



Lontar Newsletter

Email: contact@lontar.org

June, 2025

Greetings

While everyone should be in favor of “efficiency,” so-called government efficiency programs have resulted in widespread economic uncertainty and, with that, a downward trend in philanthropic giving.

Late last year, the *2024 Doing Good Index Report*, issued by the Center for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), revealed that Indonesia's policies related to philanthropic activities and social initiatives have been stagnant and even barely able to encourage the progress of these activities in the last six years. The report also showed that the policies and ecosystems of the philanthropic and non-profit sectors in Indonesia have not undergone much-needed change and improvement. As a result, it does not support citizen initiatives to “do good.”

We have yet to see what this year's CAPS report will reveal but, on the ground, at Lontar, we have witnessed in the past few months a precipitous drop in public and corporate donations, a situation that threatens not only the continuation of Lontar's publications program but the foundation's very existence.

Lontar has numerous publications in the pipeline, at least eight of which we hope to bring out this year, but will be unable to without assistance. This list of titles includes:

- *A Scented Prison*, an early Indonesian novel by Arti Pubani;
- *Winarta*, a novella set during the revolution by Basuki Gunawan;
- *Bush Fire*, new translations of the body of poems by Chairil Anwar;
- *Larasati*, an early novel by Indonesia's

Ruminations

Red Herring

Contrary to a frequent assertion in international media articles about Indonesia, most Indonesian's do NOT have just one name—at least no longer, in the 21st century, when I can count on one hand the number of Indonesians I know who have just one. The historical basis for this misconception is likely linked to the fact that most international news about Indonesia is Java-centric and that in the past the Javanese did not traditionally use surnames. I have no hard data to bolster my assertion but I would say it's only “recently,” in the second quarter of the 20th century, that a growing number of Indonesians, Javanese in particular, began to adopt family names. A name is kinship.

I also believe this trend can be at least partially attributed to Indonesia's egotistical first president who added “Sukarnoputri” or “Sukarnoputra” (“Daughter of Sukarno” or “Son of Sukarno”) to his children's first names. Further, I see this custom really taking off during the New Order (1966–1998), under President Soeharto, when his children began to be referred to in the mass media as “So-and-so Suharto”—even though the president's children did not officially carry their father's name. Indonesians had begun to see the usefulness of a family name, especially when it could be used to curry favor, secure deals, or get off the hook. A name is influence.

As in other respects, Pramoedya Ananta Toer was ahead of the curve in Javanese tradition when it came to the use of a family name. “Mastoer” was his father's name and, as a young adult, Pramoedya had used it as a surname. Later, however, when beginning to make a mark for himself, he chose to drop “Mas” and keep only “Toer” as his family name. In Javanese, “Mas” is a respectful term of address, generally used for males who are older yet still close in age to the speaker. However, as the term is also used by domestic servants when addressing the male children of their household—even very young male children—it has an odor of superiority, one that Pramoedya found offensive and was, he felt, a misrepresentation of his own socio-economic background. A name is identity.

Regardless of Pramoedya's use of a family name, as is the Indonesian way, when he published *The Fugitive (Perburuan)* to national acclaim in 1952 he was henceforth referred to not by “Toer” but by his first name, “Pramoedya,” or simply “Pram.”

most famous author, Pramoedya Ananta Toer;

- *Reading the Signs*, 100 poems by preeminent poet Taufiq Ismail spanning 50 years;
- *Tambera*, a novel by Indonesian political exile Utuy Tatang Sontani;
- *The Mute's Soliloquy* (2nd ed.), the highly praised memoir of Pramoedya Ananta Toer.

The production cost of a Lontar title averages between Rp. 100 and 150 million. I hope that you (or you and a group of your friends) will consider sponsoring a Lontar publication. Full sponsorship brings with it acknowledgment in one of the title's credit page. If full sponsorship of a title is not possible, please consider giving an untied cash contribution to Lontar of any amount. All contributions, no matter how small, are much needed and greatly appreciated.

Instructions on how to give to Lontar can be found on the last page of this newsletter.

Over the years, Lontar has published 250+ books with translations of literary texts by 800+ Indonesian authors. Through its publications program Lontar has made possible the teaching of Indonesian literature ANYWHERE in the world through the medium of English

The world is in deep flux today: bonds between countries have loosened and cultural misunderstanding is rife. Translated literature is one way to meet the great need to bring countries together. And as any reader knows, literature can assuage unease by taking readers to a place outside their own troubles, stimulate ideas, facilitate understanding and communication, and inspire us to survive and even thrive.

We hope you can find it in your hearts to help Lontar to continue providing inspiration to Indonesians and, indeed, the world.

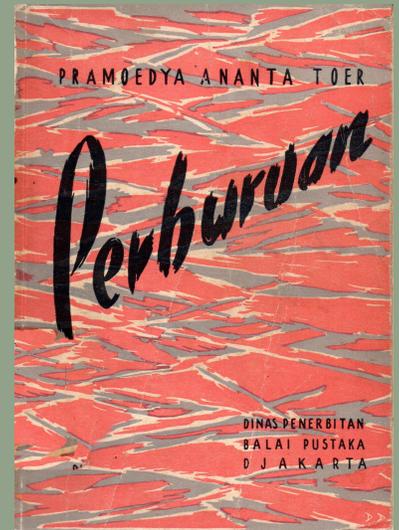
In the 1950s, Pramoedya proved himself to be not just a talented writer but a very productive one as well. By the early 1960s, "Pramoedya" was a household name; his books were being read; his opinion pieces commented on. And this is where the trouble for him began....

In 1963, Pramoedya published *Hoakiau di Indonesia (The Chinese in Indonesia)* in which he presented a sympathetic picture of the country's ethnic Chinese. So what, one might ask. So because at that time the Cold War was raging and the People's Republic of China was widely seen by the Indonesian military and anti-Communist governments in the West as having designs on Indonesia, Southeast Asia's biggest domino. Military pressure led to Pramoedya's imprisonment, without trial, for close to a year. A name can breed suspicion.

Pramoedya also came under attack for his socialist views, as expressed in his opinion pieces, and for his strident criticism of people whom he felt were inconsistent in their support of the populist goals of the Indonesian revolution. For this, he earned many enemies and thus, in October 1965, in the midst of the mayhem that engulfed the nation following the so-called "Abortive Communist Coup," these foes of his—many writers among them—delighted in his arrest and did not protest his later banishment to the Buru Island penal colony. A name has consequences.

In October 1987, when I established the Lontar Foundation—eight years after Pramoedya's release from Buru and a full 22 years since the time of his imprisonment—this animosity towards Pramoedya had not diminished. In fact, among certain authors, it had grown stronger but was now, I suspected, being kindled by their envy of the author's creativity, productivity, and growing popularity, especially among younger Indonesians.

Although I counted Pramoedya as a friend, I wanted the support of all Indonesian authors for Lontar's mission, including and especially that of two prominent authors whose names I will not mention. I asked Pramoedya if he'd be willing to meet these two authors at my home. He agreed. I then approached said two authors and invited them to meet Pramoedya. Both told me, in no uncertain terms, they would not willingly sit in the same room with Pramoedya and would not have anything to do with persons who were associated with him.



First edition Indonesian cover of *Perburuan (The Fugitive)*

AUTHOR OF THE MONTH



Taufiq Ismail at a seminar in February 2025

TAUFIQ ISMAIL, poet, activist, and editor was born in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra, on June 25, 1935, he was reared in a teacher and journalist family. He began his career as a writer in the turbulent political period the early 1960s and was a noted critic of President Sukarno's "Guided Democracy" program. In 1963, he signed the "Cultural Manifesto" (*Manifest Kebudayaan*), a document that opposed the linking of art to politics; his stance cost him his teaching position at the Bogor Agricultural Institute.

Following Sukarno's overthrow in 1966, Taufiq began to figure prominently in Indonesia's literary scene and is considered one of the pioneers of the "Generation of '66" (*Angkatan '66*).

Taufiq was twice invited to participate in the Iowa Writers Program. Over the years, he was a prominent member of the Jakarta Arts Council and, from 1973 to 1978, was head of the Jakarta Arts Institute. As the author of more than a dozen collections of poetry and other work, Taufiq has won many awards, including the SEA Write Award in 1994.

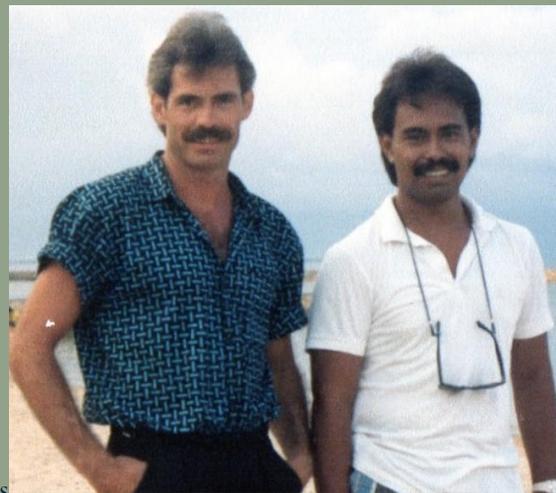
From the very beginning of Taufiq's career as a poet, his poems have frequently embodied a critical perspective on societal issues and political structures.

Hmmm... Thus, it was this troubling situation that prompted me to adopt a penname when deciding to translate *The Fugitive*—not for fear of possible repercussions from the Soeharto government but because of the divisiveness within Indonesia's literary community.

In a world where it once was so that a feminine name would be a hindrance to public acceptance of an author's work, perspicacious female authors adopted masculine pseudonyms. Take Mary Ann Evans, for instance, author of *Middlemarch*, who published under the name "George Eliot," and other female authors such as Louisa May Alcott, who wrote under the name A.M. Barnard, and Amandine Lucie Aurore Dupin, who is better known as George Sand. Even much more recently, Joanne Rowling was persuaded by her editor to adapt the penname "J.K. Rowling" so as to better appeal to young male readers. A name is a mask.

So it was that when thinking of possible noms de plume, I thought "Why not a woman's name?" I came up with a number of possibilities. Glynis Johns was at the top of my list but a popular British actress had her claim on that name. Sarah Hamil, the name of my great grandmother was another but what with "hamil" meaning pregnant in Indonesian, I decided against that one as well. The ironic thing, however, is that when I proposed the use of a female pen name to Will Schwalbe at William Morrow and Co., his female colleagues disapproved. A name is appropriation.

My partner at the time was Willem Samuel Soeitoe. With his permission, I took his first two names and added a final "s" to his middle name, thereby creating "Willem Samuels"—a name which could that of an English speaker of Dutch descent. That made a certain amount of sense. And so it was, for my translations of works by Pramoedya—*The Fugitive*, *The Mute's Soliloquy*, *The Girl from the Coast*, and others—that is who I became. A name is a red herring.



With the original Willem Samuels in 1987.

John McGlynn (john_mcglynn@lontar.org)



Anthony "Tony" Reid

Anthony "Tony" Reid passed away in Canberra on Sunday, June 8. Born in New Zealand in 1939 and educated at the University of Wellington and Cambridge, Reid became one of the most influential historians of Southeast Asia in the 20th and early 21st centuries. His groundbreaking works—*Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, *The Contest for North Sumatra*, *An Indonesian Frontier*, and many more—reshaped global understandings of the region's interconnected pasts.

He was deeply committed to collaborative research and institutional capacity-building, particularly through his leadership roles at institutions such as the Australian National University and as founding director of the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore.

Tony's contributions to Southeast Asian Studies were significant, and he was known for his collaborative research and institution-building efforts. He played a key role in developing the field in the region, fostering scholars and advocating for Southeast Asian voices.

His work is remembered for emphasizing the region's dynamism, diversity, and interconnectedness. His vision of the region as a dynamic, plural, and interconnected space will continue to inspire and guide historical inquiry for years to come.

Surat dari Pejompongan

PROTES

Kawan Moer,

Sastra memang tidak hidup di ruang hampa. Aku setuju. Sastra hidup dalam darah-daging kehidupan penyairnya. Jika seorang penyair tinggal di sebuah kota yang berengsek, maka sangatlah masuk akal jika dia akan kasih protes pada keadaan semacam itu. Protes, dalam hal ini, adalah semacam resolusi agar keadaan yang tidak mengenakan itu bisa berubah menjadi lebih baik.

Namun, orang sering lupa bahwa bukanlah tugas puisi mengupayakan perubahan itu. Seorang penyair protes bisa lupa akan keterbatasan ini jika dia sudah telanjur silau oleh sanjungan dan tepuk tangan. Tugas sastra dalam hal ini hanyalah mengingatkan atau membuat orang gelisah untuk segera memikirkan bahwa keadaan kita sedang tidak baik-baik saja. Perubahan itu tentu saja mesti dikasih tanggung jawab kepada penyelenggara kota yang memang mendapatkan amanat untuk itu.

Puisi protes juga membuktikan bahwa perhatian seorang penyair terhadap isu-isu yang krusial akan melatih kepekaannya sebagai manusia. Sebab menulis karya sastra kan memang salah satu tujuannya adalah melatih kepekaan kita kepada sesuatu, agar dari kepekaan itu kita bisa mengambil tindakan yang tepat. Dengan empati tertentu kita kemudian membantu orang yang kesusahan dan seterusnya.

Tindakan baik itu tentu saja adalah tanggung jawab yang biasa di antara warga kota. Dia menjadi istimewa bukan karena dilakukan oleh seorang penyair atau pejabat tertentu, tetapi karena dengan begitu terbangun kesetiakawanan di antara warga kota. Hati yang penuh empati akan lebih mudah melakukan tindakan seperti itu, ketimbang hati yang telanjur putus asa atau tidak peduli sama sekali.

Namun, pekerjaan menulis puisi protes adalah sebuah tindakan yang sangat khusus. Sebagaimana umumnya proses menulis karya sastra lainnya, ia membutuhkan semacam momen soliter yang ketika itu seorang penulis mesti melepaskan dirinya dari semua ingar-bingar itu. Tugasnya kala itu adalah menulis karya yang terbaik. Lain tidak.

Aku jadi ingat kata Rabih Alemaddine, seorang penyair Amerika Serikat keturunan Suriah, saat datang ke Jakarta beberapa tahun silam, "Kewajiban seorang sastrawan adalah menulis karya terbaik, dan kewajiban utama karya sastra adalah mengatakan kebenaran."

Itulah kenapa sebuah puisi protes tidak bisa dibikin asal-asalan. Jika hanya sekadar melampiaskan kemarahan, semua orang bisa melakukan itu. Karena yang melakukan protes adalah seorang penyair—si ahli kata-kata—maka sudah semestinya protesnya itu lebih berkelas daripada, misalnya, protes para demonstran di pinggir jalan. Apa yang berkelas dalam hal ini tentu saja kita sudah tahu. Dengan sendirinya kita bisa

UPCOMING SALE



“Legong Dancer,” by Krijono

Remember how, over the years, your family’s home gradually filled up with items your parents had inherited, knick-knacks they had acquired, and *oleh-oleh* they brought back with them from trips to other cities and countries? Well, a similar thing has happened to Lontar and now we have on our premises a surplus of “ABCs”:

- Artwork (paintings, etchings, prints, posters);
- Books (landmark publications); and
- Craftwork (sculpture, puppets, cloth, and other items).

As much as we love these items, it is time to find new homes for them—for which reason Lontar is planning to hold a sale and is, at this time, constructing a landing page in which images and details of all the items for sale will be presented.

A link to this landing page will be made available in our next newsletter.

Pre-Sale sales are possibly, however, and in the spirit of “the early bird gets the worm,” interested parties are invited to stop by at Lontar’s office to view (and purchase) items for sale during regular office hours, from 10 AM to 4 PM, Monday to Friday.

kita bisa membedakan mana emas mana loyang.

Situasi ideal ini belum tentu bisa dicapai. Sebab sudah banyak buktinya bahwa puisi protes terjatuh kepada sekadar ungkapan kemarahan. Bagiku puisi “Nyanyian Angsa” karya Rendra atau “Karangan Bunga” karya Taufiq Ismail adalah dua puisi protes yang berhasil. Contoh yang bagus ini masih bisa diperpanjang lagi. Tapi, poinku adalah bahwa tidak mudah sebenarnya menulis puisi protes.

Ketika menerbitkan puisi-puisi dalam kumpulan *Ayat-Ayat Api* Sapardi Djoko Damono pernah bilang, “Kalau sedang marah, jangan menulis puisi.” Peringatan itu benar adanya. Tidak semua peristiwa sosial yang terjadi di sekitar penyair mesti segera dituliskan. Yang merangsang daya cipta itu mesti diendapkan lagi. Mengendapkan ini adalah langkah penting agar kita bisa menemukan inti sugu peristiwa dan membuang limbahnya. Tanpa pengendapan, protes itu, sekali lagi, akan sama saja dengan yang lain-lain.

Begitulah jika kita membaca kembali puisi-puisi protes Taufiq Ismail—yang barusan berulang tahun yang ke-90. Tidak semua puisi protesnya berhasil. Dalam puisi-puisinya yang terakhir malah lebih kelihatan kerewelan seorang tua ketimbang kepiawaian seorang penyair. Namun, kukira, itu semacam godaan yang tidak bisa dihindari. Itulah godaan popularitas dan tanggung jawab sosial sebagai penyair papan atas di republik ini.

Aku justru lebih bisa menikmati puisi-puisi lirik Taufiq Ismail yang justru tidak punya keinginan untuk memprotes ini dan itu. Cara dia melukiskan suasana—dalam puisi “Lagu Unggas Lagu Ikan” misalnya—adalah yang terbaik di masa-masa itu. Justru puisi jenis ini menjadi berwatak politis ketika ia tidak hendak mengatakan apa-apa. Dia menjadi politis karena membisu di tengah derau politik yang memekakkan telinga.

Ah, kukira aku sudah kelewat banyak merepet tentang puisi protes. Sudah dulu ya, Bung. Kapan-kapan kusambung lagi. Salam. **Zen Hae** (zenhae@lontar.org)

Donate to Lontar through our account:

Account Name: Yayasan Lontar Nusantara

Bank Name: Bank Negara Indonesia (BNI)

Bank address: Jl. Bendungan Hilir Raya, Jakarta 10210

Account number: 0461 2005 62, Swift code: CENA IDJA

Persons who pay taxes in the U.S. can make tax-deductible contributions to our organization's fund through Myriad USA. (Myriad USA partners with Every.org to provide a dedicated donation page for Lontar.) To donate, go to <https://www.every.org/the-lontar-foundation>

