



Lontar Newsletter

Email: contact@lontar.org

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Greetings

A new government normally brings with it new policies and systems. But the education sector under this new administration decided to reverse gears and bring back the old system. As decreed by the current Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MoECRT), it's back to basics and the experimental high-tech *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) curriculum introduced by the previous education minister was unceremoniously put aside.

Aside from this policy reversal, the MoECRT has initiated an interesting project designed to make education more equitable and more accessible to disadvantaged youth, particularly young people living in remote areas. Known as the *Sekolah Rakyat* (People's School) program, the government plans to build 200 boarding schools annually, with the goal of having one in each district within five years. Tuition, along with board and lodging plus meals will be free. The biggest challenge will be the whopping Rp 5 trillion (about US\$ 306 million) price-tag to make it all happen. The government expects local and provincial governments, as well as related ministries, to pitch in by contributing lands and buildings. But the big question is how the government will find the 60,000 teachers needed for the new schools? Existing ones are already struggling with their shortage of teachers.

In a related development, the Constitutional Court recently ruled that the government must fund both public and private schools, reaffirming that all schools must be accessible to all. The ruling was in response to a petition filed by three

Ruminations

Lead Singer

As a graduate student in the disco-dominant era of 1979–1981, I was an inveterate clubber, spending weekend nights at dance bars, grinding my hips and moving my lips to the songs of Blondie. I knew the name of the band's lead singer, Debbie Harry, but did I know of drummer Clem Burke, bassist Gary Valentine, or keyboardist Jimmy Destri?

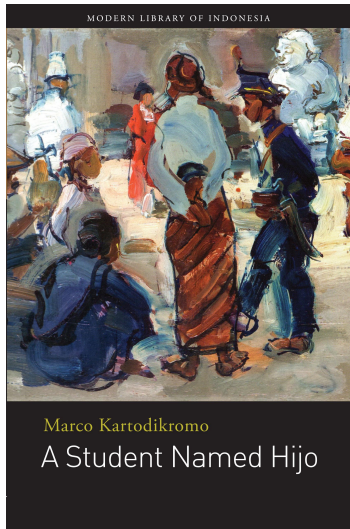
In 1986, after four years into my work on an anthology of short stories by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, when I decided to establish a foundation for the promotion of Indonesian literature, “publishing” was not my intention. Instead, I aspired to produce, on a regular basis, quality translations of Indonesian literature. The foundation would print copies for domestic consumption but the real goal was to offer reprint rights to publishers abroad. I assumed so few international publishers were publishing translations of Indonesian literature merely for lack of availability.

A lawyer-friend of mine offered pro-bono assistance for all the legal work but first I had to come up with a name. I wanted it to be an Indonesian word having some connection with books or knowledge, one that was easily pronounceable in English and leant itself to transformation as an attractive logo.

I scoured my well-worn *Poerwadarminta* and, with my battered Olivetti, typed a list of possible names: in the end, two sheets of paper, each with two columns of words, yet none jumped out at me. Another friend looked over the list and asked, “What about ‘lontar’?”

That was it! I knew instantly “lontar” was the name I'd been searching for. “Lontar,” in Indonesian, is not just a kind of palm tree (*Borassus flabellifer*) but also “manuscript” because its huge fan-shaped leaves were the material on which the first books in the Indonesian archipelago were written. And so it was, on October 28, 1987—that historic day in 1928 when, at a nationalist youth congress, it was proclaimed that “Indonesian” would henceforth replace “Malay” as the official lingua franca of the nascent nation—the Lontar Foundation came into being.

Lontar had no money, no paid staff, and, much like Hasta Mitra, Pramoedya's publisher (whose money woes had forced a relocation from Senen Market back to Joesoef Isak's home), was operating out of the



individuals who challenged Law No.20/2003 on the National Education System, which limits free education only to state schools. The Court found this law violated Article 31(2) of the Constitution, which states: "Every citizen must acquire elementary education, and the government is obliged to shoulder the costs." Presiding Judge Enny Nurbaningsih said the limited capacity of public schools often forces students to attend private institutions, underscoring the need for state support in both sectors.

Yuli Ismartono (yismartono@lontar.org)

of my home in Pejompongan. I hadn't forgotten about my hope of helping to introduce Pramoedya to the world but now I had something bigger in mind: to introduce not just one Indonesian literary voice to the world but an entire chorus of voices.

