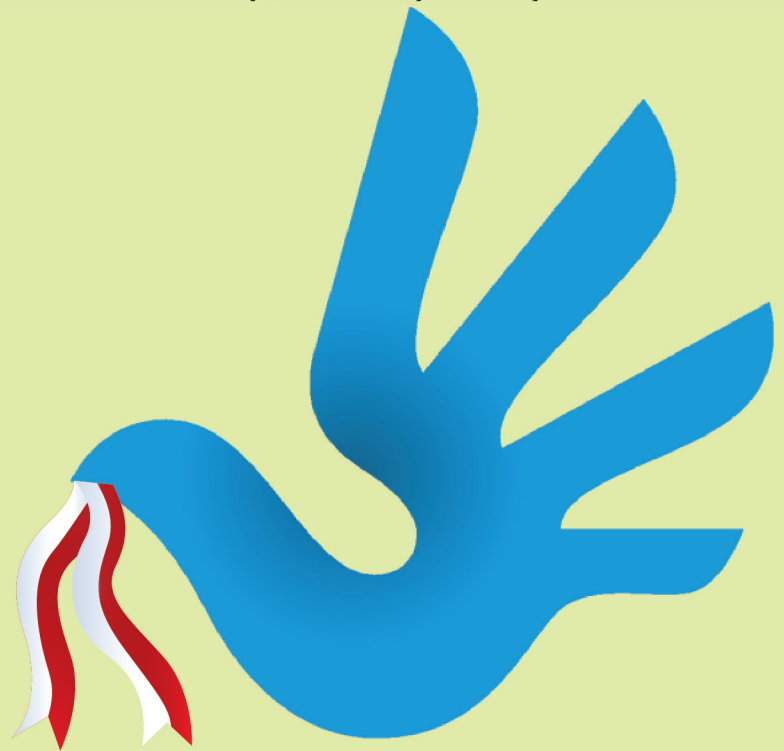


# JURNAL KRITIK

## Human Rights Voice in the Largest Muslim Country

Denny JA's Essay Poetry Phenomenon



Agus R. Sarjono  
Ahmad Gaus  
Ashadi Siregar  
Berthold Damshäuser  
Datuk Jasni Matlani  
Denny JA  
Ignas Kleden  
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Leon Agusta  
Phaosan Jehwae  
Sapardi Djoko Damono  
Sutardji Calzoum Bachri  
Tatang Abdulah

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## EDITORIAL

# The Human Rights Voices from the Largest Muslim Country An Essay Poetry Phenomena

**TATANG ABDULAH**

Will the world continue to have two versions of Human Rights into the distant future? Should human rights violations that are normally denounced according to the criteria of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights be overtly defended and justified by an alternate version? These questions naturally emerged in response to the Muslim world's Declaration of Human Rights in Cairo, 1990.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the version of the Muslim world's Declaration of Human Rights, see: [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cairo\\_Declaration\\_on\\_Human\\_Rights\\_in\\_Islam](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cairo_Declaration_on_Human_Rights_in_Islam).

As many as 45 predominantly Muslim countries convened in 1990. The delegates made some crucial decisions at this assembly. They created a divergent declaration of human rights, based on religious considerations in predominantly Muslim countries. In the Cairo Declaration, they accepted aspects of the official United Nations' version of Universal Human Rights principles to the extent that they did not contravene Islamic law. According to these 45 countries, the principles in Muslim scriptures took precedence over articles of the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights.

The Cairo decision immediately drew harsh criticism. The decision was viewed as a cultural justification to perpetuate human rights violations in Muslim countries and enclaves. For example, the United Nations version of Human Rights confers the right of every human being to change religions wherever he may live. Citizens also have the right to intermarry, i.e. to marry outside their religion. The United Nations version of Human Rights also permits citizens of member states to choose their own interpretation of their religion. LGBT people are also protected. Equal civil rights were bestowed not only to women but also to LGBT people. These major issues were precisely what was opposed in the Cairo version of the Declaration of Human Rights. The universal rights promulgated by the United Nations, e.g. to convert away from one's religion, marry a person of a different religion, and condone the sexual orientation and lifestyle of LGBT, were rejected because they violated sharia, Islamic religious law.

Three decades later, Denny JA's presence is crucial. There are at least three things that make his books and ideas so important.

*First*, Denny JA is a public intellectual who wields influence in the largest Muslim country, Indonesia.

He has been a social activist and advocate for the UN version of Universal Human Rights for many years. In 2012, he established and financed the *Indonesia Without Discrimination Foundation*. He has often spoken out publicly in defense of the right of citizens to choose their own lifestyle. He has defended the rights of Ahmadis, Shiites and other minorities to congregate and pray according to their own religious interpretations. He defended the disputed right of Indonesians to marry someone from a different religious faith. Denny JA is also a progressive advocate of spirituality, which frees individuals to choose their own spiritual depth and path. His talks and essays also express the need to protect the rights of LGBT people.

*Second*, Denny JA has also voiced his concern for universal human rights through literature. In various literary works (*The Forbidden Love of Batman and Robin*, *Waiting for Sodom and Gomorrah in Amsterdam*, *A Gay Ustad*), he has repeatedly raised the issue of LGBT. In his long essay poems, he has also defended the religious rights of minorities, such as Ahmadiyya (*Romi and Yuli from Cikeusik*), and interfaith marriage (*The Desiccated Flower of Separation*). Denny JA has also supported the right

of citizens to oppose their government through peaceful demonstrations; in the essay poem, *Each Thursday Will I Await Your Return*, he highlights the acute enduring pain caused by the brutal “disappearance” of anti-Suharto activists in Indonesia in May, 1998. In Denny JA’s three main anthologies of essay poetry, *In the Name of Love* (2012), *Bread for the Heart* (2014), and *Each Thursday Will I Await You Return* (2018), as well as twenty other literary works, human rights constitute his main focus.

*Third*, and this is very interesting... Denny JA does not just convey the voice of human rights in literature, but he also delivers it through a new literary genre that he “created” himself: *essay poetry*. Essay Poetry is a long, polished poem whose form and content are reminiscent of classic epics; however, their novelty and value result from a blend of poetry, entrepreneurship, and scientific research. Essay poems contain multiple footnotes in the form of research findings, various news reports from the mass media, as well as literature reviews. Denny JA does not place footnotes merely to support the essay content. He made the footnote as important as the poem itself because, according to Denny JA, it is precisely the footnotes that represent the “biological mother”

and historical context of the background story that is rendered in poetry.<sup>2</sup>

This is what makes Denny JA unique. He spoke out loud and clear on the issue of universal human rights as a protest directed toward his own people, and he conveyed his thoughts through the genre of essay poetry, which he created himself. Recently, in 2021, Denny JA received an ASEAN level literary award from Malaysia for his innovations in the world of poetry, awarded by the Sabah Language and Literature Agency.<sup>3</sup> Denny JA has received other major awards as recognition of his contributions to Humanitarian Literature and ASEAN Diplomacy.

The Denny JA phenomenon has colored the Indonesian literary scene during the past ten years. The increasing popularity of essay poetry now extends to several Southeast Asian countries. This led to *Jurnal Kritik* deciding to dedicate a special

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<sup>2</sup> See Denny JA. 2020. *Elucidating Essay Poetry*. Jakarta: CeraH Budaya Indonesia.

<sup>3</sup> Denny JA received an award at the ASEAN level from Malaysia in recognition of his contributions to “Humanistic Literature and ASEAN Diplomacy”: <https://suratdunia.com/2021/03/15/penyair-denny-ja-mendapat-penghargaan-kategori-sastera-kemanusiaan-dan-diplomasi-asean-2021/>

edition regarding Denny JA and essay poetry, which was composed in English so that it could be enjoyed by a large audience of foreign readers.

Major changes occurred in Indonesian politics in 1998. The New Order which had wielded power for 32 years, finally ended after the 1997 economic crisis hit Indonesia, and students took to the streets in protest. After Suharto abdicated the presidency in May, 1998, his New Order regime was followed by *Reformasi*, a reform era that changed and improved many things in Indonesia: enhanced freedom of speech, limitations on the presidential term, and shortly thereafter direct elections (for selecting the president, provincial governors, regents, and mayors). In matters of direct presidential elections, Denny JA was the pioneer in conducting public surveys and formulating political communication. *Lingkarana Survei Indonesia*, Denny JA's political survey institute, became the first and strongest survey institution in Indonesia to date. Three presidents were elected thanks to his "cool hands". This was the first instance when Indonesia witnessed a social activist and intellectual become a successful entrepreneur by turning his expertise in the field of public surveys and political communication into a new business field. His success

prompted the growth of other survey institutions in Indonesia.

However, democratic reforms and greater transparency did not proceed as many people had imagined and expected. Alongside democracy, openness, and freedom of speech, various radical, intolerant, and even anti-democratic voices began to resonate, using the vehicles of democracy against it. Identity politics, which had simmered below the surface during the authoritarian New Order regime, began to emerge and spread everywhere. In fact, at the outset of the reform itself in May 1998, many acts of intolerance and violence, often seething with racism, exploded in Indonesia.<sup>4</sup> There emerged various interest groups that did not only take part in the political sphere but actively fanned

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<sup>4</sup> The violent events in Jakarta (May, 1998) exacted a toll of hundreds of Chinese Indonesian victims, who suffered from arson, looting, beatings, and rape. For a review of these events, see: <https://www.kompas.com/tren/read/2020/05/13/092900265/mengingat-kerusuhan-mei-1998-bagaimana-kronologinya?page=all>;

For more information on interethnic riots related to conflicts in Sampit (South Kalimantan), Ambon, and Poso, and their roots in earlier transmigration policies, see: <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/4058118/kisah-minggu-mencekam-di-kota-ambon-8-tahun-lalu>; <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20201202124935-20-577034/jejak-panjang-konflik-di-poso>; and <https://tirto.id/provokasi-elit-berujung-pembantaian-sampit-cEWZ>.

the flames of ethnic, religious, racial, and intergroup discord, thus inciting even more conflict and violence.

This situation likely made Denny JA feel anxious even though he had arguably benefited financially from reform, democracy, and political openness, which benefited him and his clients who won political office in direct elections. However, in contrast to other survey institutions that sprouted everywhere (all of them trying to achieve similar success), Denny JA became preoccupied and worried about some self-defeating excesses of openness and democracy. He initiated an Indonesian anti-discrimination campaign by founding and funding the *Indonesia Without Discrimination* movement, which was in line with his social advocacy as a former activist. However, the sense of unease he felt as a public intellectual was not assuaged by his involvement in this movement alone.

He had written many essays, research papers, and newspaper columns, published in the mass media and as books, yet even this did not satisfy him. He felt that resistance that could counter the widespread discourse of intolerance and discriminatory actions required a new form of writing, a type of composition that not only presented hard facts but was also able to excite the emotions of the

reader. This would be an essay that could be easily understood by as many readers as possible from different social circles but did not lose its aesthetics; writing that touched the reader's heart and aroused their emotions yet at the same time hit the reader with facts. Essay poetry was born from this restless anxiety; it was a form of literature with fictional characters that is based on a real social context and fortified with footnotes in the form of supporting facts.<sup>5</sup>

His initial literary experiment in this endeavor involved an anthology of *essay poetry*, published under the title *Atas Nama Cinta (In the Name of Love)*, comprised of five long *essay poems: Fang Yin's Handkerchief, Romi and Yuli from Cikeusik, Minah Was Still Beheaded, The Forbidden Love of Batman and Robin, and The Dessicated Flower of Separation*. These long poems describe the tribulations and grief experienced by victims of social intolerance who suffer on the basis of race, ethnicity, social class, religion, and gender discrimination.

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<sup>5</sup> For more information, see Denny JA's introduction to his first book of essay poetry, *In the Name of Love*. Denny J.A. (2012). See also Denny JA et al. (2017). *Portraying Spiritual and Social Issues through Essay Poetry*. South Jakarta: Inspirasi.co Book Project (PT Cerah Budaya Indonesia).



In *Fang Yin's Handkerchief*, Denny JA tells the story of Fang Yin, a young Chinese Indonesian woman who became a victim of violence perpetrated by a gang of hooligans who broke into her house, raped her, and assaulted her family at the height of the May 1998 riots. The monetary crisis had triggered widespread support to overthrow Suharto's New Order regime, and the authoritarian dictator was eventually compelled to step down from the presidency. Some factions involved paramilitary groups who used the general riots as cover to engage in brutal, anarchistic violence that targeted Chinese Indonesians in North Jakarta. This entailed ransacking and burning of Chinese-owned shops, as well as widespread arson and rape in Chinese homes. This long essay poem evokes the trauma Fang Yin experienced in a very touching way.

*Romi and Yuli from Cikeusik* tells the story of the romance between Romi (Romeo), a young Ahmadiyya youth, and Yuli (Juliet), the daughter of an anti-Ahmadiyya religious leader. This loving couple is confronted by the persecution experienced by Ahmadiyya members in Cikeusik, West Java. Romi, who was born into an Ahmadiyya family, is not a fanatic follower of the Ahmadiyya sect. However, Yuli was born into a hardline Muslim community, and her father is an outspo-

ken opponent of Ahmadiyya. The love affair suddenly takes a tragic turn when the couple, having decided to get married, arrange a meeting between their parents.

*Minah Was Still Beheaded* tells the story of a poor Indonesian housewife who in desperation seeks work as a domestic servant in Saudi Arabia in order to support her husband and daughter. However, in Saudi Arabia, Minah is continuously molested by her employer. This state of affairs ends one night after a string of increasingly brutal rapes, when Minah grabs a kitchen knife and ends this torment. She is then sentenced to death because she has killed her employer. Diplomatic channels do nothing to commute her sentence, and Minah is eventually beheaded far away from her beloved family and homeland.

*The Forbidden Love of Batman and Robin* relates the love story of Amir and Bambang, a gay couple,<sup>6</sup> which ironically begins in the setting of a *pesantren* (a religious boarding school). In Indonesia, LGBT cases are not yet open, meaning that they have not been regulated in a legal manner.

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<sup>6</sup> More recently, Denny JA wrote another poem essay about a young lesbian. *Waiting for Sodom and Gomorrah in Amsterdam*, available on youtube: <https://youtu.be/5FoCjwKuBec>



Their right to express a form of sexual orientation that is considered deviant behavior may have been permitted previously (even to the extent of changing gender through sex change operations) but is generally not tolerated by an increasingly conservative Indonesian society. Another thing that is interesting is the difference between the two homosexual characters. Amir's character is based on a passive, "closed" orientation of shame (based on Eastern culture), while Bambang's "open" habits and lack of shame are oriented towards Western culture.

The last essay poem in the book is "The Desiccated Flower of Separation," which tells the tragic story of a loving couple who belong to different religious faiths. The possibility of an interfaith marriage between the Muslim woman, Dewi, and her Christian fiancé, Albert, does not get approval from Dewi's parents. She is consequently prodded to marry a Muslim man she doesn't love to fulfill her parents' religious and social obligations. Her married life with Joko dries up like a desiccated flower, the token of love bestowed by Albert when they had bidden farewell many years before. Due to the obstinate refusal of Indonesian society to accept intermarriage, both of Dewi's relationships sadly dry up and waste away.

These were the themes raised in the anthology, *Atas Nama Cinta*, in the form of five essay poems. The book was published with reviews from three prominent Indonesian literary figures: the poets Sapardi Djoko Damono and Sutardi Calzoum Bachri, and sociologist and intellectual Ignas Kleden. Their three articles are presented in this special English edition of the *Jurnal Kritik* so that we can get an appreciation of the initial positive reception of Denny JA's essay poetry. These three figures are not random names in the world of Indonesian literati and intellectuals.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, it can be concluded that the acceptance of essay poetry as

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<sup>7</sup> Sapardi Djoko Damono is a well-known Indonesian poet who received the "Habibie Award" and "Ahmad Bakri Award". He is a professor at the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Indonesia. Sutardji Calzoum Bachri is an Indonesian avant-garde poet who is famous for his claim to be the "President of Indonesian Poets". He received the *Anugerah Sastra Mastera* from Brunei and the Ahmad Bakri Award. Ignas Kleden is a prominent intellectual and literary critic. He received the Ahmad Bakri Award as a social scientist in the same year Sapardi Djoko Damono received the award as a writer.

