



Lontar Newsletter

Email: contact@lontar.org

July, 2025

Greetings

First and foremost, as Executive Director of the Lontar Foundation, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to each and every one who responded to the SOS for financial assistance posted in last month's newsletters. We are still short of the targeted amount we need to get through the year ahead but with the donations thus far received, Lontar now has more breathing room and will be able to proceed with its activities and programs for several months to come.

Like numerous other cultural organizations, ever since the devastating Covid pandemic Lontar has been struggling to stay afloat, a situation worsened by government "efficiency" programs both in Indonesia and abroad. Understandably, funding priorities have narrowed, both here and elsewhere, with a greater focus placed on such sectors as health and education. As such, your contributions are more important and more needed today than ever before.

With the establishment of the first-ever Ministry of Culture under the government of President Prabowo Subianto, we hold high hopes that "cultural affairs," a sector that had previously come under the domain of the Ministry of Education (with a considerably smaller operational budget) will begin to play a greater role in the course of the nation's socio-economic development. The new Ministry of Culture, under the leadership of Fadli Zon, has in its portfolio *Dana Indonesiana* (the "Indonesiana Fund"). Managed by LPDP, the Education Fund Management Institute, this fund, with an endowment of Rp. 5 trillion (US\$ 303.8 million), aims to support cultural heritage,

Ruminations

Building Blocks

As a boy, I loved to build things with the toys that appeared under the Christmas tree: building blocks, Lincoln Logs, Tinker toys, Erector sets and the like.

Although initially I had not wanted to use a pseudonym when translating Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel, *The Fugitive*, after its publication in 1989 it became evident I had made a prudent choice. Pramoedya's vilifiers were more vocal than I had expected and I was now convinced that if my work with and for the author were widely known, this would lead to negative repercussions for Lontar. By having adopted a nom de plume, even those maligners who knew I was translating Pram's could plausibly deny knowing that Willem Samuels was John McGlynn. It was very much a "don't-ask-don't-tell situation"—similar to what I'd experienced in college when, on weekends, I'd go home to see my parents with a male friend in tow. Had I told my parents that my friend was, in fact, my boyfriend, this likely would have led to confrontation. Thus, similarly, with neither party asking questions or speaking out, all was normal and fine in the world.

In 1982 Penguin Australia published *This Earth of Mankind* and in 1984 *Child of All Nations*, the first two volumes of Pramoedya's Buru Quartet.

In 1988 PEN America named Pramoedya as recipient of its Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award, one designed to honor writers who have fought courageously in the face of adversity for their right to freedom of expression. While this was prior to the publication of *The Fugitive*, Will Schwalbe, who would become Pram's unofficial literary representative, was one of the people who had submitted Pramoedya's name for consideration. The next year, PEN America awarded Pram a monetary grant from its "PEN-America Fund for Freedom of Expression."

- 1989: William Morrow of New York published *The Fugitive*.
- 1990: Penguin Australia published *Footsteps*, vol.3 of the Quartet.
- 1991: William Morrow released *This Earth of Mankind*.
- 1992: Penguin-Australia published *House of Glass*, volume 4 of the Quartet.
- 1992: Pram was named recipient of both an English PEN Centre Award and the Stichting Wertheim Award (the Netherlands).
- 1993: William Morrow released *Child of All Nations*.

arts and creative innovations. The initial allocation of Rp. 465 billion (US\$ 28.2 million) is aimed at covering a wide range of recipients, including individuals, community organizations and activists in the fields of traditional and contemporary culture.

This is a truly encouraging development, if indeed the program is implemented effectively and judiciously. About the Indonesiana Fund, Minister Zon said, “Our vision is to preserve Indonesia’s rich storytelling traditions and position Indonesia as a competitive player in the global cultural creative economy.” Amen to that. And, as Lontar’s activities fall under the purview of this ministry, we hope to benefit from some of that largesse.

Yuli Ismartono (yismartono@lontar.org)

PS: Last month I mentioned that Lontar would soon hold a sale of artwork, books, and crafts. For technical reasons, this sale has been postponed.



Poncke Princen, Hasjim Rachman, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, and Joesoef Isak at a meeting with the PEN-America delegation

Meanwhile, Schwalbe was arranging for Pramoedya’s works to be translated all over the world. With each new award and publication, interest in Pramoedya abroad grew incrementally and I began to get more requests from foreign journalists to arrange interviews with the author. Some also wanted me to put them in contact with Willem Samuels but I confessed to not having the translator’s contact information.