...Not that I had been twiddling my thumbs as the aforementioned anthology of stories by Pramoedya gestated. I was busy paying the rent translating the turgidly-written monthly journal, *The Indonesian Economy*, for Soemitro Djojohadikoesoemo but, at the same time, satiating my soul by translating literary work. In 1983 and 1985, respectively, Ohio University Press published my translations of the novels, *The Fall and the Heart* by S. Rukiah and *Shackles* by Armijn Pane; now I was working with Louisiana State University Press on the final galleys of *And the War is Over*, a novel by Ismail Marahimin. But then, as ended my previous "Rumination," I received a letter postmarked "NYC."

Said letter came from Will Schwalbe, a former journalist who had been based in Hong Kong but was now working for William Morrow and Company in New York. In a history course at Yale in 1982, Will told me in that initial letter, he had been assigned to read *The Fugitive* (*Perburan*), Pramoedya's 1950 novel. The novel haunted him, he said. Five years later, he still couldn't get it out of his mind and though he had also read the recently-published first volumes in Pramoedya's "Buru Quartet," he strongly believed that to introduce Pramoedya to the North American reading public (if not beyond), it would be best done through that early novel.

Long story short, Will convinced his colleagues that he thought that publication of *The Fugitive* in English would be an interesting bet. Soon after, he managed to phone Pramoedya who responded to Will's proposal with three words: "Ben Anderson, Cornell." Will, thereafter, contacted preeminent Indonesia scholar Ben Anderson to see if he would translate the novel. Ben declined the offer but suggested "John McGlynn" instead—which was the incentive behind that first letter of Will's to me.

Busy as I was, having just established Lontar (but lacking the wherewithal to produce much of anything), the prospect of paid literary translation work was inviting. Further, because the novel was relatively short, I could work on its translation in my spare time. But what really



Two lontar manuscripts, the lower one laid out as it would normally be read; the upper one laid out in the shape of a fan like a lontar leaf.

AUTHOR OF THE MONTH



Arti Purbani. Photo courtesy of basabasi.co

Arti Purbani was the pen name of Bendoro Raden Ayu Partini Djajadiningrat. Born into the Mangkunegaran royal family in 1902, her father, Raden Mas Soerjosoeparto, would eventually become Prince Mangkunegara VII. She was educated at the First European Elementary School (Eerste Europeesche Lagere School) but also received instruction in Javanese culture and literature at home, the Mangkunegara palace in Surakarta.

She married Hoesein Djajadiningrat, a philologist and the first Indonesian to obtain a PhD from Leiden University. Together they had six children.

From a young age, Arti Purbani was fond of writing. Surprisingly, however, neither her father nor her highly-educated husband, approved of her hobby. Presumably, it was for this reason that when she did begin to publish, she adopted a pen name.

Partini's pen-name takes the middle part of her actual name, *arti*, the word for "meaning" while *purbani* translates as "ancient" (*purba*) with a feminizing *-ni*. Arti Purbani thus can be read as "the woman who understands the meaning of the old days."

Though best known for her novel, *Widyawati*, forthcoming in English under the title *A Scented Prison*, she penned four other novels and a number of short stories and folk tales as well. She died in 1998.

convinced me to take on the job was not the money but, rather, the assumption that a surge in international interest in Pramoedya would lead to a search by international publishers for more voices from Indonesia and, in that search, to Lontar.

William Morrow published my translation of *The Fugitive* in 1990.

In a "conversation" between author-editor Harold Augenbraum and Will titled "Fear of the Word," which I commissioned for

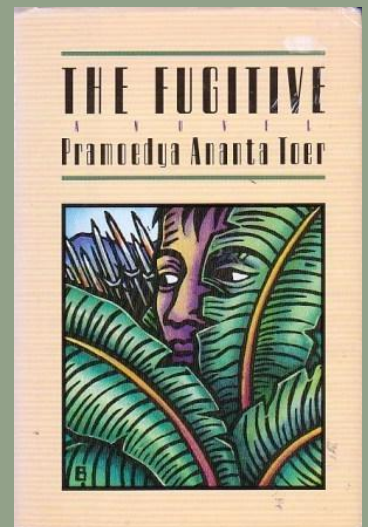
The first-edition cover of *The Fugitive*.

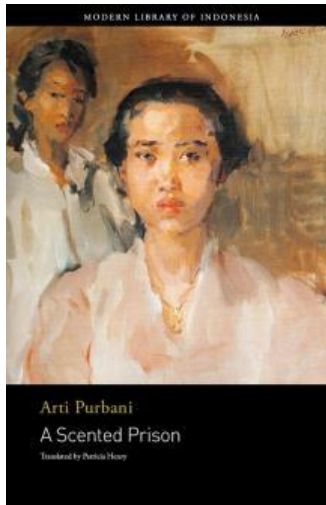
publication in the literary journal *Manoa* two decades later, Will recounted the story of that publication, snippets of which I quote here: "[W]hen our edition of *The Fugitive* came out, it got phenomenal reviews." "The book got a full-cover spread in the *Los Angeles Times* with a wonderful line drawing of Pramoedya and a caption that read 'Indonesia's Solzhenitsyn.' The review basically concluded that if Pramoedya didn't win the Nobel Prize, there was no justice in the world." "Starting with *The Fugitive*, the critical attention to [Pramoedya's] work has been phenomenal. And now, thankfully, the North American sales are starting to correspond to the spectacular reviews."

I do not include these quotes for the purpose of self adulation. Please recall, I hoped that fame for Pramoedya would lead to interest from publishers abroad towards a chorus of Indonesian literary voices. What I discovered with publication of *The Fugitive*, however—a lesson I would see repeated time and again in the decades ahead—is that the publishing industry or, at least, its more commercially oriented wing, is not dissimilar from the music industry. By and large, publishers are looking for lead singers, not a chorus or a band.

In the greater history of rock and roll, the lead singer has generally been just one player on the team, the one most responsible for calling the plays and for setting the tone, to be sure, but ascendancy on the charts meant a win for the entire band, not just the lead singer. Can you have Lou Reed without the Velvet Underground or Chrissie Hynd but not the Petenders? Of course, you can; there is always room for soloists but full appreciation of a lead singer's talents does not come without the complement of the entire band.

John McGlynn (john_mcglynn@lontar.org)





In the twilight of the Dutch colonial rule of the Netherlands East Indies, the courts of Central Java were pockets of archaic royal custom being jostled by progressive new ideas. Widati, the leading character in this novel, *A Scented Prison*, struggles to find her way between these two worlds as a young woman in love, who longs for authenticity of expression and the liberty to serve the human community.

A Scented Prison, first published in Indonesian under the title *Widyawati*, is very much centered on the lives of women of various social standings. Widati's family is not of the elite class, though high enough so that she can attend a school with some of them. She has long conversations with Waginah, a servant her own age; is comforted by Mbah Wiro, her former nanny; and mingles with neighbor children when her stepmother isn't looking. She also observes the hardships of lower-class women, and has great sympathy for them, hoping to use her education to improve their lot.

Also prominent in this novel, are Javanese rituals, especially as practiced by the elites—everything from birth to death, including rituals of marriage, pregnancy, child birth, coming-of-age birthday parties, circumcision, and funerals. We are given details about every aspect of these and many other ceremonial occasions as well.

Surat dari Pejompongan

PARTINI

Kawan Moer,

Sudah lama aku tertarik pada cerita anak. Itu pengalaman masa kecil yang terbangkitkan kembali ketika aku dewasa. Setelah menikah dan punya anak, aku terbiasa membacakan cerita buat anak-anakku menjelang mereka tidur. Kadang-kadang, aku malah menceritakan kisah-kisah di seputar keluargaku sebisanya buat anak sulungku, terutama, karena ia ingin benar mengetahui kehidupan ayahku—kakeknya yang telah berpulang sebelum ia dilahirkan.

Tapi, kali ini aku ingin berbagi cerita tentang cerita anak karangan Partini Djajadiningrat. Ia dikenal dengan nama samaran Arti Purbani dan novelnya *Widyawati* (1949) akan diterbitkan Lontar tahun ini berdasarkan terjemahan Patricia Henry. Selain novel tersebut, ia juga menulis cerita anak, misalnya *Hasta Cerita* (1964), *Ande-Ande Lumut* (1976) dan *Sepasar dan Satu Malam* (1971). Karyanya yang lain adalah novel tentang kasih tak sampai anak muda dari kalangan ningrat ningrat *Tunjung Biru* (1985).

Jika pada keempat bukunya ia menggunakan nama pena Arti Purbani, pada *Sepasar dan Satu Malam* ia menggunakan nama Ny. Husein Djajadiningrat. Kita tahu, Partini adalah istri Hoesein Djajadiningrat, seorang sejarawan pertama Indonesia yang lulus dari Universitas Leiden pada 1913. Buku ini ditulis sebagai semacam kado untuk anak-anaknya. Setelah halaman judul ada keterangan “Untuk: Anak-anakku, Dari: P. Djajadiningrat”.

Sepasar dan Satu Malam adalah cerita berbingkai. Cerita pokoknya adalah kedatangan seorang nenek, Eyang Purwasastra—nama tokoh yang sangat terkait dengan kepujanggan di masa lalu—kepada lima cucunya (Arbi, Ams, Indradi, Mira, Darini). Nah, kepada cucu-cucunya ia memberikan hadiah masing-masing satu cerita. Dengan bonus satu cerita pada malam terakhir sebelum sang nenek pulang ke kotanya.

Masing-masing cerita dalam buku itu selalu berkaitan dengan kejadian sehari-hari. Dengan kata lain: pesan moral cerita dimanfaatkan untuk mengomentari atau “meluruskan” sifat melenceng anak-anak. Misalnya, anak yang serakah, sebagaimana Ams yang ingin bermain sekaligus mendengarkan cerita, akan mendapatkan ganjaran cerita “Walang Sintrong”, tentang Joko Sembotok yang serakah dan mendapatkan hukuman karena sifat buruk itu. seorang kurator festival berat

Arbi yang menangis karena bonekanya diduduki oleh Ams, pada malam hari mendapatkan hiburan cerita “Paman Bangau” yang menceritakan bagaimana seekor bangau mencari tempat perlindungan sampai akhirnya ia menduduki sarang burung gemak dan menghancurkan

A Call for Translation Funding



Speakers at the National Book Day event: Yoris Sebastian (moderator), Leila S. Chudori, Asma Nadia, and Alya Putri

It was standing-room only in the auditorium of the H.B. Jassin Literary Documentation Center on Saturday, May 17, when the Ministry for Creative Economy convened a meeting of book-related personnel to commemorate the 23rd anniversary of National Book Day (Hari Buku Nasional).

In the first part of the event, audience members listened in rapt attention to readings by popular authors Leila S. Chudori and Asma Nadia but the most interesting part of the event was the discussion and Q&A session that followed.

Aimed primarily at generating suggestions to the Creative Economy Ministry on how to strengthen the nation's book industry through exploitation of "book content," a long list of suggestions emerged. Most prominent among them was re-establishment of KBN, the National Book Committee, (or establishment of a new body of similar focus) which was disbanded by the previous government.

During KBN's five years of existence, its participation in international book fairs and, most importantly, its Translation Funding Program, had foreign publishers lookig to Indonesia for content and generated exponential growth in the sale of rights to Indonesian books abroad.

telur-telurnya. Dan seterusnya.

Di hadapan cerita yang punya pesan moral yang kuat, anak-anak dengan sendirinya mengalami "penertiban moral" sampai pada akhirnya kegaduhan di awal—karena anak-anak yang suka bertengkar dan mau menang sendiri—berangsur-angsur kembali kepada perilaku yang baik. Sebelum naik kereta, sang nenek berpesan kepada cucu-cucunya untuk jangan suka berkelahi dan jangan menyusahkan orang tua. Pesan singkat itu sudah lebih dari cukup.

Perubahan perilaku itu sebenarnya berhulu pada cerita berbingkai yang lebih lampau lagi. Itulah *Hikayat Seribu Satu Malam* yang menjadi model cerita-cerita Partini dalam buku ini. Syahdan, Syahrazad memberanikan diri menjadi permaisuri Raja Syahriar dan menunda kematiannya dengan cerita berantai. Raja Syahriar yang semula membunuh istrinya itu akhirnya takluk di hadapan kekuatan cerita, dalam pesona kata-kata Syahrazad. Perilakunya yang maniak berubah menjadi beradab dan pengasih. Ia membiarkan Syahrazad hidup terus, sebab darinya ia berhadap kelangsungan kehidupannya yang akan datang, generasi penerusnya.

Bung, aku menikmati cara Partini membikin cerita anak seperti ini. Meskipun *Sepasar dan Satu Malam* tergolong buku lama, tetapi pesonanya tetap muncul setiap kali dibaca. Jika sekarang ini buku cerita anak dipenuhi oleh petuah moral religius, Partini tidak ke sana, meski ia tetap menekankan moral yang baik untuk anak-anak. Nikmatilah bahasa Indonesianya yang agak klasik, tetapi selalu dalam struktur yang kokoh—dengan kata lain: beres. Jarang ada buku cerita anak di Indonesia hari ini yang mampu mendayagunakan bahasa Indonesia secara baik.

Ah, rasanya aku kelewat banyak menggadang-gadang sesuatu yang berasal dari masa silam dan menggerutu saja terhadap apa-apa yang ada hari ini. Mungkin aku harus lebih sabar untuk menunggu, atau membaca lebih saksama, khazanah cerita anak yang ada hari ini. Mudah-mudahan aku bisa menikmatinya.

Salam, Bung, untuk anakmu yang pernah bertualang ke kutub selatan itu. Sehat selalu buatmu dan keluarga. **Zen Hae** (zenhae@lontar.org)

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