<sup>8</sup> This controversy is the most exciting and prolonged controversy in the history of Indonesian literature. The pros and cons lasted more than 2 years and enlivened various media, especially social media. Part of the resolution of this controversy can be seen in Denny JA's recent book, *Elucidating Essay Poetry*.

a valuable new form of poetry devised by Denny JA is quite convincing. Indeed, shortly after the book was published (in 2012) and the essay poetry movement was launched, controversy concerning the legitimacy and value of essay poetry became rampant, especially among young writers.<sup>9</sup>

The following is a list of well-known Indonesian authors who reacted positively to the new poetic genre pioneered by Denny JA. Among them are the poet Jamal D. Rahman, the poet Leon Agusta, and the novelist Ashadi Siregar. In this special edition of *Jurnal Kritik*, Agus R. Sarjono's article (originally included in the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the *Journal Sajak*)<sup>9</sup> is also published; Sarjono's essay contains explanations of literary essays and sci-

entific essays as an initial basis for understanding essay poetry as a movement. Essay poetry subsequently developed and became controversial in Indonesian literary circles, but the controversy did not prevent essay poetry from expanding to foreign countries. Supportive articles by Datuk Jasni Matlani from Malaysia and Phaosan Jehwae from Thailand are examples of how essay poetry has infiltrated into the modern literature of Malay-speaking Southeast Asia.

From his first essay poetry book, Denny JA's main concerns became apparent. The new literary form he devised, essay poetry, was a side product, a sort of by-product, while his main purpose was promoting the anti-discrimination movement and instilling it in the heart of each reader and thereby raising public awareness of the menace of racism, stigmatization, and intolerance, stemming from radical religious interpretations.

More recently, Denny JA has been focusing more on religious issues, particularly related to Islam, following the fairly rapid development of discourse on religious radicalism and violence based on radicalized religious interpretation in various communities, particularly on Indonesian college campuses. It can be seen in subsequent literary works that Denny JA strives to combat religious radicalism

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<sup>9</sup> In a short time, the essay poetry movement has recruited various writers, both writers and intellectuals, academics, and activists, including teachers and lecturers. A number of essay poetry works were published in the early days of the essay poetry movement, including: Ahmad Gaus' *Kutunggu Kamu Di Cisdane* (2012); *Manusia Gerobak* (2013) by Elza Peldi Taher; as well as a number of essay poetry anthologies, including: *Mata Luka Sengkon-Karta* (2013); *From Rangin to Telephone* (2013); *From Singkawang to Sampit* (2013); *Rose of Tears* (2013); *Penari Cinta Anak Koruptor* (2013). It seems that the form of essay poetry whether this was deliberate or not has opened a Pandora's Box in Indonesian history. As essay poetry became mainstream, social wounds buried in the darkness of history suddenly began to be recorded and discussed.

and encourage a more tolerant discourse that promotes democracy, inclusiveness, and tolerance among young Indonesian Muslims.

Islam is the religion practiced by the majority of Indonesians; thus, Indonesian Muslims constitute the largest Muslim community in the world, equal to the combined population of several Arab countries. From a historical perspective, Indonesian Muslims tend to be the most open, relaxed, and democratic Muslim population.<sup>10</sup>

This can be seen in the conduct of major Islamic organizations, such as NU (*Nahdlatul Ulama*) and *Muhamadiyah*. However, following the 1998 reformation, more exclusive groups emerged which espoused radical ideologies. Although these were few in number, they became active on social media; consequently, a more radical discourse of Islam began to spread very rapidly. This phenomenon still

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<sup>10</sup> The violent friction of the Islamic Association vs Ahmadiyya Union, for example, did not lead to discussion, but instead was an open debate that was fair and democratic. See Irsyad Mohammad, "Age of Debates: Dialogue between Ahmadiyya & Islamic Association 1933", in the *Journal of the International Conference on Culture and Language in Southeast Asia (ICCLAS)* 2018. Compare the democratic debate with the persecution of Ahmadiyya as raised by Denny JA in his essay poem, *Romi dan Yuli dari Cikeusik* in Denny JA. Op.cit.

worries large Islamic social organizations. The rapid spread of radical Islam can be seen in the surging popularity of the discourse of a sharia state to replace the long-standing Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (*NKRI*).<sup>11</sup>

This worrisome phenomenon motivated Denny JA to write a provocative article entitled "*NKRI Bersyariah or a Humane Public Space?*" which was responded to by many Indonesian Islamic experts, academics and intellectuals.<sup>12</sup>

Denny JA's struggle to combat Islamic radicalism has increasingly dominated the poetry of his recently

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<sup>11</sup> The debate between the Unitary State and the Sharia State has occurred since the preparations for Indonesian independence, which resulted in the elimination of the phrase "by implementing Islamic law for its adherents" from the Jakarta Charter. Further, see Endang Syaifuddin Anshari's thesis, which was later published as a book. For further information, see Endang Syaifuddin Anshori. 1981. *Jakarta Charter 22 June 1945*. Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama. See also Al-Habib Muhammad Rizieq Bin Husein Syihab's Dissertation. 2012. *The Influence of Pancasila in Countering the Implementation of Islamic Sharia in Indonesia*. Proposed for Part I Sharia Bachelor Diploma, Position Fight and Proposal. Islamic Studies Academy. Universiti Malaya. Kuala Lumpur.

<sup>12</sup> These discussions were later published as a book. For further information, see Satrio Arismunandar (Ed.). 2019. *NKRI Bersyariah or Humane Public Space?: 21 Experts' Responses to Denny JA's Ideas*. Jakarta: Cahaya Budi Indonesia.

published works, such as *Bread for the Heart* (2016) and *A Soul that Chants* (2018).<sup>13</sup> In *Bread for the Heart*, for example, Denny JA grapples with religious issues and disputes that arise from various interpretations. Written in a tolerant, pluralistic spirit, *Bread for the Heart* tries to describe how nonsensical the dispute over interpretation has become, especially when religion and its radical interpretation are wielded as a political tool that endorses and sanctions the stigmatization and persecution of ethnic and religious minorities.

Meanwhile, his fourth work, *A Soul that Chants (Jiwa yang Berzikir, 2018)*, is a collection of religiously inspired essays. Denny JA wrote these thirty essay poems during the early morning meals (sahur) throughout Ramadan. Each poem expresses a re-

ligious virtue in the context of modern socio-political and economic phenomena that occur both in Indonesia and abroad. Through his reflections in this book, Denny JA appears to strive persistently to persuade religious communities, particularly adherents of Islam, to broaden their perspectives to avoid being trapped in narrow and radical interpretations of religion.

It becomes clear here that Denny JA's recent works have mostly dealt with and raised religious themes, especially related to Islam. As a Muslim from the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Denny JA seems to realize that Islam as interpreted in Indonesia today will play an important role in the constellation of Muslim societies.<sup>14</sup> If Indonesian Islam fails to become a faith that is open to various scientific advances, and if it rejects democracy and tolerance, then Islam in the world will likewise adopt radical forms of Islam; this situation results from narrow, uncompromising religious interpretations propagated by large groups

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<sup>13</sup> In addition to the two essay poetry books above (following *In the Name of Love*), Denny JA wrote another essay poem *Kutunggu di Setiap Kamis* (2015) which did not have the theme of religious matters but instead raised the remaining issue of the authoritarian New Order regime, specifically the phenomenon of missing persons or more precisely activists whose lives were tragically cut short. Meanwhile, his short story book *Atas Nama Derita* (2020) raises the issue of Indonesians who were affected and afflicted by the pandemic. However, in this collection of short stories about the Pandemic, Denny JA also talks about religion vs the covid 19 virus.

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<sup>14</sup> Denny JA has also written essay poems on this subject. For further, see Denny JA. 2016. *Is the Western World More Islamic? Substance or Label* (Editor: Jonminofri Nazir). Jakarta: Bright Indonesian Culture.

that preach intolerance throughout the world. Hence, Denny JA tries to champion a form of Islam that is democratic, open, and tolerant because only then can Indonesian Islam become a counterweight that balances the global Islamic discourse rather than become merely another satellite for a radical Islamic mentality that is currently spreading through Muslim societies, including Indonesia.

The articles in this special English edition of *Jurnal Kritik* predate and thus do not discuss Denny JA's most recent essay poetry; instead, they refer to his first work, *In the Name of Love* and the phenomenon of essay poetry which he proclaimed as a new form of poetry. With this new form of poetry, Denny JA seems to want to rebuff (and perhaps complement) the unfortunate assertion of Chairil Anwar, Indonesia's leading modernist poet, who said: "Those who are not poets do not take part." Essay poetry, in diametric opposition to Chairil's statement, welcomes fledgling writers with the statement: "Those who are not poets may certainly take part". Chairul's prohibitive remarks imply that a poet's existential wound is a personal existential wound, which non-poets should not take part in. However, social wounds are not individual pain. In dealing with and

treating social wounds, everyone should participate. Denny JA's poetry essays, both *In the name of Love*, which was published in 2012, as well as his latest book, *Jiwa yang Berzikir*, and other essay poems that he wrote recently (which have not yet been compiled and published as a book), all deal with the social wounds of society, not the existential wounds of individuals.

The focus on the first book of poetry and the phenomenon of essay poetry was deliberate, because shortly after birth, essay poetry provoked both supportive and disparaging points of view. The controversy over essay poetry, which was followed by the controversy over Penerbit H.B. Jassin's inclusion of Denny JA in its publication of *The 33 Most Influential Indonesian Literary Figures*, was one of the longest-running controversies in the history of Indonesian literature. During the two years they were brewing, these debates stirred up and invigorated literary polemic discourse in the mass media and especially on social media.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Regarding this controversy, both the issue itself and Denny JA's response can be seen in his book *Elucidating Essay Poetry*.

Although many articles in the special English edition of *Jurnal Kritik* highlight the phenomenon of *essay poetry* and Denny JA's first and seminal essay poetry book *Atas Nama Cinta* (In the Name of Love), it becomes clear once again in these essays that Denny JA's main concern is the theme of democratization and openness of discourse. Denny JA believes that there is no single interpretation of everything. Nothing is absolute in the relationship between people and within human culture. When vectors of racism are increasingly mediated by religious radicalism, especially when this leads to terrorism, it is there that Denny JA directs his readers to confront the exclusivity of religious interpretations towards inclusiveness. For this reason, Denny JA does not hesitate to use examples from various foreign phenomena as demonstrated in his essay poetry anthology *A Soul that Chants*. There, Darta, the main character, is faced with various phenomena, ranging from political and religious disputes in Indonesia to the stories of Nelson Mandela, Mother Theresa, and the tragic removal of destitute "half-caste" children a century ago in Australia. By expanding the world of Darta's wandering, Denny JA appears to invite his readers

to experience how vast the world is and how diverse the forms of social discrimination are so that all forms of narrow interpretation will always endanger not only those who subscribe to that narrow interpretation but also other people, including the general public.

Denny JA's recent expansion effort was carried out not only through essay poetry but also through short talks on YouTube in the form of seven-minute lectures, entitled *Thirty Sufis & Philosophical Quotes*. In each episode, Denny JA presents one of the great Sufis, philosophers, or classical Islamic thinkers ranging from Rabiah Al Adawiyah, Jalaluddin Rumi, Hafiz, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Sina, Al Ghazali, to Nawal El Saadawi, the latest in this series. Nearly all of the quotes he chooses express openness, breadth of knowledge, and love for humanity to exemplify the wisdom of great Islamic scholars and thinkers. Within his 30 videos, Denny JA tries to demonstrate that old Islamic treasures and traditions are much richer, more democratic, much wiser, and more humane than the trivial contributions developed by radicals.

Reading Denny JA's works in the context of the current onslaught of Islamic radicalism that is gaining momentum in Europe and Africa

imparts hope that the more open-minded perspective of Indonesian Muslims (as the world's largest Muslim population) may prevail. A more pure voice of Islam, as exemplified by

classical Islamic scholars and philosophers, lends hope that the world can experience a form of Islam that is tolerant, democratic, pluralistic, and respectful of rational discourse.[]



# Understanding Denny JA's Essay Poems

**SAPARDI DJOKO DAMONO**

When Denny JA sent me his long verses, there was a certain issue that made me interested to ask: "Could you please explain the possible connection between poetry and footnotes?" As he has already clearly explained, the footnotes in his poems possess an essential function in understanding the poem.

Are footnotes unnecessary in writing poetry? And conversely, are there no examples at all of poets having attached footnotes to one of their poems? We already know the answer: Yes.

Footnotes are occasionally needed to provide clarification regarding various issues, such as names, events, foreign language terminology, and many other aspects that need to be elucidated for the edification of the reader. And footnotes can be written directly by the poet or another person.

This last aspect concerns poetry in translation, which often requires footnotes in order to provide clarifications concerning various words or phrases (in the original language) whose poetic nuance may be misunderstood or unappreciated by the

intended reader. Of course, it is also possible to exclude footnotes and thereby place the burden of trying to understand the meaning of a poem in translation entirely on the reader.

So, what is the connection between footnotes and Denny's poems? In the preface to his book, he states that his poems "do not just depict the inner personal experiences of people but also the context of related social facts." Furthermore, he explains that his compositions are motivated "not only to agitate the heart but also to help the reader to better understand social issues in the real world." In order to achieve this objective, footnotes derived from various types of sources become crucial; thus, they become an indispensable part of his poems. Because footnotes fulfill this purpose, this has piqued my interest in discussing issues that concern these notes in greater detail.

Denny's compositions are poetry; this is clear because among other poetic aspects, his poems are written in a visual form that has a lyrical structure arranged in stanzas. And poetry is also fiction, meaning that the composition has a particular source (and sometimes exclusively) that is inspired by imagination and creativity. How exceedingly close are Denny's stories to everything that has ever

happened... Everything is fiction because the source is derived from his own imagination. We certainly understand that common imagination is induced by all kinds of events. This is what I read within Denny's compositions.

However, Denny has named his compositions "essay poems." Is an essay not fiction? People say that an essay is normally fact that is conveyed in a distinct manner, which reflects the opinion of the author. An essay is a piece of writing that represents a personal approach toward a certain problem or issue that exists in one's environment; in this sense, an essay is a work of literature.

A work of literature also possesses a similar function. However, the footnotes that are attached within this book are not merely a personal perspective but instead derive from a variety of sources that cannot be classified as essays. We like to refer to the footnotes that Denny attaches within his essay poems as facts. Many of the footnotes he cites are in the form of news items; this certainly impels us to normally classify his footnotes as facts. News is always linked to facts, i.e. something that has really happened. But what if the fact that is recorded within a footnote is used to cite fiction, i.e. a poem that is

derived specifically from Denny's imagination?

News is real and factual, while fiction is not; this is generally our perspective. However, can't a "news story" easily change or be modified to become a "story"? I have the distinct impression that there is a difference between fiction and fact. However, between news and a story? This is what causes him to consider a certain form of composition that I had hitherto never witnessed throughout the development of our literary history. He calls this form of composition, "*Essay Poetry*".

In this context, an essay is classified as fact and, conversely, poetry is certainly classified as fiction. The issue that attracted my attention when I first read Denny's compositions and explanations was that a push-pull interaction had emerged between "news" and "story". This is certainly what he wants; he has composed five stories that are linked to various social and cultural issues, but he doesn't want his readers to simply enjoy his stories. He also wants his readers to gain "a deeper understanding of social issues." This is the distinct purpose of the accompanying footnotes.

When Rendra and F. Rahardi, for example, wrote social poems, I'm sure

they also wanted us to gain "a deeper understanding of social issues," and they offered their points of view regarding these issues. However, these two poets did not include footnotes. In one verse, F. Rahadi regarding "tuyul" provides a quotation from a dictionary to define the word "tuyul," and this in my view also constitutes an example of a "footnote" since it is inserted within the body of the poem. However, in contrast to these two poets, Denny neither ridicules nor blames a certain side of the conflict; instead, he tries to show that there is "an attempt to foment conflict," regardless of its outcome.

This issue among others demonstrates that Denny's compositions are not poems of resistance and opposition or social poems like the ones we already recognize and understand; instead, these represent a distinctive subgenre developed by the author, which he calls essay poems. We know that in the field of photography, there is something called "a photo essay," which is a series of photos that are sequenced to tell a story regarding a certain issue, normally without any deliberate footnotes of the kind Denny applies in his compositions.

In an intentional manner such as Denny chooses, essay poetry can become a stylistic choice that any

writer with a similar viewpoint can emulate. What is written and conveyed by Denny originates from a certain idea that he adeptly unravels through his delivery of the story. More significantly, he has already raised some important issues, which, to my knowledge, have never been expressed before within our poetry, such as issues concerning Ahmadiyah, homosexuality, Indonesian migrant workers, religious differences, and the impact of the events of May 1998, in long verse replete with footnotes. Many of our Indonesian poets have written poems about the events of May 1998, but they are all in lyrical form, expressing feelings and emotions concerning these events.

In the five essay poems that were given space in his book, *Atas Nama Cinta* (In the Name of Love), Denny

classifies each as pertaining to issues of social discrimination. At least, this is what makes his ideas and compositions, which have been labeled “essay poems,” significant in recording the current developments in Indonesian poetry.

I figure he needn't worry whether the genre of poetry he has chosen will be emulated by other poets in the future. He has already offered a new style of writing, and this is already more than enough... even more so if, as he has stated, several other poets also choose to write in a similar form. So we will soon witness numerous anthologies of essay poems, which we certainly hope will not only include informative footnotes but will also serve up the kind of stories that, according to Denny, “stir the heart.”

# Essay Poetry: Humans and Humanity without Discrimination

**DATUK JASNI MATLANI**

Literature is one of the branches of creative arts which has its own historical geneology. Since human beings have been clever at composing stories about what is happening around them, assorted genres have been born and various kinds of stories in fairytales, comics, pantun, poems, quatrains, and so forth, have become popular in the form or medium of oral traditions, in which a portion of them have become very well known until today.

In fact, the scenario is not static nor does it stop at one point and not develop, on the contrary, it is exposed

to all forms of change, evolution and transformation so that it leads to the creation of assorted new genres of literature. One of these is essay poetry. Essay poetry is now continuing to grow and develop in society, across demographic and geographic borders. From its original home in Indonesia, essay poetry continues to develop across countries, forming its own references and being studied through various disciplines and fields. One of these is knowledge in social science which touches upon issues of humanity and philosophy in an integrated way.

## **Social Science and its Relationship with Literary Works**

The social sciences have actually developed since the time of Ibnu Khaldun. Ibnu Khaldun is said to be among the initial figures to pioneer studies in social fields. His name was actually Abdul Rahman bin Muhammad bin Khaldun (1337-1406). He wrote the book, *Mukaddimah*, and this book expresses various opinions about life and human beings based on observations, studies that are authoritative, scientific and highlight relevant theories or focus on the subject being studied. Ibnu Khaldun opened the door and the widest space for various studies in social science which were new particularly in the West. In fact, after the Renaissance in Europe the field of social science approached the door of enlightenment especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. At that time Europe made the field of social science like the child of the industrial revolution, with empirical observation, generalization and tests becoming the new emblems of the system in accentuating and defending the integrity of some knowledge. In this context, literature was made into one branch of art that told the stories of humans and life. Although a literary work according to A. Wahab Ali

(1956) as a whole is an individual expression, but those individuals are also components of society. Because of that, since an individual writer is a part of society, then all the ideas or results of his creativity will become a shadow reflection of the surrounding society. The result of his work plays an important role in the context of transforming values and the system of societal norms. All of that can be seen in the process of studying a theme, problem, character, symbol, spirit, the impression of the whole structure of the literary work itself.

Social science is not a stage shared by literature. Social science is knowledge studied about humans and life with different groups in the public. Social science is not a creative field. Social science analysis holds to facts and tries to clarify and explain phenomenon as precisely as possible and as objectively as possible, or it holds to the principles and discipline of analysis which tries to explain the precise situation, with a theoretical description of a social phenomenon in an objective way. Social science for the writer, does not compromise with literature, because the two fields are very different with their own audiences and the performance of each one follows their own laws because literature is a field involved with imagi-

nation, the creative world and language that has power from an esthetic aspect and is guided by feelings and conscience which does not have authority from the aspect of the validity of social facts. Literature does not report a phenomenon the writers see objectively with data that is complete and which they can be held accountable for from aspects of research, objectivity, and study of a phenomenon so that they are able to explain the target findings and the direction of their predictions.

In fact, it is even worse as John Barr said, and as he wrote in an editorial article on the book, *Membawa Puisi Ke Tengah gelanggang: Jejak dan Karya Denny JA* by Narudin (2017), that the world of literature (in this context poetry) is increasingly difficult for the public to understand. Poetry writing has experienced stagnation or it has ceased to be an agent of civilization, not moving, not active, static, and without any meaningful change for twenty years. The general public feels an increasing distance from the world of poetry. It is said that poets are just preoccupied with their own imaginations or only respond to other poets, with those interested in literature becoming less and less. They are more and more separated from and not sensitive to the phenomenon

or problems in society or the people around them. They do not interact with the greater public. *Poetry is nearly absent from public life, and poets too often write with only other poets in mind, failing to write for a greater public.* The studies done by Lembaga Survey Indonesia and issued in writing by Denny JA, the founder of this Survey Institute, on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018, says that the number of readers of literature in Indonesia is only 6.2 % and 46.8% more do not remember the title of a book and name of an author that they have read. This shows how low is the number of people in Indonesia who know literature, what's more poetry, so few of the millennial generation in Indonesia know leading Indonesian poets, such as Chairil Anwar and W S Rendra (just to mention a few names). Only a few percent of them have read their poetry. This situation is rather critical, and is also true in other countries, including Malaysia.

Nevertheless, there are signs that the situation is changing in current times. Even though literature does not talk about people and life as objectively as possible like social science requires and demands. Literature is the colors of life and does not step into the factual world perse, but it is a form of positive acceptance to see the connec-



tion and relationship between social science with literature from the aspect of ideology which comes together in both of these fields. In fact, according to Abdul Rahman Embong (2011) at this time literature is not only a world involving imagination and certain esthetic values, but also descriptions which validate and glorify the ideas, ambitions, value system, and the ideology of the author.

This is because the author himself is part of the social components and an actor who moves actively in the environment of that social stage, thus what is quoted by a writer begins to be accepted as an aspect which has common ideology, the same as what is explicit or implicit with social science. Social scientists are beginning to soften and take a stand that resembles writers of literature. Social scientists are beginning to see the parallelism and problems in human life written about by literary writers as object and subject who is active, behaves, acts, thinks, has feelings and which interacts with one another the same as between individuals or in groups so that a connection forms community networks which cannot be denied by social scientists. Writers also shape objective ideas about common values in the process of growth and development of human civilization itself.

According to Misran Rokimin (2011), writers now have a very large role in human development, society's thinking and the state. Literature is a dynamic branch of knowledge and it can change the way people think. The contents also contain facts that are real and can be accepted. In fact, it is also regarded as a pearl which is hiding ideas and offering knowledge which is not only materially shaped, but is more spiritual. Every writer has a purpose in the field of writing and that purpose is always different from one to another. There are those who write because of an artistic goal and esthetic value in the form of words and language. That is why if the purpose tends more to art, then the elements of the beauty of the words and language become the priority. But if the purpose is to provide information to the public without discrimination for example, and wants to convince the public about the need for society to eliminate discrimination across demographic boundaries and geography, then the factor of the information and message must be prioritized compared to esthetic value and art.

We agree with the notion that a literary work must process problems and phenomena of society, but on the other hand it is also considered a work

of art in which the writer is free to be expressive in accordance with his/her creative powers. The word art has the meaning of the expertise of a person in creating a quality work, of high and extraordinary esthetic value, but if we want to inspire the people and guide them to appreciate the great idea of the writer, lead the people to understand a way of thinking and influence them so that it can change their attitudes and actions, then we need to provide a genre of literature which does not turn its back on esthetic values in the form of literary expression in it, but how we express something in simple artistic language, understood by many, people-friendly and not too exclusive, or for art lovers only.

This is causing social science, which in the past acted on its own, to now start to compromise and assimilate itself with the field of literature, breaking down the dichotomy and the previous rigidity of the two fields, so that in many cases in the context of human beings and life the tendency is increasingly evident towards research that is not independent, but looks for a meeting point that brings mutual benefits. Not to mention that the field of literature is now decreasing more and more the distance of its essence with imaginary factors and imagination when meeting the poetry

essay genre based on facts and information right in its surroundings. Although essay poems emphasize dramatic elements in their process of creation and language composition that brings community confidence closer to the existence of the value of the imagination which is the basis and the strength of literature which is so rich in a level of esthetics. It is free to dive to the basic nuances of feelings and human behavior which is in conflict inwardly and outwardly, but essay poetry also tries to bring the public to move to the world of facts, by passing on a series of numerical analyses and studies which are authoritative, scientific, as well as some with numbers that can be believed and can explain a phenomenon in more detail accompanied by reference sources, and a series of footnotes which indicate that essay poems can become factual sources about a phenomenon and problem taking place in society in current times.

What is even more interesting, essay poetry has become a kind of writing that tries to explain a societal phenomenon as exactly as possible with responsible analysis from the aspects of research and authority. This then guides the public to discover findings which deconstruct phenomena and existing problems and make correct predications about the

future. Essay poems become a kind of sign of the excellence of literature and social science which give writers freedom to be creative and capture the audience. Although on the one hand they were created in such a way for the purpose, goals, and interests of different societies, but they still highlight or describe phenomena and problems of human society and life which are universal. In fact, essay poems may also argue about the aspect of humanity without discrimination and as a medium of ASEAN literary diplomacy, as well as talking about the great humanity across demographic and geographic boundaries, and processed carefully, critically and full of considerations so that its relevance with social science stands out.

### **The Emergence of Essay Poetry in the Middle of Social Phenomena and Academic Interests**

The emergence of essay poetry not only answers relevant social phenomena and problems of human beings and life, but it also highlights academic interests in the world of literature which have never been practiced in the creative process itself until now, since countries in the Southeast Asian region have become independent and opposed Western hegemony in various dimensions of

life, excellence in science, economics, and Western ideology, through colonization and imperialism. The emergence of essay poetry now actually offers a form of literary expression which has more traces of the real world and formulates society's problems in a discourse that is more in line with the scientific means of social science. Essay poetry gives a new interpretation towards literature and unearths things that until now have been taboo in the world of literature and corrects literary confusion and distortion in highlighting ambiguity and the blurring of thinking and emotional nuance. Essay poetry enlivens human character which is aware of values that we hold together and life without discrimination, based upon resource people with integrity and historical facts which at the same time help to enrich and strengthen the traditions of social science and humanity.

Essay poetry also offers a new perspective to the world of literature and dismantles the way of thinking of literary people who are no longer bound to the concept of *The captive mind* seen by Syed Hussein Alatas (1974) as the existence of a captive character in opposing Western hegemony, but in this context opposes literary hegemony or the habit that all this time has been institutionalized in

the world of literature. Essay poetry opposes the habitual current of literature which until now has been the most exclusive place for poets to conceal all of their pleasures. When poets are scared of facing the turmoil of the real world which actually frightens those around, then they are metaphorical with beautiful words and rebel behind a veil by composing a number of words that are only understood by them but are not for other people.

When they fight against the establishment or tyrannical groups while taking sides with ordinary people, they also make small talk with excerpts of words filled with ambiguous elements, because of certain fears and a thousand and one excuses to save themselves and their interests. When they write about love filled with conflicts, and without blessings, they hide behind expression which distract the public's attention from what is actually happening in the real world. In other words, poets make poetry into a dark and mysterious house that is not community friendly. They pile up a number of special words which are full of symbols, metaphors, personification and difficult to understand. They build a tall, thick wall to hide their conscience from the public in the name of esthetics.

Sutardji Calzoum Bachri (2017) said, they write poetry all of which are efforts to cover up or forget the verses of life (real world).

Why is that so? Because in dark poetry a number of words are only special for the poet who created them and are very subjective. The process of understanding them requires measuring sticks or a certain approach that is not natural, and that is very foreign from general knowledge. How did essay poems emerge to oppose all the prevalence and hegemony with writing a form of poetry which on one hand maintains creative power and poetic elements, but on the other hand excels in the dramatic element in the social story line, and is marked by an attitude, thoughts, and arguments that offer considerate solutions for phenomena of humanity and life. Denny JA said (2017) that the essay poems that he conceived are written with language that is easy to understand, and although a lot of symbols and metaphors are used, it is not part of dark poetry that demands too much reflection and interpretation. Denny JA's essay poems provide some input from sources, facts and data that educate the public, so that Sutardji Calzoum Bachri says again, essay poems are smart poems which with many ways, facts and arguments

give their audience intelligence in understanding and appreciating phenomena and problems related with issues and social conflict, which does not deny the presence of dumb poetry.

Essay poetry according to Prof. Madya Dr. Ramzah Dambul, (2020) is not only a genre, but it is ideas and a correspondence movement which are larger. Denny JA when he informed people about the birth of essay poetry he did not just define it as another form and function of poetry as a creative work (in society), in fact he also gave meaning and a new direction to all literature of the archipelago through the foundation of poetry. In simple words, essay poetry is a fresh innovation which is important in the development of regional literary arts. Like this writer has emphasized in previous writings, essay poetry institutionalized and became a new dynamic, a fresh innovation that is important in the development of regional literary arts. While at the same time it is also full of humanitarian issues, which at once enrich the way of speaking in literature and give a choice to people to write poetry which includes various research and footnotes.

It is precisely that, whether aware or not, acknowledged or not, Denny JA's concept of essay poetry, like Prof Madya Dr. Ramzah Dambul has said, has achieved status as literary advocacy and diplomacy. This is actually

one of the highest scores in terms of extent of literary impact. He is not only giving mental gratification or just triggering spiritual catharsis as is typical in conventional literature, in fact the stories and (social) history of the region which has rarely been sung is beginning to be heard (and approached) through a literary medium. Even better, essay poetry as a movement has also been able to cross boundaries, make diplomatic bonds among countries through regional literary companions and this really fits the concept: Literature joining communities, (humans and humanity) and also nations. While the writer has an opinion it is a great contribution to common values and win-win partnerships with literature and social science.

### **Denny JA as a Pioneering Figure Writing Essay Poems and Essay Poetry As the Book of Man and Humanity Without Discrimination**

Denny JA is the figure responsible for pioneering and popularizing essay poetry not only in Indonesia but also in several ASEAN countries. He was born in 1963 in Palembang and he furthered his education in the United States where he received a Ph.D. Jamal D. Rahman said, Denny JA is a phenomenon in Indonesian literature (2017). He is known in the literary

world, because he emerged with the genre of essay poetry when conventional poetry had become an exclusive genre just for poets and not for the general public. He chose to go against the current, because in every era someone must be born who comes up with a new stream of thought in line with concepts of modernity and the constantly changing era. Experience in the Malay world witnessed a while ago, the archipelago region became great with the birth of an amazing figure like Hamzah Fansuri who introduced a genre of poetry at the Southeast Asian level. Nevertheless, other genres also appeared such as *guridam*, *seloka*, and so forth. There is also the tradition of synonymous poems or pantun with the dominant form of four lines, which also accepted transformation when pantun appeared in the form of two lines, six lines, eight lines, and so forth. This showed that change can occur and can be done by a creative person in a certain period. Whether desired or not, change still happens, but of course that change can be handled well and maturely, with responsibility, and thinking with integrity, open to the scientific tradition developing all around. If that change is contradicted it is usually done in the spirit of intellectual and academic reasonable argument. Any differences of opinion

always celebrate understanding in other aspects.

In fact, Denny JA is a literary figure in a class with Chairil Anwar and WS Rendra in Indonesia who sees poetry as no longer being a weapon for weak and frightened people. If he voices social issues and humanity without discrimination across ASEAN and global boundaries, he aligns a number of true facts in the world of reality which are the antithesis of and oppose previous literary conventions. He wants that literary message to reach the public, to be friendly and approachable for the general public, at the moment the world has changed and been conquered by various new forms of domination, technological innovation, the internet of things, and so forth. Denny JA joins in strengthening the problem proposed by Kasim Ahmad (2011) in Malaysia, about the concept of who literature should serve, in which literature must support the concepts of universal humanism and art for human beings, because literature is a reflection of society as well as having a positive role in the evolution of life and the process of human development. That is why literature may not be separated from life perse. In fact, writers must depict social life realistically in their works and this is also being done by Denny JA in his essay poetry.

Indeed, for the writer, Denny JA provides a new color in the midst of the wealth of assorted colors surrounding us. He provides fragrant flower buds in the midst of a garden filled with flowers of assorted colors. He sings like a bird chirping, and pioneers the essay poetry movement to unite thoughts, emotions and positive values in a harmonious container, and we must respect him for that.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded that essay poetry is now indeed continuing to grow and develop in society, across demographic and geographic boundaries. Essay poetry has crossed new ranks to become an international literary genre forming its own references and also studied by various disciplines and fields including in social science which includes issues of humanity without discrimination and philosophy in an integrated manner. Denny JA is an important figure behind the existence of essay poetry. In fact, he has guided essay poetry with his own character and dominance. He has pioneered a mass movement for essay poetry which is very relevant at a time when the world has changed and been conquered by various new forms of domination such as technological innovations, the internet of things, and so forth. Denny JA is a phenomenon

who plays a huge role in ensuring that essay poetry is rich in positive discussions about human beings and humanity without discrimination. He created a new literary movement which has not just been institutionalized in Indonesia, but has become a literature of advocacy and diplomacy of ASEAN, and in fact at a global level. One day the author wants to see, Denny JA will be remembered and talked about like Franz Kafka who pioneered works of magical realism, but magical realism became an influential literary movement in the hands of great South American writers. Likewise essay poetry may give rise to a bit of commotion and controversy in the country in which it was born, but this genre will continue to grow like the virus of the pandemic across demographic and geographic boundaries, continuing to speak its power and presence in the context of literary and social science development.

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# Confronting Discrimination with Poetry

IGNAS KLEDEN

**L**icentia poetica (poetic license) and poetic ambivalence can apparently be a facility that permits poetry to be accessed by various parties by introducing each poet's special needs. Not every writer of verse will dedicate his life to art, such as was done by Chairil Anwar. Not every devotee of poetry will meddle with words to make sure that real life is more illogical and more nonsensical than the requirements for writing poetry, as Sapardi Djoko Damono experienced<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> "... The real world often makes no sense, but the world of fiction must be sensible. The real world is less rational than the fictional world.

Rendra periodically explored his own "method" which tried to reconcile and accommodate his inner mandate and sparks of thought through the means of expression, which was able to convey his ideas concerning the method that potentially makes a compound for the

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Each incident that occurs in the real world just happens without any forethought or design, but the structuring of events in fiction must be arranged in a manner that is clearly sensible—so that it makes sense." See Sapardi Djoko Damono, "Permainan Makna" in Pamusuk Eneste (ed.). 2009. *Proses Kreatif*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Jakarta, Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, pages 155-156

contents and form of a poetic verse<sup>2</sup>. Sutardji Calzoum Bachri has written poetry to prove that words possess a semantic life force that is less restrictive and richer than ideas that are standardized by people who compile dictionary entries<sup>3</sup>. Joko Pinurbo, the poet who wrote about pants and *sarung*, composed poetry about the most mundane aspects of life, which if personified would exhibit a dimension of life that often drowns in banality; nevertheless, Pinurbo was still able to converse poetically within a dialogue that is both appealing and inspirational.

In the mid-1960's, poetry was written in Indonesia to perpetuate the momentum of the political shift from the Old Order (*Orde Lama*) to the New Order (Soeharto's *Orde Baru*), especially regarding emotions and the determination of student activists to get involved in movements to achieve

a major historical political change: *A jacket smeared in blood / We have all seen you / We have shared our supreme grief / For the recurrent sorrow of many recent years / A river restricts us / Beneath the blazing Jakarta sun / Between freedom and oppression / Armored weapons and steel bayonets* (from Taufiq Ismail's "*Sebuah Jacket Berlumur Darah*" / *A Jacket Smeared in Blood*).<sup>4</sup>

Currently, in 2012, a devotee of poetry, Denny JA, has written five long poems, proclaiming them as an attempt to represent an alternative form in Indonesian poetry, which combines the inner environment of a lyric figure with a social condition as the context that creates this atmosphere. Whether this endeavor brings innovation to Indonesian poetry deserves more time to see how it develops. Despite this, the author has consciously selected a certain thematic subject as his field for cultivation, namely discrimination with regard to all manners of prejudice that have been generated by society as well as the victims who have experienced physical suffering and internal conflicts, which until now may not have been sufficiently recognized. There are both human and social costs

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<sup>2</sup> "I live with strong personal discipline. I am in the process of seeking an appropriate art form to convey my thoughts and spiritual nature in a manner that relates to socioeconomic and political issues. The form that I previously used no longer suits my purposes now". See Rendra, *Mempertimbangkan Tradisi*, Jakarta, Penerbit PT Gramedia, 1984, page 65.

<sup>3</sup> "Words must be set free from significance, from the burden of ideas. Words must be free to determine their individual existence." Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, "Kredo Puisi", found in Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, *O Amuk Kapak: Tiga Kumpulan Sajak*, Jakarta, Penerbit Sinar Harapan, 1981, page 13.

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<sup>4</sup> See Taufiq Ismail, *Tirani dan Benteng*, Jakarta, Yayasan Ananda, 1993, page 67.

whose extent may not have been sufficiently calculated and reckoned.

Social ills are not a new topic in Indonesian poetry. Since the establishment of LEKRA (the Institute for Societal Culture), individual emotions have been obliterated from poetry, and what needs to be attached are social issues, especially political themes regarding the struggles of the people, which deserve to be addressed and won.

In retrospect, it can now be said that what was abandoned in the verses of the LEKRA poets was the disappearance of a personal dimension, which in my humble opinion had been an inherent element of successful poems. A difference between the poems of the LEKRA poets and Rendra's poems concerning unbalanced development and social injustice is that for Rendra (with various levels of success that he was able to achieve), social problems were attempted to be internalized as much as possible as his own individual predicaments and these were reiterated as concern and distress or an expression of his own anger. It appears that this is a minimal condition for every social poem because poetry is not destined to be a reproduction of a social situation but is intended instead to be a personal response to various social issues that the poet encounters.

In the absence of this personal dimension, a poem can be easily disrupted into becoming a pamphlet for struggle or a sociopolitical diatribe. With regard to poor people who had been marginalized in the struggle to survive in the big city, Rendra wrote with full sympathy that: *Poor people at the roadside / Who subsist within the gutters / Who were vanquished in their struggles / Who were ridiculed by their dreams / Do not let them be abandoned* (from the poem "Orang-Orang Miskin" / "Poor People")<sup>5</sup>. Or, a young poet from the village of Jatiwangi who tried to find his place in Jakarta in 1955, writes, with feelings which are intermingled: *I love thee during the early hours of the morning / Muffled coughs break the still silence / And the singing of the rickshaw driver / Whines his fate to the skies / As well as stars that seek not to understand* (The poetry of Ajib Rosidi: "Kepada Jakarta" / "To Jakarta")<sup>6</sup>. What is poignant here is not just or not especially social conditions and problems but rather the personal attitude and sensation of the poet toward problems and social conditions within the setting in which he himself is struggling.

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<sup>5</sup> Rendra, *Potret Pembangunan dalam Puisi*, Jakarta, Pustaka Jaya, 1993, page 82.

<sup>6</sup> Ajip Rosidi, *Surat Cinta Enday Rasidin*, Jakarta, Pustaka Jaya, 2002, page 12.

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The poet, and perhaps every creative artist, works by relying on spontaneity and intensity. An idea or emotion materializes, but these concepts and feelings are greeted with great intensity, which renders structure to something that was previously supple and inundated with fanciful notions. It is unimaginable that a poet would arrange a design for a poem that he would wish to write. Poetry, in general, represents an encounter of inner and outer settings which are transformed into the momentum of creativity. A poem can certainly be improved through repetitive editing by a poet, or it can be written in one draft, but each attempt at editing represents an effort to enhance the intensity as well as sharpen the expressive power in order to articulate something that was already acquired in a spontaneous manner.

While bearing in mind this routine practice, it is evident that Denny JA's poetry demonstrates his own personal penchant for deviating from norms. These five poems were born from a conscious design. The overall theme executed in these poems relates to issues of discrimination in Indonesia during the Reformation (post-Soeharto) period; the length of these poems is relatively consistent. Each

poem is equipped with extensive footnotes, which provide information about social situations at the time that certain events described in each respective poem occurred. He has not forgotten to include data, whose purpose is to develop a *Sitz im Leben* that is suitable for lyricists as well as lyrical contexts that can also be represented visually as art. Lyricists are also members of society who are relatively well known to the reading public since news about them or the types of events that they are involved in are given news coverage by both the print and electronic media. This is the reason that the writer did not call his compositions *poems* but rather *essay poems*. This demonstrates an effort to improvise within a different form of expression, specifically by combining elements of poetry and essays. Whether this represents a truly innovative form within Indonesian poetry will be assessed by an overview within this introduction.

These long poems immediately remind us of various ballads that were written by modern Indonesian poets. A ballad is a lyric poem that contains a complete narrative, possibly a narrative concerning folklore that resides within a particular community or a narrative that is arranged by the poet himself based on the stories told by a certain social group. Amir Ham-

zah composed the “Hang Tuah” ballad, Laksamana, Cahaya Melaka, Bunga Pahlawan (The Admiral, the Glory of Mulacca, the blossom of Heroes, in defense of Malacca, but Hamzah was killed in an assault by a Portuguese cannon squad: *The cannonball headed for the ship // the Admiral heaved itself to the midst of the ocean*<sup>7</sup>. The authors of the New Verse (Pujangga Baru) also relived other folktales in the ballad, “Batu Belah” (Split Rock), i.e. a rock which is ready to crush its victims in its mouth if it is summoned with the right mantra: *Split rock, covered rock, Rock at the banks of bathing places / May it be God’s will that I do not become fearful / For I have already made this promise* [8]. Ajip Rosidi composed the ballad “Jante Arkidam,” a hero who could not be apprehended due to his cleverness in transforming his masculine appearance to resemble a beautiful woman and later manifest himself once more as a gallant man. He was the king of gambling at every festive event; he could penetrate the iron grating of pawnshops, and he could conquer any woman according to his whim: *Whose lips had he not savored? / Whose bosom had he not*

*grasped? / An engorged mass with black fur? / The joints of his bones had become even more elongated / Had already been buried within hundreds of women / In his sturdy face*<sup>9</sup>.

When viewed from the poetic traditions of Indonesia and the world, Denny JA’s five extended poems can be classified as ballads, especially the literary ballads that were introduced by Francois Villon in 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century France, which differ from folk ballads, i.e. a subgenre of ballads that recounts folklore within a poetic form. It is appropriate to state that while assuming the form of the ballad, these five long poems focus their attention not on history that chronicles the lyricist but instead and specifically concentrate on the internal conflict that the lyrical actors are forced to suffer when confronting discrimination in a manner that defies them and compels them to take action. In other words, the poet repeatedly is unable to evade the social issues that confront society, and ultimately cannot isolate his verse from direct involvement, which necessitates pursuing social responsibility.

Within these five poems, Denny JA has fervently chosen to take the side of victims of social discrimination

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<sup>7</sup> See Amir Hamzah, *Buah Rindu*, Jakarta, Dian Rakyat, 1996, pages 27-30.

<sup>8</sup> Amir Hamzah, *Nyanyi Sunyi*, Jakarta, Dian Rakyat, 1991, pages 21-23.

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<sup>9</sup> Ajip Rosidi, *Cari Muatan*, Jakarta, Balai Pustaka, 1998, page 67.



as if to register a sense of protest, sympathy, and determination to oppose currents of injustice through the voice of each lyrical actor; thus, he feels able to shoulder the responsibility for promoting advocacy for disadvantaged people who do not receive equal representation before the law. It appears that the lyrical actors are destined to face obstacles that can neither be repelled nor dismissed in trying to reach their goals, while the pain of punitive social sanctions is merely due to prejudiced beliefs that are zealously defended; they thus experience persecution from various social factions that treat them as members of an “out-group”, which in practical terms differs little from the circumstances of outcasts, whose membership in society remains unacknowledged to the extent that they become social pariahs. With regard to those who perpetrate discrimination, these biased attitudes have emerged from prejudice related to inter-religious differences (in the poem “*Bunga Kering Perpisahan*” / “The Desiccated Flower of Parting”), prejudice concerning different interpretations that emerge within the same religion (in the poem “*Romi dan Yuli dari Cikeusik*” / “*Romeo and Juliet from Cikeusik*”), prejudice that results from ethnic differences (in the poem “*Sapu Tangan Fang Yin*” / “Fang Yin’s

Handkerchief”), prejudice that arises from differences in sexual orientation (in the poem “*Cinta Terlarang Batman dan Robin*” / “The Forbidden Love of Batman and Robin”), and the prejudice that results from social class differences (in the poem “*Minah Tetap Dipancung*” / “Minah was Still Beheaded”).

Indonesia is not a nation whose citizens are free of prejudice, a feature that is certainly not unique to this country. It is quite easy to point out various biases that haunt social ties in other countries, including nations that consider themselves civilized and advanced. Beside the five forms of prejudice that are illustrated in Denny JA’s verses, it is still possible to mention a variety of other biases that are no less consequential, such as inter-cultural prejudice, prejudice that emerges from differences in political affiliation, prejudice regarding differences in understanding science, as well as prejudices that relate to intergenerational and gender biases. Despite this, the potency of the five prejudices illustrated by Denny JA is especially relevant since these biases have already caused the deaths of many innocent victims. This issue has compelled the writer to adopt a clear-cut, sympathetic position, and he expresses his support for victims of discrimination in his long poems. His

one-sided support is so strong that some readers may detect a tone that sounds like a manifesto and which appears to be compiled within the lines of each poem. It feels too harsh to dive into the inner consciousness of a young woman who was gang-raped in the anti-Chinese riots during the transfer of political power in 1998, and express her feelings as being *no longer able to feel the cool breeze / because her time of happiness had lost all sensation* (“Fang Yin’s Handkerchief”). The author describes a dispute concerning different concepts among people who believe that in Indonesia, *Religion trumps everything else / Not excluding teenage love* (“Romeo and Juliet from Cikeusik”), as well as other parties whose viewpoint is that *Humanity is older than religion / Love had already existed since mankind was created by God / Love is older than religion / Remember, love is older than religion* (“The Desiccated Flower of Parting”). And who should be blamed if Amir has already tried twice to get married (in accordance with his mother’s guidance) but never feels any physical attraction to the woman who is sleeping next to him? In front of his mother’s grave, he makes a confession *that made the grass near the burial site cringe / the wind in the frangipani trees became suddenly still*. One still

evening he carries out his determination because *in the universe honesty must be upheld*. Hence, he tells his mother (who is lying in her grave): *Mother, please listen well, okay Mother? / Your son is homosexual / I am a homosexual, Mother! / I have already resisted my natural instinct throughout the years / But I can no longer do that! I will remain a homosexual / Please forgive me, Mother* (“The Forbidden Love of Batman and Robin”).

In another poem, an Indonesian migrant worker who is working in the Middle East introduces herself: *Aminah is my name / I am called Minah / An Indonesian migrant worker / Working in Saudi Arabia*. She is subjected to incessant rape by the master of the house. Her passport is confiscated, her wages are left unpaid, and she is only given a small amount of riyal each time she is raped. She wishes to send this money to her family to pay for her daughter’s school tuition; she is already 8 years old and has not yet attended school due to a lack of funds. But her heart rebels; Minah is unwilling to deceive her family by sending ill-begotten money that was acquired in exchange for rape. She finally tears up the entire sum of this money. During the final attempt of rape when she is threatened at the blade of a knife by the man

of the house, Minah manages to grab the knife, embedding it in the stomach of the rapist and quickly killing him. The local law requires the compensation of a life for a life. Without expressing bitterness, she writes a note stating that: *the government has given its response / However, in my case / The train has already left the station / Efforts to provide a just sentence are tardy / Diplomatic efforts to achieve a just political outcome had never been initiated in advance / And no attempt of defense will be offered at the trial / Yes, yes, I will be forced to undergo / The punishment of beheading / Yes, yes, I must be beheaded!* (a verse from “*Minah Tetap Dipancung*” / *Minah Was Still Beheaded*). It is steadily felt that the weakness of political support coupled with the absence of legal defense generates a cogent validation of Minah’s thoughts within the poem that you are currently experiencing.

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These five long poems are also accompanied by long extensive footnotes. The poet’s intention is to provide a description of social conditions to contextualize where, why, and how a certain lyrical actor faces turmoil and conflict. It is appropriate to note that these footnotes are not a common feature in poetry, with the exception

of their inclusion in anthologies whenever the editor feels the necessity to provide additional clarification concerning the presentation of a particular poem. This means that footnotes do not represent an organic element in poetry. Despite this, we can easily find other examples within Indonesian poetry which combine these two worlds in a harmonious manner within the framework of these poems. Rendra’s ballads regarding the *Folks of Rangkasbitung* demonstrate the cleverness of the author in inserting a social context within his poems to the extent that we are able to feel the social ambience of a certain place and time just by reading his poems. In his poem, “*Nyanyian Adinda untuk Saijah*,” Rendra writes that *In Kalijodo I sang within my heart / An arhythmic Sundanese song like a leafless tree / Comprising sorrow like a rootless tree / When the dead of night awaits the arrival of morning*. And in the next verse, *Saijah, come! / Without a clue or any real trace / My dusty song of love / Is seeking you*<sup>10</sup>. The story behind this poem relates to Saijah, a woman who moved to find work in Sumatera, Adinda’s meeting with a friendly and wealthy man from the

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<sup>10</sup> Rendra, *Orang-Orang Rangkasbitung*, Depok, Penerbit Rakit, 2001, page 35.

village meeting hall, and how Adinda was wooed when accompanied by this man on a bus, how she stayed overnight with him in Karawaci and was ultimately raped by him as she lay sleeping. These events are all written in verse so that even in the absence of any footnotes, the reader is immediately able to comprehend the atmosphere and social conditions that trap Adinda in her longing for Saijah. In brief, the use of footnotes is just a technique that lacks any constitutional aspect of written verse.

For a reader like myself, the experimental use of footnotes by Denny JA is an attempt to integrate poetry within a new social movement in Indonesia. This measure has already been taken with full awareness by its author, including the risks that this may entail, e.g. the possibly negative consideration by literary critics. Two viewpoints can be seen here: the integration of a social movement within Indonesian poetry, and the integration of poetry within new social movements. My expectation is that in any attempts by other poets who write essay poetry, we may see the results later, which angle will be the focus of attention for each of these authors, according to their personal tendencies, attention, cultural background, and education, as well as their social involvement and literary experience.

No matter what the issue is, it appears there will always be a new initiative within social awareness and culture, which opens up horizons for creative development, as well as literary creativity and socio-political creativity, which signal the hope that this nation's pulse of life will continue to beat despite the profusion of natural disasters and political disarray that normally ensue.

There are two issues in the arts, especially in literature, that need to be distinguished, although some accomplished poets have unified them in one blow. Goenawan Mohamad, Sapardi Djoko Damono, Joko Pinurbo, and Afrizal Malna are poets who have composed valuable and memorable poetry, although they are not innovators in Indonesian poetry. On the other hand, Chairil was an innovative poet who wrote verse that remains inspiring to this day, and his poetry-writing tradition blazed a trail that is still followed by many poets today. However, Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, a poet who has exhibited an original style, has more or less been an innovative reformer in Indonesian poetry, although he lacks a following of poets who wish to write in the tradition that he has endeavored to establish. With regard to the development of Indonesian poetry, we anticipate that more young poets will

appear with an original expressive style without being mindful to be or not to be reformers. Pramoedya wrote novels in a substantially conventional style and did not harbor any conceit or claim to being a reformer, yet his literary works have captured the attention of critics in the literary arena to this day; moreover, Pramoedya still has a substantial following of young devotees in Indonesia.

This indicates that a certain social movement and the generation of poetry do not always coincide to support the same forces. I feel that the government's attention to social problems is minimal; moreover, it seems that the social sensitivity among the social classes in civil society has become dull, and this has driven a countervailing movement in social movements that focus their attention and energy in solving social problems, and this is evident within the five essay poems in this anthology of poetry. This specifically represents an issue that deserves to be accepted and supported since it is proof that sociopolitical sensitivity and creativity still prevail in Indonesia and it inculcates social change due to the presence of efforts to attract public attention to solve these social ills. Despite this, social movements are one thing, and poetry movements are another. To quote

Chairil Anwar, *both must be recorded / both of them have a place* (poem: "Catetan" 1946)<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, the use of a poetic format as a container for a social contract is completely conditional on two coinciding issues, i.e. the authenticity of the social issue described and the authenticity of the poem which expresses it. Those who criticize the use of poetry only as a means of communication have repeatedly received a critical response, especially regarding the mission which was affirmed by Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana in his educational poems, and it is not necessary to repeat and examine those assertions here.

Whatever the issue may be, the efforts that Denny JA has exerted (in his essay poems on social discrimination) deserve our appreciation since it is not impossible that his poetic enterprise will attract or impel new attempts in the future by other writers and poets, which can produce new achievements, which was not imagined previously, while this path has already been inaugurated by the accomplishment of Denny JA's five long poems.

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<sup>11</sup> Chairil Anwar, *Aku Ini Binatang Jalang* (editor, Pamusuk Enesta), Jakarta, PT Gramedia, 1986, page 53.

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Social oriented poems are not a new phenomenon in Indonesian poetry. This is simple to comprehend since a poet's sensitive heart is receptive to ideas that are blowing in the wind; a poet may also hear stories as old as time— that ocean waves splash on the shore in the middle of the night, so a real poet would certainly be moved by the sight of other people's suffering, or at least witness how people who are divided into social classes become distanced from each other. In this manner, the poet Ajip Rosidi observed the society as perpetually divided in two, with their fate also divided into two distinct groups:

*Under the same sky / Mankind forms two sorts: One that is exploited / That must yield each moment / That sacrifices its life force, like a water buffalo / Which when it can no longer be utilized for work is forsaken / And sent to the slaughterhouse, despite its protestations / Or it is whipped and abused / It is distinguished from the gods / The angels that seize mortal life, its divine masters / Who partake of luxury and carnal pleasure / Which resemble a sea: Not necessarily vast or deep / Yet always roaring and surging / Throughout eternity.* (Excerpt-

ed from Ajip Rosidi's poem, "Panorama Tanah Air") (12).

These social themes converge at the same point: social justice and injustice, equal rights or disparity before the law, common or dissimilar fates, the opportunity for a better life or continuous consignment to low-class status, emancipation or discrimination. The problem that always haunts this discussion is whether social inequality in the distribution of wealth (as something that is nearly impossible to avoid) necessarily leads to injustice (which is something that could possibly be prevented)? Or must the stratification of society into differential levels of prosperity as well as disparate levels of potential and achievement coincide with the leveled structuring of access to legal representation and social dignity, as well as unequal access to political and legal protections? This matter has been the subject of debate for many centuries among the intelligentsia in many corners of the world and in various scientific and philosophical debates, both in the classical and modern eras.

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<sup>12</sup> Ajip Rosidi, *Terkenang Topeng Cirebon*, Jakarta, Pustaka Jaya, 1993, page 155.

In the same manner, poets in each era have addressed the same anxieties using different methods for delivering these ideas, adopting different images and comparisons, and we often feel as though poetry possesses important values due to the authenticity of expression or the authenticity of the social issues that are discussed. The English poet William Blake, who lived in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century through the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, always recited the grave circumstances that afflicted the lower classes, and he once felt compelled to

express in his unique style the division of society between those who lived happily in sweet contentment and those who were stranded in the darkness of interminable suffering:

*Every night & every morn / Some to misery are born / Every morn & every night / Some are born to sweet delight / Some are born to sweet delight / Some are born to endless night.*

(An excerpt from William Blake's poem: "Auguries of Innocence")<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> William Blake, *Selected Poetry* (edited with an Introduction and Notes by Michael Mason), Oxford University Press, 1996, page 176.

# A Social Scientist's Experiment

JAMAL D. RAHMAN

Denny JA introduced what is now known as “*essay poetry*” by publishing a book of poetry entitled *Atas Nama Cinta (In the Name of Love)* in 2012. Sapardi Djoko Damono, Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, and Ignas Kleden discussed Denny’s poetry in the same book. As a social scientist, essayist, and columnist, Denny feels that these “old” media (essays, newspaper columns, and scientific articles) are no longer adequate for expressing ideas, attention, and concern related to social facts and phenomena.

Meanwhile, poetry as it is generally conceived is also deficient because poetry tends to be inscrutable and unappreciated by the public at large. However, poetry is also perceived in some ways as a literary genre that can touch and stir people’s feelings. On this basis, Denny sought and then developed a new and more suitable medium for disseminating his ideas. From Denny’s perspective, essay poetry represents a new medium which he believes is conducive for this purpose.



What exactly is essay poetry?

Denny JA (2012) has already affirmed its criteria, specifically: “*First*, it explores the inner personal side, the psychology, and the human interest of the character. *Second*, it is imbued with lyrics and language which are intended to be poetic and easily understood. *Third*, it doesn’t just portray the personal individual experience but also the context of social facts. The presence of footnotes within these compositions is central. *Fourth*, it is intended to not only touch the heart of the reader/viewer but also supply data and facts surrounding a certain social issue.” Based on these criteria, it becomes quite clear what “essay poetry” entails. Thus, this article will not focus on the validity of the term “essay poetry,” which combines two quite dissimilar forms of composition (poetry and essay).

What Denny JA has accomplished with the concept of the essay poem is evident in the narrative poems concerning social facts and phenomena in *Atas Nama Cinta (In the Name of Love)*. Because they are narratives, the poems in this book are relatively long. The book consists of five essay poems; these are all narrative poems supplied with footnotes, which serve as clarification and mainly citations that substantiate phenomena, data, and social

facts which are of specific interest to the author within his poems. The social issues that are discussed are discrimination against those holding divergent religious convictions, as well as victims of gender discrimination, discrimination against ethnic Chinese, discrimination against homosexuals, and religious discrimination (against intermarriage). The stories are told from and explore the point of view of the victims, with the effect that these narratives are especially poignant and heartrending. Thus, Denny’s essay poems implicitly evoke sympathy for the victims of various forms of social discrimination.

In considering Denny’s criteria for essay poetry and his achievements (in *Atas Nama Cinta*), it immediately appears that yet another significant issue emerges in essay poetry, which was not mentioned as a criterion, and that is a story or plot. Each essay poem in *Atas Nama Cinta* constitutes a story regarding victims of social discrimination, which is written in a lyric design. Therefore, what is designated as an “essay poem” is actually a narrative poem, i.e. a poem that consists of a story that features several characters, a plot, setting, conflict, and a conclusion (not necessarily a happy resolution), which endeavors to the greatest possible extent to touch, stimulate, or astound the reader.

We are already acquainted with a similar form of poetry within the traditions of Indonesian poetry, exemplified by poems written by Ajip Rosidi, Taufiq Ismail, and especially Rendra (in his ballad poems). Denny's essay poems stand out by specifically raising issues of social discrimination. A more exceptional difference that distinguishes Denny's poetry from poems written by previous authors of narrative poetry is that Denny places significant emphasis on the use of footnotes in his essay poems. Denny writes, "That composition was written in the form of a poetic love story, but it is full of footnotes that document facts. It is an experiment to bridge fiction and fact. The details of the story are fictitious. However, the social reality behind the main issue is fact." The footnotes are so significant that Denny states that "the presence of footnotes within these compositions (essay poems) is central."

Thus, Denny JA has asserted the importance of footnotes and has raised some significant social issues in his essay poems. What does this mean? To answer this question, we must also consider the concept of the essay poem from the perspective of Denny JA, who has academic degrees in the social sciences and has also been a social activist. In this regard, by composing these essay poems,

Denny JA operates in a certain manner and from the perspective of a social scientist, primarily because he truly possesses the academic background and experience of a social scientist. Data and social facts are especially significant for a social scientist. Conversely, imagination plays a secondary role, although imagination is relevant within the framework of understanding and interpreting social facts and phenomena. In this regard, imagination is "only" used in the context of responding to and considering social facts. Since they represent a primary factor, these social facts must be researched rigorously in a scientific manner in order to obtain indisputable facts. In "essay poetry", the source and legitimacy of research findings must be authenticated in an unambiguous manner and expressed by supplying accurate sources. Academic articles accomplish this by using footnotes, which not only present supplementary clarification but also provide an authoritative and credible reference or citation.

In essay poetry, footnotes also perform the function of clarifying the context or social facts concerning victims of social discrimination in a narrative whose characters are fictitious. This is what Denny calls an experiment that bridges facts and fiction. Thus, fiction must be con-

textualized or based on facts and social reality, which should be obtained to the greatest extent possible through research. Fiction should not drift in the clouds of an imaginary sky; instead, it should be directly grounded in facts and social reality. Again, this represents the point of view of a social scientist; although he uses his imagination to create fiction, he does not straight away abandon social facts since in his estimation social facts are his primary focus and concern. In his view, facts cannot be subordinated even within the realm of fiction.

In my opinion, works of literature always represent a dialectic between fact and fiction. Thus, literature results from the creative distillation of both fact and fiction. Fact stimulates fiction, and fiction finds factual relevance within particular views of realities that may differ from each other. However, in poetry (and literature in general), social facts are secondary. The primary features are fiction, imagination, and most significantly the use of language as a means of articulation in approaching social facts. This does not mean that authors do not research social facts that attract their attention and which are dealt with in their literature; literary authors certainly research and integrate facts that pique their interest. It is just that authors in their

approach to research do not apply strict methodologies, such as those normally pursued by scientists and academic scholars. It could be said that the research that a poet conducts is mainly intuitive in its grasp of phenomena and its quest for particular facts. Thus, poets do not feel the need to accompany their social poems with footnotes.

How does a fact differ for a poet in contrast to a fact for social scientists? Or more precisely, what sort of fact becomes the focus of attention for poets, and what kind of fact attracts the attention of social scientists? For poets, even the most trifling of facts can be perceived as being especially significant insofar as that fact stimulates the emotions and stirs the heart of the poet. Thus, even the most mundane facts can arouse a poet's spirit. For example, D. Zawawi Imron wrote a poem entitled "*Sungai Kecil*" (Little River), which was inspired by the experience of having seen a small river. On the other hand, facts that attract a social scientist's attention are first and foremost facts and phenomena that exist in a social setting. In this context, it is evident why Denny JA's essay poetry is always connected to and grounded in social facts.

In conceptualizing essay poetry, Denny JA's stature as someone who

has earned academic degrees in the social sciences and has also been a social activist apparently holds even more far-reaching significance. If as a social scientist Denny focuses attention on social facts and assertions, as an activist Denny apparently places attention and sympathy for the victims of social discrimination. It is not surprising then that in each of his five essay poems (in *Atas Nama Cinta*), he never mentions victims of natural disasters, for example. Victims of social discrimination are obviously more interesting to him than the victims of even the most atrocious natural disasters. Therefore, victims of social discrimination who have suffered due to their religious convictions are more worthy of his attention than victims of a tsunami, for instance. That homosexuals suffer social discrimination is more disquieting to him than the victims, for example, of a devastating earthquake. This, of course, does not mean that he lacks sympathy or solidarity toward the victims of natural disasters.

Nonetheless, for several reasons, the concept of the essay poem is not only appealing but also important. First, an essay poem is an experiment: composing a social poem from the functional perspective of a social scientist or academician. This viewpoint prioritizes the significance of

social facts, while poetry truly prioritizes fiction (and imagination) as having primary value. Therefore, fact and fiction have equal importance in essay poems. The result is fiction which is directly connected to particular facts, without dismissing the possibility of a connection of this fiction exclusively with other relevant facts.

Second, many examples reveal that the most recent Indonesian poetry has been dominated by lyric poetry, i.e. poetry that discusses the personal feelings, problems, and experiences of the poet, often detailing the poet's most intimate feelings. It is absolutely astonishing that in the midst of various chaotic social quandaries, most of our poetry still discusses a poet's personal problems. It is likely that the concept of the essay poem will impel poets and many other people to write narrative poems, which in and of themselves represent social poetry. At the same time, this situation reflects our responsibility to write social poetry that addresses the realities of Indonesian life, which in many respects remains bitter, as well as discriminative toward minorities.

Third, because it has the features of a narrative, essay poetry will certainly be more communicative and relevant to many social groups. In this

context, the embellishment and promotion of narrative poetry will connect poetry with many social classes. Essay poetry will narrow the distance between poetry and the general public. It is true that poetry can be found in many places. However, it should be recognized that a yawning gap still exists between the public and poetry, which is partly caused by the indifference of poets in considering the relative lack of communication with potential readers

who would like to appreciate and enjoy poetry.

Of course, to witness how substantial the contribution of these new ideas may be to enhance the treasury of Indonesian poetry, we must await further developments from essay poetry writers. Any further progress will be linked to the scope of influence of essay poetry and most of all the social merit and esthetic value of its achievements.

# A Brief Overview of Denny JA's Essay Poetry

LEON AGUSTA

What sort of understanding can be attained if we, particularly people who read and write poetry, hear the following terms: lyrical poetry, contemplative poetry, Sufi poetry, religious poetry, mantra poetry, prose poetry, resistance poetry, pamphlet poetry, contextual poetry, or social poetry? And there are also various other appellations, such as Cirebonese/Klangenan poetry, mumbling poetry, mute poetry, dark poetry, and most recently essay poetry. The immediate impression is that the dynamics in the treasury of Indonesian poetry, in keeping with its nature, never displays a single face. There is variety, for example, in style, in its aesthetic inclination, as well as character from the works that are attached. This manifestation is propelled by the presence of a type of creative anxiety which always clings within poets who perpetually seek something distinctive. Differences in cultural background among these poets often feel like an inevitable quality that pervades this variety.

Or, another line of inquiry could be posed: What factors give rise to or serve as the background for such differences? Education and talent? Social environment or even other factors? Concepts of art and obsession with a certain quest? Like, for example, the difference in spirit and proximity in the poems of Chairil Anwar, the rebel of Angkatan 45; Rendra, the colorful peacock who vented his ideas through pamphlets and ballads; and Wiji Tukul, with his brave and soul-shaking resistance poetry—just to mention a few names. Presumably, these factors all touch upon each other, all influence each other, with different degrees of intensity, throughout the period of creation from time to time, and these are shaped by the experience of creation by each poet. What is stated above represents a basis for deliberation that will never end.

What is needed is a simple understanding from the stance of the form of writing and the definition of poetry, prose, essay, and any academic narrative that is packed with serious thoughts. Pure poetry, for example, is understood as a type of literature that is linked to sound and rhythm as essential aesthetic elements. On the other hand, prose is considered to be a literary form that conveys stories through narration which is slightly

more connected to aesthetics when compared to other forms of writing that merely convey a theme or explanation (e.g. essays, reports, and news). What a literary artist does in the process of creating an experimental work is to demolish the barriers that separate poetry and prose to the point that a new genre is produced, which is called *prose poetry*.

This concept and examples of experimental prose poems first appeared in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (1855-1869) through a composition by Charles Baudelaire, entitled “Paris Spleen”. Baudelaire’s goal was to create prose that was rather lively in order to engender lyrical delight within the soul, a contemplative vibration, and conscientious sentiment. Until the current era, this literary genre, which could be called a sort of graft between poetry and prose, has generated various debates within groups of literary critics and authors.

Prose poetry represents a vehicle for introducing a story line or idea into a prosaic form (which is usually more intended for expressing thoughts), which is laden with poetic elements (that are normally occupied with nuance, emotion, and beauty). During the historical journey of prose poetry, several propensities have been identified in this mixed genre: 1. the obliteration of rigid poetic style by

getting rid of the use of lines; 2. the introduction of phrases possessing poetic elements into the prose; 3. storytelling that communicates moral messages (e.g. fables), a technique that was later solidified to fantastic and surreal effect by Kafka; and 4. familiarization with a modernist approach, which was established in poems written by Robert Bly, Rosmarie Waldrop, and Charles Simic.

Regarding the matter of contents and weight, prose poetry has begun to raise issues and problems that exist within the public sphere in a certain historical period. In this regard, similarity exists between prose poetry and the type of writing that Denny JA has named *essay poetry*, which are found in his book, entitled *Atas Nama Cinta: Sebuah Puisi Esai* (In the Name of Love: An Essay Poem).

And the difference? From a close examination of Denny JA's book, *Atas Nama Cinta*, essay poetry represents a vehicle that escorts poetry with "raw meat" which is compiled from the real world. At this point, it is important to note that essay poetry as conceived by Denny JA must be supplemented and reinforced by (a certain number of) footnotes. This requirement will apparently be a permanent burden in the art of creating essay poetry. A question arises: Would it be possible to bring forth an essay poem that lacks

footnotes? This is a discussion that will require some meticulous deliberation.

Beyond the themes that are offered in *Atas Nama Cinta*, it would be a positive development if essay poetry as introduced and familiarized by Denny JA could receive both acceptance and a warm welcome from writers as a new genre which deserves to be developed since essay poetry possesses a reservoir of seemingly unlimited themes: the hustle and bustle of urban existence, the suffocating nature of daily survival, altercations and disorder, conflicts that can never be resolved, deceptive tactics full of subterfuge and deceit, insatiable lust and desire, and evasion of justice through prevarication and the buying and selling of alibis, without tolerance or solidarity in the name of truth, the aims of justice or any confidence in multilateral conciliation to achieve common goals.

### **The Aesthetics of Liberation**

When essay poetry was first introduced as a new literary genre by Denny JA, an academician and analyst who specialized in political science and business history during his college study in the United States, the publication of his book, *Atas Nama Cinta*, elicited astonishment and provoked a variety of questions. What



was meant by essay poetry? A new name had appeared in the literary treasury of modern Indonesian poetry.

Perhaps we can find part of the answer to this query by examining the themes and contents of the book *Atas Nama Cinta*, an anthology which features five love stories with its unifying focus being the most troubling and complex social problem, namely discrimination: 1. *Sapu Tangan Fang Yin* (Fang Yin's Handkerchief), 2. *Romi dan Yuli dari Cikeusik* (Romeo and Juliet from Cikeusik), 3. *Minah Tetap Dipancung* (Minah was Still Beheaded), 4. *Cinta Terlarang Batman dan Robin* (The Forbidden Love of Batman and Robin), and 5. *Bunga Kering Perpisahan* (The Desiccated Flower of Parting).

The first impression is that the author, Denny JA, is presenting a form of literature which combines elements of poetry, prosaic elements, and elements of academic essays that emerge from scientific traditions (such as using footnotes as confirmation of the real social phenomena that actually affect a specific community and also a means of providing context to the story) in order to yield testimony regarding the current state of existence of a certain society. He strives to extract poetic energy from

various social manifestations within a society where discrimination runs rampant. Mankind and humanity are destroyed, the charitable disposition of man, which is a divine quality, is abandoned and abused.

It is likely that the author realizes that during the current era, Indonesia has still not completely instituted human rights. This is especially true in having not yet extended tolerance to minorities who suffer from differences related to religion and gender, including the issue of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender). For example, Indonesia has not yet signed the current version (March, 2011) of the United Nations Declaration of Human rights, which covers gender issues and the rights that should be afforded to LGBT. Even worse, in 2008, as a reaction to a previous UN resolution to recognize the rights of LGBT, Indonesia signed a counter-resolution that rejected any acknowledgment of LGBT rights. It should be mentioned, however, that when the United Nations declaration was publicized in 2011, Indonesia no longer rejected the resolution which included aspects of tolerance for LGBT; on the other hand, in 2011, Indonesia still neither accepted nor acknowledged the rights that the UN had advocated, such as:

- Protecting individuals from homophobic violence;
- Preventing cruel and inhumane abuse and debasement of homosexuals;
- Abolishing laws that criminalize homosexual behavior;
- Prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity'
- Guaranteeing freedom of expression, assembly, and association.

Denny JA decided to take action, as he admits, because his conscience was disturbed and because he was unwilling to just close his eyes and be indifferent. He felt challenged to respond to the realities of life in our current social circumstances, and he did so in an uncommon manner: writing literature. He could not imagine writing poetry similar to what he was already familiar with, although he was well-acquainted with Indonesia's treasury of poetry. He was also personally acquainted with many local poets. However, he did not consider the possibility or have the ambition to become one of them. Inconceivably, he only wanted something that was truly suitable for himself: authenticity. In his efforts to become an authentic writer, he armed himself with a huge reserve of scientific knowledge, meticulous observation of

social and humanitarian manifestations, as well as a considerable supply of experience in many facets of life that he had accumulated during many years of living and working in Indonesia. These aspects of his preparation enabled and facilitated his potential to express his ideas as an intellectual, equipped with linguistic proficiency and a vision of establishing a more humane society.

It is clear that the record of Denny JA's steady progress in accumulating achievements as a public figure who became prominent as a young man (born January 4, 196) is truly amazing. However, his accomplishments were already behind him. The current decade represents an era of struggle for idealism within the realm of civilized cultural values.

The five essay poems in Denny JA's book *Atas Nama Cinta* present stories of brutality that break and touch the heart as well as shine in a truly innovative way. Story plots that are gloomy become bright, and doors that are closed are opened. The reader feels the spirit of freedom become pervasive to the point that the reader is impelled to attain numerous points of view that bestow a new awareness that is also full of enjoyment. This is the essence of what the author calls the aesthetics of liberation. Denny JA escorts the reader from a totally obstructed state

of affairs, from a gloomy overcast sky, from dense stifling air, from a one-sided attitude that is thick and saturated with blind obstinance, where everything emerges from narrow alleyways of the history of civilization. From this starting point, various processes of liberation ensue which lead to the opening of spaces of illumination. As Sutardji Calzoum Bachri has declared, "All of the verses in the book contain themes of varied forms of resistance."

Liberation is another side of resistance and opposition. It is not impossible that the aesthetics of liberation as presented by these essay poems could serve as a source of inspiration for the rise of a cultural movement in our beloved country of Indonesia. With the concept of aesthetic liberation, whose scope is wide and far-reaching, we can hope that various new works of literature will emerge in the near future. However, it is obvious that just in order to read an essay poem, one already needs to be equipped with greater than average intelligence, even more so to create and compose it. Essay poetry cannot possibly be produced by a poet who is only equipped with natural talent. It appears that the era in which natural talent sufficed has already come and gone.

Civilization similar to the issue of culture requires a liberating effort to break free from the various forms of weakness that cling to it. Efforts to achieve liberation entail a process that is not possibly based on an all-purpose design that has previously been applied. Thus, intervention with aesthetic energy is necessary. In other words, the process of liberation must proceed by optimizing the role of the aesthetic force. Rigid limitations between definitions of art and "non-art" will only reinforce aesthetic tyranny. The aesthetics of liberation has the ambition to create an organized space of immense capacity to accommodate its presence in the midst of society. The right of the public to enjoy art that is dedicated to the progress and enlightenment of human civilization should be served like one's daily diet. However, it has been envisioned from the start that essay poetry requires literary critics who can build golden bridges between these poems and the general public. Therefore, an appropriate venture is to present essay poems through social media, such as Youtube.

### **The essay poem's lungs: Footnotes**

We can demonstrate that the text *Atas Nama Cinta* is prose in several aspects. One is impressed that the

extent of the poetic content is occasionally weak, even more so to be called an essay. The format is far from the typical structure and conventions of an essay. Despite this, the presence of three elements—poetry, prose, and footnotes—it appears that this hybrid literary form can be understood and that the term “essay poem” is acceptable. The presence of footnotes performs a function in a manner similar to creating “lungs” for the stories which are presented. Footnotes breathe life into the essay poem, allowing it to thrive, not only within the restricted environment of highly literate readers, but they also enable the essay poem to break through and infiltrate the readership of the general public. Thus, footnotes not only facilitate an engrossing opportunity to enjoy and contemplate but also offer many intriguing surprises.

Footnotes are seen in *Fang Yin's Handkerchief* (7 citations), *Romeo and Juliet from Cikeusik* (6 citations), *Minah was Still Beheaded* (6 citations), *The Forbidden Love of Batman and Robin* (11 citations), and *The Desiccated Flower of Parting* (6 citations). These footnotes affirm that Denny JA is asserting a connection with traditional conventions practiced at universities where he enjoyed his education and accumulated an appreciation for science. This is what distinguishes

Denny JA's essay poems from the works of other genres. Footnotes open up a space of liberation among the empirical sciences, technology, law, theology, social issues, and art, which are normally compartmentalized within their own individual discipline but are drawn together and united within these texts. Essay poetry cannot function or exist without footnotes. The presence of footnotes in these literary works called essay poems represents an innovative breakthrough within the treasury of creative writing in Indonesia.

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*Pursue Chinese. Kill Chinese* (Fang Yin's Handkerchief). Hordes of rioters scream hysterically back and forth. Savage and vicious, like ravenous beasts. Rape occurred here and there. As well as looting and ransacking. *They fought over turf for plundering, competing to outdo each other / Helter-skelter, piling down on each other encircled by flames / In buildings which were set on fire / They were roasted alive / Killed in vain /*. How should we comprehend a text like this?

We might ask and inquire endlessly without reaching a sound conclusion. Where did these wild creatures come from? Who were they? These questions leave us very agitated

to the point that they disturb our dreams. A calamity can approach so suddenly, crushing the weak until they are pulverized. From the footnotes, we can find some information that revives the bitter memories of the events of May 13-14, 1998, including significant details that leave us stupefied, unable to make sense of them. (It is mentioned that 70,000 ethnic Chinese left Indonesia in the aftermath of the violent riots of May, 1998 (Footnote 2; ... at that time a rivalry between two generals, Prabowo and Wiranto, was transpiring (Footnote 6).

In the text of another essay poem, the presence of footnotes is especially significant. The contrast evinced between the first three and the last eight footnotes in *The Forbidden Love of Batman and Robin* required persistent research by a social analyst who truly cares about the world and problems of the gay community. They were created by the same God who created us. By setting forth several examples here, it will be apparent that reading *Atas Nama Cinta* provides a unique experience for understanding social problems wherever discrimination occurs.

In the essay poem concerning gay love, Denny JA selects death as a

setting for ending his story. At his mother's grave, the son begs forgiveness while expressing a confession that was too late in coming. Let's appreciate how beautifully the poignant mood of sorrow at the cemetery is described:

The overgrown grass surrounding  
the gravesite cringed  
A breeze wafting through the frangipani  
trees became suddenly silent  
But the sky remained blue  
And clouds passed gently by

*(The Forbidden Love of Batman and Robin)*

In the essay poem that relates the love story of an interfaith couple, death also lurks close at hand. Denny JA chooses the sad beauty of a highly melancholic tragedy as his final offering:

The story of grief and sorrow had reached  
its conclusion For mankind  
The topsail had already been lowered  
From up on high

*(Romeo and Juliet from Cikeusik)*

Who would not be startled to read, for example, footnote 4 in *The Desiccated Flower of Parting* that explains, "There is information that the Prophet Mohammed married Maria Qibtiah, a Coptic Christian woman from Egypt as well as Sophia,

a Jewish woman. The prophet's companion (*sahaba*), Utsman bin 'Affan, married a Christian woman named Nailah bint al-Furafisa; another companion, Thalhah bin Ubaidillah, married a Jewish woman in Damascus, and Huzaifah married a Jewish woman in Madian. This information was supplied by Professor Musdah Mulia, Professor Kautsar Azhari Noer, and Professor Zainun Kamal at the 200<sup>th</sup> session of the Klub Kajian Agama (KKA), which was held by the Paramadina Foundation on October 17, 2003."

As a final note, the essay poem anthology *In the Name of Love* confirms the authenticity of Denny JA

as an artist who possesses the spirit for seeking a new form of expression within the repository of contemporary Indonesian art. Essay poetry is a literary manifestation derived from contemporary artistic ideas that obtain poetic energy from the alleyways of the history of civilization, wherever it can roam unimpeded. The spirit of liberation in its soul and the obsession from artistic ideas that strive to be realized have already given rise to an inspiration: aesthetic liberation. Thus, this inspiration is jam-packed, much like an architect who in designing spaces discovers new outlets for creativity that he has devised independently.



# Essay Poetry: Challenges and Possibilities

**AGUS R. SARJONO**

**E**ssay poetry, as seen from its name, is a combination of two literary states of mind, namely poems and essays. It is not necessary to explain that poetry represents a genre of literature. On the other hand, essays are clearly not classified as works of literature. For many years there have indeed been some people in literary circles who have wrongly claimed that essays comprise works of literature. Some essays can often be poetic, and essays can often be a form of writing that is chosen anytime someone wants to discuss a certain issue regard-

ing literature and/or discuss a certain work of literature. Although essays frequently roam back and forth in the living quarters of literature, essays remain texts that are not works of literature. This position is rather consistent with literary criticism.

Literary criticism is an important part of the life-support of literature; however, literary criticism itself is not a work of literature.

Literary criticism on one hand can assume the form of an essay, and on the other hand, it can also appear in the form of a scientific composition;



however, in either sense, literary criticism is not a literary composition.

The essay as a form of composition was first known when Michel de Montaigne published some writing entitled *Essais* (1580). Since then, the term “essai” in France and “essay” in English has been used to designate an effort or attempt (and in this sense, it represents a more temporary than a complete final piece of writing) recognized as the name for a compositional genre rendered more or less in the writing style of Michel de Montaigne. Shortly afterward, Francis Bacon followed in de Montaigne’s footsteps by writing some essays regarding various subjects with a length that tended to be shorter than the general length of de Montaigne’s earlier compositions. The essay, as Bacon (1597) tried to clarify the position of his essays, was in the form of grains of salt that stimulated the appetite in comparison to food that one might gorge on. Since its introduction by de Montaigne, the essay has undergone development in its underlying format, enticing many writers to become involved in this expository genre. Thus, it does not astonish writers when they are reminded that the essay is considered to be the most flexible and highly adaptable form of writing. The rapid development and increase in

popularity of the essay have caused almost every prominent writer in the world to have written an essay, even if in some cases this is not a frequent activity. Many groups of authors, even in elite literary circles, are assessed on the quality of their essays because nearly every great writer is also adept at writing essays, and writers who demonstrate expertise in writing essays are also very likely to be accomplished poets, novelists, and short story writers.

The popularity of the essay, which began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, experienced an even greater acceleration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; it has become even more popular and appreciated in modern times. It is difficult to find an example of a prominent mass media outlet that does not provide space for essays within its publications.

In Indonesia, there is a fairly long history of essay writing. However, the term “essay” as a genre only became popular when H. B. Jassin published a well-known book, namely *Kesusastaan Indonesia Modern dalam Kritik dan Esei* (Modern Indonesian Literature in Criticism and Essays), which was later published in a few editions. Since then, the composition of essays has become a common feature in the cumulative written archives, especially of literature, in Indonesia.

Despite this, upon reading the compositions which fill Jassin's book, the concept of the essay tends to lack clarity. This is not only because H. B. Jassin did not sufficiently clarify what he specifically called an essay but also because he did not state explicitly which among his compositions should be called criticism and which should be called essays.

If we retain the basic and classical understanding of literary criticism, i.e. "a composition within which one finds an effort to assess or judge the merits of a certain work of literature," then our understanding of literary criticism in the book *Modern Indonesian Literature in Criticism and Essays*, becomes relatively clear. What remains unclear is our understanding of the term essay itself. Compositions in Jassin's book do not equip us to distinguish between compositions that may consist of essays and those that may comprise literary criticism. This effort is even more daunting when we consider that a considerable amount of literary criticism was written in essay form.

Of course, many other essays were written even before Jassin published his seminal work, *Modern Indonesian Literature in Criticism and Essays*. The notable composition by Ki Hajar Dewantara, "Als Ik Een Nederlander

Was" (If I were a Dutchman, 1913), which infuriated the colonial government and led to Dewantara's exile, cannot be anything but an essay. This is also true for S. T. Alisjahbana in his composition, "Semboyan yang Tegas" (A Firm Slogan); this composition, which triggered the "Polemik Kebudayaan" (Cultural Debate) is obviously an essay.

But what is designated as an essay?

Several formulations regarding the essay have been done, for example by various dictionaries and encyclopedias, e.g. *Webster's Dictionary*<sup>1</sup>, *Oxford Dictionary*<sup>2</sup>, *Ensiklopedi Indonesia*<sup>3</sup>, *Encyclopaediae International*<sup>4</sup>, *Encyclopaediae Americana*<sup>5</sup>, Joseph T. Shipley<sup>6</sup>, and J. A. Cuddon<sup>7</sup>. However,

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<sup>1</sup> *Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*. 1877. Chicago: Consolidated Book Publisher

<sup>2</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Volume III). 1997. Oxford at the Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> *Ensiklopedi Indonesia* (Jilid 2). 1980. Jakarta: Ichtiar Baru-Van Hoeve

<sup>4</sup> *Encyclopaediae International*. 1986. New York.: Glorier Inc.

<sup>5</sup> *Encyclopaediae Americana*. 2001. New York: Scholastic

<sup>6</sup> Joseph T. Shipley. 1962. *The Dictionary of World Literature*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

<sup>7</sup> J. A. Cuddon. 1992. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin Books

even at a glance, it is evident that the concept of the essay is apparently defined in many ways and incompletely; some definitions are even contradictory. Concerning the size of an essay, for example, there are sources (e.g. *Oxford Dictionary*) that claim that is a free form or of medium length (e.g. *Encyclopedia International*, Shipley). Another view is that an essay should be brief enough to read in one sitting, according to *Webster's Dictionary*.

Looking from the stance of its contents, an essay should contain analysis and interpretation (*Webster's Dictionary*), or literary, cultural, scientific, and philosophical commentary (*Ensiklopedi Indonesia*). On the other hand, other sources do not state the contents of an essay.

The style and methodology of essays are also defined differently. *Webster's Dictionary* states that the style and method of an essay are flexible and variable, while *Encyclopedia Indonesia* states that essays should be written with a coordinated style and method. Other sources do not mention this issue.

Some sources differentiate essays as being formal or non-formal (Shipley, *Ensiklopedi Indonesia*, *Encyclopaediae International*, Cuddon), while others (*Encyclopaediae Americana*, *Webster's Dictionary*, and *Oxford*

*Dictionary*) do not.<sup>8</sup> For an example, let's examine the definition in *Ensiklopedi Indonesia*<sup>9</sup>:

“An essay is a genre of prose that examines an issue within the following disciplines: literature, art, culture, science, and philosophy; based on observation, close inspection, interpretation of facts or an approach which is appropriate for inducing concepts and insights, which are the product of the author's as individual efforts. Within an essay, the writer evokes a certain perspective, personal attitude, introduces his findings, and closely examines the chosen subject with systematic analysis which is orderly, clear, and dispensed in Bahasa Indonesia from the 1930s, especially within *Pujangga Baroe* magazine, and further developed in the post-World War II era.”

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<sup>8</sup> The differentiation of essays within formal and non-formal literary categories has been discussed by certain Indonesian writers, among others: Panuti Sudjiman, *Kamus Istilah Sastra*. Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1982; H. G. Tarigan, *Menulis Sebagai Suatu Ketrampilan Berbahasa*. Angkasa: Bandung, 1983; Saini KM dan Jakob Sumardjo, *Apresiasi Sastra: Sebuah Pengantar*. Jakarta. Jakarta: Gramedia, 1985.

<sup>9</sup> *Ensiklopedi Indonesia* (Jilid 2). Jakarta: Ichtiar Baru-Van Hoeve, 1980.

It is clear that the definition, “Within an essay, the writer evokes a certain perspective, personal attitude, introduces his findings, and closely examines the chosen subject with systematic analysis which is orderly, clear, and dispensed in Bahasa Indonesia from the 1930s, especially within *Pujangga Baroe* magazine, and further developed in the post-World War II era,” can be easily refuted. In an essay, the author can put forward more than one particular perspective; the author can also introduce his or her finding or someone else’s. The author can also approach the issues systematically or in a disorganized manner, and the analysis can be clear or ambiguous. Furthermore, the essay need not be doled out in Bahasa Indonesia of the 1930s or especially published in *Pujangga Baroe* magazine.

Let’s abandon (or at least postpone for a while) the definitions provided for an essay as addressed previously. This delay is not caused by the ease with which we can present proof that the definitions (above) are unconvincing, such as definitions that are viewed from the stance of the essay contents, i.e. stating that it should contain analysis, exegesis, or explication of literary, cultural, scientific, or philosophical texts. It is simple enough to establish that the vast majority of

essays do not include analysis of the kind indicated by *Webster’s Dictionary* and furthermore, most essays are not replete with literary, cultural, scientific, or philosophical analyses, as stated in *Ensiklopedi Indonesia*; an exception is when the essay writer refers to another essay (e.g. in the field of science or literature) to make a comparison or clarification.

This kind of comparison is performed to view the contrast in subject-object connections in the three types of compositions, as well as principles that are used as writing references for these three aforementioned kinds of compositions. This is done because Shipley<sup>10</sup>, for instance, creates a range of essays by positioning the formal/objective (with attention to intellectual aspects) on one side and the informal/subjective (with attention to subjective experiences) on the other side. Within this range, he allocates the propensities of an essay. This definition appears quite persuasive and simple to apply when classifying types of essays. However, indeed, composing an essay cannot be recognized as separate from other forms of compositions because this would make a whole range of compositions, such as

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph T. Shipley, *Ibid.* op. cit.

articles, monographs, running the gamut to sketches and comedy routines similar to essays and thus only distinguishable by their particular propensities. By contrasting the subject-object connections within scientific, literary, and essay compositions, it will become evident that apportioning of essays according to formal-objective versus informal-subjective elements as conceptualized by Shipley<sup>11</sup> (and followed by those who quote him in Indonesia) is irrelevant.

To discuss the characteristic of the essay, I try to use popular references and resources—at least well-known—in Indonesia. Only if I have to, I will use books or resources that are not very popular in Indonesia. The use of references that are well known in Indonesia is deliberately done to make it easier for us to recall “standard” meanings in our—in term of Hans Robert Jauß—*Erwartungshorizont* (horizon of expectation)<sup>12</sup> so that the review and its efforts become more open.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* loc. cit.

<sup>12</sup> Jauß, Hans Robert. 1982. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Translated by Timothy Bahti). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

## Scientific, Literary, and Essay Compositions

Science represents efforts to expand knowledge, which are achieved through certain processes called the scientific method. This method separates science from other intellectual pursuits. Stanley M. Honer and Thomas C. Hunt<sup>13</sup> have stated that the basic framework for the scientific method consists of six steps<sup>14</sup>, namely:

1. Awareness and formulation of the problem;
2. Observation and collection of relevant data;
3. Arrangement and classification of the data;
4. Formulation of a hypothesis;
5. Deducing and refining a hypothesis;
6. Testing the validity of (i.e. verifying) the hypothesis

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<sup>13</sup> Yuyun Suriasumantri (ed.), *Ilmu dalam Perspektif*. Jakarta: Gramedia, 1982, page 9.

<sup>14</sup> These 6 steps represent the general standard for following the scientific method as applied internationally. For the meantime, we will disregard the different perspectives advanced by Thomas Kuhn in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, on one side, and Karl Popper in *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. London: Routledge. 1959, on the other side of this issue.

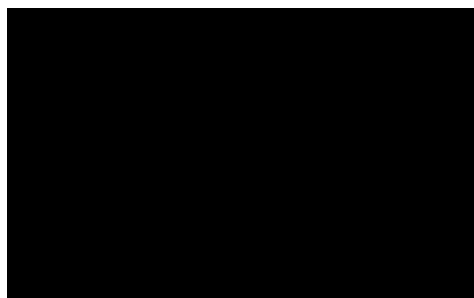
It can be concluded from these steps that scientific writing possesses certain principles that involve an underlying framework and scientific method. Thus, the structure of scientific composition entails following certain rules that are signified by formulating a problem, organizing a theoretical framework, reporting the results of one's investigation, drafting a summary of one's conclusions, writing an abstract, and finally registering the research and arranging publication in a scientific journal<sup>15</sup>.

Thus, writing a scientific paper must comply with certain rules, i.e. scientific procedures that are expected to assure objectivity within a certain scientific discipline. Being objective, according to Senn<sup>16</sup>, means that data must be made available for scientific evaluation without regard for the character or reputation of the individual scientist.

From its objective contents, according to Cassirer<sup>17</sup>, science abandons and

does not emphasize the characteristics of the individual (scientist) because a key objective is to eliminate all personal and anthropomorphic elements. This is because to fulfill its inherent nature, empirical science strives to achieve maximum objectivity, and scientific measurements require precision. Therefore, scientists must place distance between themselves and their subjects. Any subjective "disturbance" regarding the subject of inquiry must be dismissed<sup>18</sup>.

Diagram 1



- S = Subject
- O = Object
- X = Scientific Principles
- OX = Scientific Research Article

<sup>15</sup> For descriptions concerning this issue, a popular article, which is both lucid and enjoyable to read, was written by Yuyun Suriasumantri, *Filsafat Ilmu: Sebuah Pengantar Populer*, Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1985, especially pages 309-244.

<sup>16</sup> Senn, in Yuyun Suriasumantri (ed.). op. cit., page 115.

<sup>17</sup> Ernst Cassirer. 1962. *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press

<sup>18</sup> K. Bertens, *Filsafat Barat Abad ke-20* (Jilid II). Jakarta: Gramedia, 1985.

In Diagram 1, there is a clear connection between the subject (S), which is observing, and the object (O), which is being observed. S observes O, then O is processed and integrated based on scientific principles (X). The subject (S) distances himself from the object (O) to the point that the presence (and influence) of S is nearly eliminated. What remains is a description of the object (O) based on X (OX). OX which is called a scientific paper.

In contrast to scientific writing, a work of literature has its principles. When composing a piece of literature, the author refers to aspects of writing relatively standard literature, such as theme, plot, characterization, background information, perspective, and other elements in writing prose, such as novels and short stories; however, in poems, these include the theme, diction, pace, enjambment, figures of speech, and design of stanzas.

These rules are carried out by the writer under literary conventions that exist in a certain era; these conventions are normally followed but sometimes they are intentionally disregarded. Therefore, reading a work of literature, according to Culler<sup>19</sup>, rep-

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<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistic and the Study of Literature*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, page 126.

resents no-thing less than the act of recapitulating the experience of the process that the author originally underwent in mastering the literary devices and rules that create meaning in a piece of literature.

In this regard, many literary experts, e.g. Luxemburg<sup>20</sup>, believe that differences between fiction and non-fiction run parallel to differences between literary and nonliterary texts. Thus, fictionality can be applied as a benchmark for determining what is included or not included within the literature.

The connection of literary authors with reality is a connection with imaginative possibilities, i.e. a realistic situation that a writer describes which is adapted somehow to the real world, or fictional situations in the literature that possess the potential to occur in authentic reality.

Since works of literature are characterized by fictional elements, these works rely on the creativity and ingenuity of the author.

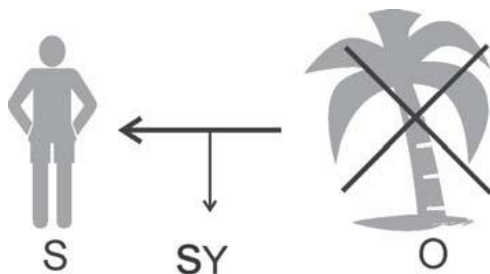
If a chart is made that depicts the relationship between the observer

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<sup>20</sup> Jan van Luxenburg (*et. al.*), *Pengantar Ilmu Sastra* (adaptation by Dick Hartoko). Jakarta: Gramedia, 1984, page 22. The opinion that fictionality is an important element of literature is also shared by Prof. A. Teeuw. See also, A. Teeuw, *Sastra dan Ilmu Sastra*. Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1988.

(subject) and reality, based on the normal practice of a literary author in drafting a work of literature, it can be represented in the manner shown in Diagram 2:

**Diagram 2**



S = Subject  
 O = Object  
 Y = Literary Conventions  
 SY = Literary Composition

The second schematic diagram clearly describes the relationship between the subject (the author) who acts as an observer (S) and reality represented by the object being observed (O). S is observing O, then O is disregarded, and S conjures a fictional impression, which may or may not pertain to the object (O).

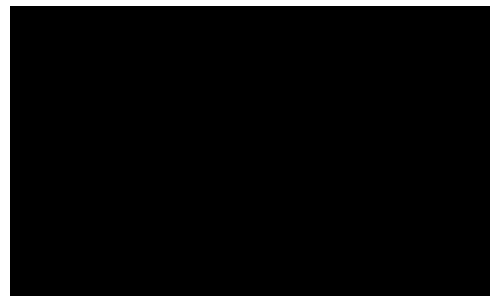
If the fictitious plot is connected to O, the existence of O (in reality) is no longer significant because what exists is the subject (S) who orchestra-

tes the creative story and writes it under the literary conventions (Y) which eventually yields **SY** (a work of literature).

The subject is minimized, while the object becomes the focal point when drafting scientific papers; conversely, when writing literature, it is specifically the subject that is prioritized, while the object is often neglected. This matter is handled quite differently in composing an essay. When drafting an essay, both the subject and the object play equally important roles, and thus, both are addressed.

Diagram 3 describes this relationship:

**Diagram 3**



S = Subject  
 O = Object  
 OS = The Composition of an Essay

In Diagram 3, the relationship is seen with the Subject or Essayist (S)



intently observing and recording authentic reality or a specific object (O). The observer (S) views reality through its factual manifestations and causal relationships as expressed within the observer's human levels of perception and awareness. The essayist as a dependable observer then directly records the presence of the object which is physically and logically evident within his field of perception. This symptomology depends on the observer's attitudes, character, temperament, intentions, attention, range of experiences, and depth of understanding. The object (O) is perceived by the essayist (S) in the sense that O exists within the essayist's field of awareness, and to the extent that a dialectic process of discovering the objective truth, **OS**, emerges, it is then written by S and called an essay.

Because of this process, the personality of the essayist (S) is eternally reflected within the written content of the essay by S concerning O. In the essay, the existence of O cannot be neglected any more than the very existence of the essayist himself. If S disappears or achieves a relativistic or negligible posture, the essay will tend to become a scientific paper if it is thus written according to scientific conventions. On the other hand, if the object (O) is disregarded, it will tend to become a work of literature if lite-

rary principles are used in writing and composing it.

The outcome of the O-S dialogue can be manifested in impressions, reflections, and other deliberations. Its attributes can be calm or more serious in addition to being imaginative or more intellectual. Moreover, regarding the topic at hand, it is open to many different issues, such as art, culture, philosophy, politics, science, economics, and religion. The degree of seriousness, casualness, and intellectualism depend substantially on the personality of the essayist and also depend on indications of the presence of the object in the cognitive awareness of the essayist. Thus, once again, the notion that essays can be classified as being formal or informal is not relevant; this is because the level of formality in an essay is not determined by the properties of a certain essay but instead, it results from an encounter between the subjective traits of the essayist and the indications of phenomena connected to the object which is being discussed in the cognitive awareness of this specific essayist.

The previous comparison represents the contrast among scientific papers, works of literature, and essays, based on the relationship between the subject (the writer) and the object (what is being described in written form). The differences among these three genres of writing can also be

understood via intuitive reasoning as well as the form of writing which an author most frequently uses. However, for the particular purposes of this discussion, it is sufficient that this comparison indicates the differences among scientific papers, literary works, and essays.

Considered from the angle of applying abstract logic, regardless of which of these three forms of writing predominates, the composition of essays differs with the writing of scientific articles and certainly with works of literature.

From this perspective, it can be understood that essays can be brief, medium-length, or considerably long. The most common length of an essay is a maximum of approximately 2,000 words. The layout that is considered ideal is usually adapted to the size of columns found in the mass media, as well as newspapers and magazines. Despite this, essays can be differentiated according to those which are expository and descriptive, compared to essays, which express the viewpoint and attitude of the author. Essays as a form of written composition normally conform to a size that tends to be brief to moderately long. However, essays that express the attitude of the writer can be unlimited in the number of pages, e.g. John Locke's book, entitled *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) and Ernst Cassirer's

book, *An Essay on Man* (1944). These two writers named their books essays, not specifically because they were writing within the form of an essay but because they were writing within the "discipline" of an essay; it was not always necessary to think vertically; instead, these writers could also think laterally<sup>21</sup> and, in addition, they were able to adopt a subject-object relationship that was not mutually nullifying.

Seen from this perspective, at a basic level, every new trial (or effort) in the exchange of ideas tends to be written within an essay format.

For instance, Edward Said's book *Orientalism* is in essay form<sup>22</sup> because

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<sup>21</sup> For the term "lateral" and "vertikal" thinking, see Edward de Bono. 1991. *Lateral Thinking: A Textbook of Creativity*. London: Penguin (first published 1970).

<sup>22</sup> In the introduction to his book, Edward Said firmly states that he as an observer subject never wants to negate himself as is customary in scientific writing. "Much of the personal investment in this study derives from my awareness of being an "Oriental" as a child growing up in two British colonies. All of my education, in those colonies (Palestine and Egypt) and the United States, has been Western, and yet that deep early awareness has persisted. In many ways, my study of orientalism has been an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals.... In none of that, however, have I ever lost hold of the cultural reality of, the personal involvement.. etc. See Edward W. Said. 1979. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. New York: Vintage Books/Random House, Pages 33-34.

the character and subjectivity of the author are continuously revealed on each page, while the objects that are discussed are never abandoned, discounted, or rendered in a fanciful manner. He is unimpeded in playing with models, experiments, notes, and ideas. As it is common practice to think laterally, a form of creative thinking that attempts to break free from the rigid conceptualization of a certain system, Edward Said's book also tries to attain release from the frozen system of oriental discourse. This illustration can be extended with additional examples from Frantz Fanon's books, which inspired post-colonial studies, as well as Benedict Anderson's books regarding nationalism<sup>23</sup>, which challenged the standard (and immutable) view of nationalism throughout the modern era. In Indonesia, Tan Malaka's book, *Madilog*<sup>24</sup>, was written with a mindset that is characteristic of essays. This is also true for Mochtar Lubis' thin book, *Manusia Indonesia*.

Because an essay topic is open-ended, the public that reads essays can be said to be the general public.

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<sup>23</sup> This book opens with "Perhaps without being much noticed yet, a fundamental transformation in the history of Marxism and Marxist movements is upon us... etc." See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. London, New York: Verso, 1991.

<sup>24</sup> Tan Malaka, *Madilog: Materialisme Dialektika Logika*. Jakarta: Pusat Data Indikator, 1999.

This issue distinguishes essays as a form of composition and essays that express the author's attitude and opinions. The public for essays as a form of composition is general, while the public for essays as an attitude of writing tends not to be general.

John Locke's book, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Ernst Cassirer's book, *An Essay on Man*, Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, for example, are similarly not intended for the general public. On the other hand, it is likely that Tan Malaka's book, *Madilog*, was deliberately intended for a wide readership, but it is almost certain that this book could neither be read nor understood by the general public; instead, it has only been read and understood by a specific group of elite people.

### **Essay Poetry: Spirit vs Definition**

Essay poetry is a fusion or combination of poetry and essay. Designating this genre as "essay poetry" yields two possibilities:

1. Poetry that is written by applying the spirit of an essay; or
2. An essay that is written which applies principles of poetry.

First of all, regarding the relationship between subject and object, and

according to the literary works of Denny JA<sup>25</sup>, it is evident that essay elements are very pronounced in his essay poems. The objects which are described are all social facts. This is true in “Fang Yin’s Handkerchief”, as well as “Romi and Yuli of Cikeusik” and “Minah was Still Beheaded” since these refer to factual events. The factual background is clarified by the presence of footnotes, which indicate when, where, and how events transpired, and who was involved, by referring to sources that inform the reader of these facts. The “Ballad of Batman and Robin” distills factual elements connected to the perpetrators of certain events; however, these events, or at least these phenomena, by themselves are truly founded in social facts, and to emphasize the factual basis, again, these are indexed by footnotes.

All of these facts if researched through scientific methods of writing would yield a scientific article. However, a scientific paper, similar to that addressed previously, requires the elimination of the subject (i.e. the view of the writer) to the greatest extent possible. However, the disappearance of the subject-writer’s presence along

with all his involvement and tremulous emotions toward the object he describes and further impels the writer, in this case, Denny JA, is rendered impossible and undesirable. The social issues which he gleans as a social scientist and analyst dismay the author, and it is precisely the active involvement of the subject-writer that is desired. The active involvement of the subject along with the disappearance of the entity of the object as a durable fact, although rather common in works of literature, may not be desirable here, when looking at this from a different stance. Hard facts are what the writer wants to grab hold of in a subjective manner. These two aspects, i.e. objective facts and subjective involvement, truly need to be maintained by the writer. Preserving and supporting both of these aspects, whether or not this is desirable, compels the author to select the essay as the basic form of his composition.

However, this degree of subjectivity begs to augment the writer’s involvement and attachment both internally and externally; thus, this literature—in this case, poetry—is understood as accommodating the extent of involvement of the writer. To guard against facts being misconstrued as fiction, footnotes are required to protect the factual veracity of certain events, thus preserving them as his-

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<sup>25</sup> See Denny JA, *Atas Nama Cinta: Sebuah Puisi Esai*. Jakarta: Rene Book, 2012. See also Denny JA “Puisi Esai: Apa dan Mengapa” in *Jurnal Sajak* no. 3, 2012.

torical facts rather than fiction. literature is also favored for being associated with a certain subject-object relationship. For scientific inquiries, the object of research must be scrutinized with great detail to draw general conclusions that explain a certain phenomenon. On the other hand, in writing literature, the author normally avoids reaching general conclusions. All manner of general conclusions, observations, attitudes, and inquiries concerning a certain phenomenon are disdained by literary authors because good literature at a basic level truly probes and then rejects anything that has general implications. General phenomena and perspectives that make generalizations will be critically tested through the lens of particularity. General categories will be downgraded and interred, then transformed to become the particular experience of a certain person in specific conditions and situations.

Considering an example from one of Denny JA's essay poems, the phenomenon of the May 1998 Jakarta riots, which exacted a toll among ethnic Chinese victims, gives rise to the experiences of a particular figure, a young woman named Fang Yin. The grounding of social phenomena in the life of the protagonist and the particular situations she encounters necessitates literary proximity. A quarrel between

two large ancestral families (in the form of a long-standing ancestral feud between two villages, two ethnic groups, two cultures, or two religious groups) is reduced to the particular experience of two young lovers, as described by Shakespeare. Thus, the tragedy which was experienced by Romeo and Juliet becomes a tragedy that also breaks the hearts of readers and viewers of the eponymous play.

Various treatises concerning the sociological and psychological reasons for the feud between two warring factions, although replete with theoretical presentations, statistical data, and advice for resolving these conflicts, will not make the public experience and appreciate this absurd ancestral quarrel. It is particularly the presence of two love-stricken teenagers, Romeo and Juliet, since it was first performed on stage during Elizabethan times and through each era until now, which stirs the soul of each sensitive reader.

Because it emerges from the desire to personally enter the social phenomena that are especially crucial in Indonesia and raise them within a poetic form so that one can become emotionally involved and enter the psychological mindset of the protagonist, who appears as a victim due to social circumstances, it is not surprising if the medium of communica-

tion becomes an important consideration. Choosing poetry as this medium would not be efficacious if the social issue that was raised in a poem could not be communicated to the widest possible audience of readers. Because of this, the diction (phrasing) of the poem tends to be as communicative as possible. The idea of being communicative on its own is a relative concept because it depends entirely on the recipient of the message. The greater the lack of sophistication among the readers as recipients of the message, the simpler and easier the language used must be to be called communicative. Conversely, the greater the sophistication of the readers as receivers of a message, the more complex the language and ideas must be to be called communicative.

The Indonesian readership, virtually from various educational backgrounds, are not readers who have a tradition of reading literature in a manner that would make them familiar with various literary techniques and linguistic conventions. At a certain point, one could presume that this issue demonstrates a weakness of Indonesian intellectual traditions since intellectual traditions normally presuppose relatively proficient knowledge of literature. However, blaming the educated class in Indonesia for

their lack of adeptness, which did not develop in the tradition of reading and comprehending literature, is also not a wise idea. This is even more true when we consider the sufficiently large number of Indonesians who have progressed beyond a Bachelor's degree in literature by pursuing higher degrees and doctorates in literature after studying for many semesters yet still lack a satisfactory grasp of literature, although some have published books on literary theory and summaries of various theories which apply to foreign literature. Poetry often requires that the poet process and exploit dictions, words, and language as optimally as possible.

Chairil Anwar selected words and pursued them to the "bare bone of their essence". Sutardji Calzoum Bachri probed the use of everyday language and overturned the conventions of general language to liberate words from these conventions, which were overburdened, to the point that words were ostensibly able to break free and stand independent from social, ideological, and psychological loads. In short, poetry occasionally needs poets who are willing to test the conventions of language. In this regard, to obtain the greatest opportunity to communicate, Denny JA must truly choose the language that already

conforms to public conventions and apply them optimally in his quest to communicate with the widest spectrum of the public.

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*Jurnal Sajak* (Journal of Poetry) is holding a contest for writing the best essay poems. Denny JA has already joined and become a member of *Jurnal Sajak* as its general manager. He conceived of the idea to hold an essay poem writing contest, and we reached an agreement on this together. Thus, the Essay Poem Writing Contest has become an endeavor that has been consciously chosen by *Jurnal Sajak*.

Previously, Berthold Damshäuser, an editor at *Jurnal Sajak*, had written an article concerning his longing for rhyming verse as a form of poetry that was combined with an arousing and melodic meter. This yearning is shared by the staff of *Jurnal Sajak*. Amid the current environment of Indonesian poetry, which predominantly entails prosaic poems that demonstrate little consideration for incorporating diction (creative phrasing) and meter, this yearning has become more consequential. With the current presence of a new element of poetry, “Essay Poems”, the Essay Poem Writing Contest showcases discrete extremes in poetry: “pure poetry” versus “engaging poetry”.

Several basic guiding principles have been addressed above regarding scientific, essay, and literary compositions. In deliberating our understanding of the features of composing essays and literature, it is possible to imagine, more or less, a fusion of these two forms: “essay poetry”.

There may be some experts who are more interested in the terminological aspect of “essay poetry” and who may thus grapple with testing and questioning the legitimacy of the specific term “essay poem”. We, on the other hand, are more interested in underscoring the spirit which is being conveyed by essay poetry rather than rigidly questioning the validity of the term “essay poetry”.

Essay poetry, as demonstrated in Denny JA’s anthology, *Atas Nama Cinta* (In the Name of Love), could be labeled based on several aspects narrative poetry, epic poetry, a ballad, and other such appellations, in consideration of the plots and cast of figures as well as the explicit social setting (in each of the five essay poems in this book).

However, the designation “narrative poetry” would encourage people to underscore the narrative aspect of these works, i.e. their storyline. On the other hand, the label “epic poetry” would promote the idea of emphasizing the epic nature of long episodic

verse. Both terms, narrative poetry and epic poetry, could be certainly applied, for example, to fiction, such as the epic story of the *Mahabharata*. In this regard, it should be emphasized that essay poetry differs from fiction because it is firmly and solidly grounded in fact and, because of this, it requires footnotes whose purpose is to cite related facts. Consequently, I am more interested in the spirit that is conveyed by essay poetry rather than getting involved in discussing the narrow and rigid aspects of the term “essay poetry” itself.

These are some of the manifestations of the spirit conveyed by essay poetry:

1. The involvement of the poet in crucial matters inhabits and represents important issues in the lives of the public at large;
2. It demonstrates respect for facts, accompanied by a generally unhurried approach to concluding certain facts or phenomena (or even more so tacit acceptance of public announcements) and then fictionalizes them;
3. It shows respect for research, which provides effective and relatively objective opportunities to discerning the truth about social issues, which are intended as subjects for discussion in poetry;
4. It grounds social phenomena in a unique manner, which considers many

assumptions about the social stigma that thrive among the common people as general beliefs (and prejudices), and frames these ideas within a specific social setting, populated by protagonists and antagonists; and

5. It demonstrates an awareness that poetry by its very nature performs a communicative function. Poetry that does not communicate with its readers loses its significance; this is true for communicative failure that results from the shortcomings of the poet, e.g. obscurity, but it may also result from the deficiencies of the reader, e.g. a lack of insight or experience in reading poetry.

Amid the current situation of poetry in Indonesia, which we tend to imagine involves readers who have common ground with the poet (and all poets presume this to be true), this new movement is significant. It is imprudent to imagine merely a handful of poets when a poet who writes poems lives in a country whose population exceeds 250 million people, whose lives are continuously inundated with multiple social issues and often oppressed and battered by social ills. Because of this reality, Indonesian poets need to constantly remind themselves that they dwell among a population of more than 250 million souls and that many Indonesians suffer and remain impoverished both due to their own



mistakes in life and mainly due to the intransigence of the political elite whose life horizons never extend beyond their own physical needs, including their economic welfare, political self-preservation, and physical compulsions.

Indonesia has suffered from many tragic events, including social misfortune (e.g. the Jakarta riots of May 1998, and other riots in Sambas, Maluku, Poso, Mesuji, and others), as well as natural disasters (e.g. the tsunamis of Aceh and Flores, earthquakes in Yogyakarta and Western Sumatera, volcanic eruptions of Mount Merapi and others). Many poems have been written commemorating these calamities. However, how particularly these poems were all written in verse, or are these verses still in the form of a general perspective? Particularity makes problems more difficult for concluding at the same time that we engage in retesting generalizations; indeed, these stigmas have persisted in the lives of the public throughout this era.

Concerning the Yogyakarta earthquake (May 2006) or the Aceh tsunami (December 2004), for instance, we tend to feel upset and mournful as a result of these tragedies. However, literature is insufficient when it only supplies us with tears and verses of commiseration. Its value would be much different if poets presented a

specific figure within a particular situation. This figure could appear in the form of the victim of a tragic event whose situation is unique or special and not necessarily representative of a common scenario featuring a generic "victim of a disaster". It never fails to present a challenge for a poem concerning an earthquake to portray a figure in the form of an adventurer, such as a loan shark or a political party member, for example, who at first appears displaying assistance posters and business cards in various locations which provide a good view from every angle of the disaster, then appears at the head of the efforts to collect donations from various far-flung regions of Indonesia and finally distributes a small portion of this money and swallows the remainder whole without blinking. Upon seeing a verse that explicitly exhibits a particular theme, the reader is served an authentic illustration by having a chance to contemplate a contextualized social phenomenon in a heartfelt way rather than experience a poetic treatment of a certain topic in a detached manner.

There is a widespread assumption among the public that poetry is about daydreams and fantasy. Daydreams and fantasies, of course, are then attached to fiction. Consequently, any poem can be neither more nor less than

the product of the poet's fantasy or daydream. This public perception is inaccurate. