah proses dan proses dan proses. Masing-masing bisa berdiri sendiri. Tidak ada tujuan

Englishzone Receives Book Donations

Englishzone is an English club aimed at improving the basic English skills of students at UIN Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi. The club provides a space for students to develop their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills in English through various interesting and interactive activities. Founded by Ririn Novayana, a third semester student, Englishzone has grown into one of the innovative and committed learning platforms in supporting the English education process on campus.

On January 24, 2025, Englishzone officially received books donation from the Lontar Foundation. The books received cover a variety of genres, such as novels, poetry, and short stories, with themes centered on Indonesian culture. This donation is particularly valuable, especially in supporting learning at Englishzone. The books will be used as reading materials in class discussions and learning modules to improve members' reading skills, text analysis, and vocabulary building.

We are very grateful to Lontar for this donation. This contribution not only enriches Englishzone's collection but also gives students the opportunity to develop their language skills through quality materials. With this support, Englishzone is committed to continue to grow and provide greater benefits to all its members.



L-R: Afriza Kurniati, Ririn Novayana, and
Ramadhan Nur Yasin

akhir dan memang tidak perlu. Kita selalu ditunda untuk sampai ke ujung sana.

Jika penundaan adalah sebuah siasat, maka sebenarnya kita mesti senang bisa menikmati apa yang terjadi pada saat itu. Kita tidak perlu mencari apa yang kemudian. Yang ada di hadapan kita adalah sebuah sikap curiga dan kelewat hati-hati sehingga niat baik untuk menolong orang selalu tertunda dan tertunda. Kita juga harus melihat erangan kesakitan itu sebagai bagian dari kehidupan kita sehari-hari. Dengan kata lain, kita mesti berdamai. Bahwa yang begituan akan terjadi lagi dan lagi. Lama kelamaan kita menjadi terbiasa. Dan kita bukannya tidak mau menolong, kita masih akan menolongnya, sebab perdebatan tentang bagaimana jalan terbaik menolong orang itu masih berlangsung.

Tidak ada yang menyerah di sini. Sebab jika masing-masing orang di atas panggung itu berdiam—tidak mau menolong lagi, misalnya—maka panggung akan sunyi. Putu tidak menghendaki panggungnya sunyi. Harus terus ada laku manusia yang mengalami kesulitan, harus selalu ada teror, baik dari orang kebanyakan maupun dari yang dianggap sebagai sumber masalah tadi.

Bahayanya, aku kira, karena Putu keseringan menggunakan formula ini dalam karya-karyanya, aku pribadi sudah tidak terkejut lagi dengan teror mental Teater Mandiri. Aku seperti bisa menebak bahwa akhir cerita Putu akan mengejutkan kita—dan aku tidak bisa terkejut lagi.

Bung mesti pernah juga mengalami ini toh. Menghadapi sebuah rezim yang melakukan hal yang itu-itu saja dari waktu ke waktu, lama kelamaan, buat kita jadi membosankan juga ya. Tapi, kau kan tetap punya harapan akan sesuatu yang ada di ujung sana. Sebuah penyelesaian. Kasus ini kan berbeda. Bukan bagian dari lakon Teater Mandiri.

Jadi, Bung, untuk yang satu ini, kita masih harus terus berusaha. Melawan! . **Zen Hae** (zenhae@lontar.org)

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