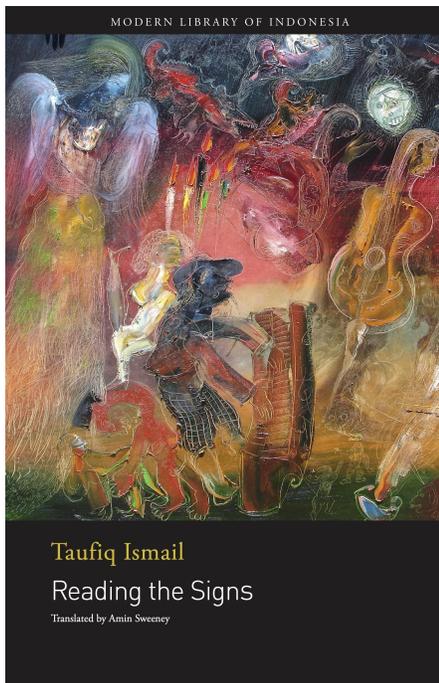
A further boost to Pram’s international reputation abroad came in the wake of a visit to Jakarta by a delegation from PEN America in September 1993. The chief organizer on PEN’s side was Siobahn Dowd, program director of their Freedom-to-Write Committee. Other delegates included Clark Blaise, author and head of the Iowa Writer Program, and Indian-Canadian author, Bharati Mukherjee.

With Lontar serving as host organization, Executive Director Adila Suwarmo arranged several receptions and informal gathering. Meanwhile, I convened two discussions more official in tone. The first, co-sponsored by the Jakarta Arts Council at the Jakarta Arts Institute, had an academic flavor, with such participants as Arswendo Atmowiloto, Goenawan Mohamad, Ikaranagara, Leon Agusta, Nirwan Dewanto, Radhar Panca Dahana, Toeti Heraty, and Umar Kayam. The second, held at a private home, had a more underground-activist feel with participants that included Chalid Arifin, Gerson Poyk, Hasyim Rachmad, Joesoef Isak, Marianne Katoppo, Poncke Princen, Ratna Riantiaro, Satyagraha Hoerip, Pramoedya, and Putu Oka Sukanta.

None of this is to say that Indonesians were sitting by passively as the Soeharto government’s repressive tactics became every more blatant. In 1994 the government had revoked the publishing permits of three influential news outlets—*Tempo*, *Editor*, and *Detik*—which had led to widespread protests and thrown gasoline on the flames beginning to lick at the government’s pseudo-democratic façade.

In 1995, Pramoedya was named that year’s recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay Award in the category of Journalism, Literature, and Creative Communication. Often referred to as Asia’s Nobel Prize, the award

FORTHCOMING



Born in 1935, Taufiq Ismail began to write and make his name as a poet in the mid 1950s. Over the course of the the next decade, he became an important voice in Indonesian literature—and in the country’s social history as well. Both at that time and in the decades ahead, he successfully captured, through his poetry, the natural world with a unique measure of sensitivity. He also stirred up public awareness of pressing socio-political issues, especially social inequality. Almost no socio-political issue escaped the sight of his poetic camera. His poems were turned into songs and sung throughout the nation. His poems are a testimony of the times, exuding intense social commitment with a sophistication of words rarely matched in the history of Indonesian protest poetry.

Reading the Signs contains 100 of the poet’s work dating from a period of more than 50 years. In their reading, from the first to the last, one is able to trace the thematic development of this poet’s work: from worship of nature, to testimony to human suffering, changing political regimes, sojourns in foreign lands, religiosity in modern life, and life-changing catastrophes.

recognizes individuals or organizations in Asia who have made significant contributions to these fields. Mochtar Lubis, a prominent author and previous recipient of the prize (in 1958) strongly protested the choice, threatening to return the prize, and rallying other authors to his cause. (What with the previously mentioned banning of news media, I found it ironic that Mochtar, a former newshand himself, was so vehement in his attacks on Pramoedya, one of only a handful of authors who had consistently spoken out in favor of greater freedom of expression.)

Despite the above controversy—or, maybe, partially because of it—more foreign attention was being focused on the situation regarding human rights and freedom of expression in Indonesia.

- 1995: William Morrow released *Footsteps*. Also that year, Pramoedya was awarded a Hellman-Hammett Award, given by Human Rights Watch.
- 1996: William Morrow released *House of Glass*.

Will Schwalbe, who was now chair of the Freedom to Publish Committee of the Association of American Publishers (AAP), informed me that he was putting together a delegation of representatives from AAP who would like to hear directly, from Indonesians themselves, about the state of freedom of expression in Indonesia.

With Lontar again acting as host organization, and with the advice of numerous political activists as well, I devised plans for a three-day seminar on the subject. The seminar was held at a secluded resort in Puncak, the mountainous area south of Jakarta. Had it been held in Jakarta, it would surely have been shut down.

More than 50 human rights activists from around the country were invited to attend the seminar. The AAP delegation included several prominent publishers and authors who shared a concern about these issues: Wendy Wolf (of Viking), Will Schwalbe, Jeri Laber (a founder of Human Rights Watch), and Amitav Ghosh to name a few. The seminar focused on four topics related to free expression: politics, religion, sex, and education. The forum provided a space where Indonesian activists were able to share their experiences openly and make plans for a future Indonesia in which respect for human rights was guaranteed. While the AAP delegation was there, primarily, to listen, numerous friendships and useful contacts resulted.

I think it was then I realized that what I had intuitively learned as a child, when playing with those gifts from Santa Claus, was true in adult life as well. The analogy is a simple one but the larger or higher the structure you want to build, the greater the number and the more solid building blocks one needs.

John McGlynn (john_mcglynn@lontar.org)



Amin Sweeney in 2006

AMIN SWEENEY, born in England in 1938, was a linguist of Anglo-Irish descent. After graduating from high-school, Sweeney joined the British army and, in 1958, was sent to Malaysia—Malaya at that time—to help stop the communist insurgency. During his time there, he taught himself Malay culture and Islamic studies and, when returning to Britain, converted to Islam. (Previously, his name had been “Patrick Louis.”)

Sweeney's interest in Malay language and literature drove him to study at the School SOAS, the School of Oriental and African Studies, where he completed his doctorate dissertation in Malay literature in 1970. For the next seven years, he served as a lecturer at the National University of Malaysia. Thereafter and until his official retirement in 1998 he taught at the University of California, Berkeley.

Following his move to Jakarta in 1999 and his marriage to Sastri Sunarti, he began to reside in Indonesia full time. Sweeney continued to be productive until his unexpected death in November 2010. As a scholar, he authored numerous monographs and books but the one for which he is most well known is the three-volume *Complete Works of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi*. His most recent (posthumous) publication is *Reading the Signs: the Poetry of Taufiq Ismail*, forthcoming from Lontar.

Surat dari Pejompongan

PERSONALITAS

Kawan Moer,

Suara penulis adalah penting—jika bukan yang terpenting—dalam tulisannya. Ketika menulis seorang penulis sebenarnya tengah memperdengarkan suaranya melalui kata-kata yang dituliskan. Dari situ kita bisa melihat bukan hanya apa yang ia katakan, tetapi juga bagaimana cara ia mengatakannya. Apakah ia mengatakannya dengan membawa kepribadiannya ke dalam tulisannya, atautkah sebaliknya, ia berusaha menghapus kepribadiannya.

Jika ia membawa kepribadiannya ke dalam tulisan, maka kita bisa menarik garis tanpa putus antara dirinya dengan apa yang ia tuliskan. Jika ia menggunakan pronomina “saya”, maka itu berarti saya di dalam tulisan itu sudah bisa dipastikan adalah diri si penyair. Jika ia menuliskan sejarah hidupnya melalui sebuah tulisan, kita bisa menyebutnya sedang menyusun sebuah autobiografi atau biografi tentang dirinya sendiri. Sebaliknya, jika ia tidak menggunakan sudut pandang orang pertama, bukan berarti, ia tidak sedang berbicara tentang dirinya.

Dalam tulisan yang seperti itu, sebenarnya, personalitas si penyair tetap hadir, meskipun dalam tulisannya itu ia menggunakan sudut pandang orang ketiga. Di sini pribadi penulis ditempatkan sebagai orang ketiga, subjek yang diceritakan, oleh pencerita yang justru adalah penulisnya sendiri. Esai panjang “Potret Seorang Penyair Muda Sebagai si Malin Kundang” (1972) karya Goenawan Mohamad adalah esai yang demikian. Goenawan menempatkan dirinya sebagai orang ketiga.

Dalam tulisan itu Goenawan mencoba menempatkan dirinya pada titik tertentu sehingga ia bisa melakukan penilaian yang lebih objektif tentang dirinya sendiri. Atau, jika ia perlu mempertajam sosok pribadinya, ia memperdekat sudut peneropongannya sehingga ia bisa lebih mendetail membicarakan kepribadiannya. Sebaliknya, pada titik tertentu, ia malah mengkritik dan meledek dirinya sendiri. Goenawan, misalnya, menyebut esai pertamanya yang ditulis pada usianya 18 tahun tentang kebebasan seorang pengarang sebagai “esai yang angkuh” dan ia tidak ingat lagi bagaimana kelanjutan pemikirannya itu.

Namun, mengkritik atau meledek diri sendiri terjadi bukan semata-mata karena seorang penulis menggunakan sudut pandang orang ketiga dalam tulisannya. Yang jauh lebih penting sebagai pemicu adalah karena ia berhasil menekan hasrat membagus-baguskan diri sendiri—soal yang lumrah dalam tulisan yang bercorak autobiografis. Dalam konteks ini, seorang penulis merasa perlu mempertahankan marwahnya dengan cara menceritakan yang bagus-bagus saja tentang dirinya. Adapun yang jelek-jelek, kalau bisa, tidak boleh orang lain tahu.

Konon, humor terbaik adalah meledek diri sendiri. Dengan meledek diri sendiri kita sebenarnya sedang mencopot selubung heroisme yang

GOOD NEWS!



In days of so much bad news, it's great to be able to share some good news.

As all book lovers in Jakarta know, there is a dearth of well-stocked book stores in this city and only a select few that carry more than a handful of Lontar titles. Not so now! All Lontar titles are now available at Jalma Book Store, the recently rebranded Gramedia Book Store, on Jalan Melawai III in Blok M.

"Jalma," the name of the store, comes from the Sundanese word which means "person" or "people" and the concept behind this store is that it is a place for people to meet, a community center of sorts where people can discuss topical issues and share ideas.

The store is a book lover's delight with a large space equipped with table and chair for comfortable reading, an open stage for book talks and discussions, a corner especially for children and a coffee shop as well.

Unlike in the past where Gramedia book stores generally featured only Gramedia titles, Jalma carries a huge number of Indie titles, those by Lontar included.

Check it out!



selama ini mungkin kita pertahankan secara mati-matian. Dengan meledek diri sendiri kita bisa melihat diri kita sebagai orang lain, yang jika kita meledeknnya tindakan itu tidak melukai orang lain, sebaliknya, membuat kita tersadar akan kelemahan kita sendiri.

Itulah bedanya puisi protes yang kubilang tempo hari dengan puisi yang punya hasrat meledek diri sendiri. Dalam puisi protes, pribadi seorang penyair berada di ketinggian tertentu dan dari situ ia memandang borok pihak lain atau masyarakat di sekitarnya. Dengan sudut pandang seperti ini si penyair itu hampir tidak bisa melihat dirinya secara kritis sebagaimana ia melihat pihak lain yang selama ini ia kritik.

Sebaliknya, dalam puisi atau tulisan lain yang punya hasrat meledek diri sendiri kita menemukan bukan hanya humor atau ironi, tetapi juga sikap yang dewasa dari seorang penulis. Dengan sikap yang dewasa dia bisa melihat secara sadar dan dengan kepala dingin segala kelemahan dirinya. Sementara pada pribadi yang belum dewasa—terlebih-lebih pada ana-anak—yang kerap muncul adalah sikap melulu ingin dipuja-puji, dibagus-baguskan, jika perlu, lebih bagus dari siapa saja di muka bumi ini.

Sikap dewasa seorang penulis dengan sendirinya mencerminkan sebuah peralihan psikologi yang penting. Kedewasaan membuat kita terbuka kepada intelektualitas. Sebab, kata seorang teman saya, masa remaja dalam puisi Indonesia berlangsung kelewat lama. Salah satu sikap remaja yang muncul adalah gampang terharu dalam melihat keadaan dan masih besarnya hasrat akan tepuk tangan. Kita tahu, para penyair protes di Indonesia, tidak bisa menghindari konflik kepentingan yang satu ini. "Kenes", kata Subagio Sastrowardoyo—ketika membicarakan sosok dan puisi-puisi Rendra.

Puisi Indonesia hari ini mungkin belum banyak beranjak dari apa yang dikatakan Subagio lebih dari 50 tahun lalu. Tapi, di antara keremajaan yang bersimharajalela, baik juga jika kita mengambil sikap yang lebih dewasa. Itu sebuah keputusan politis, kan, Bung! **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

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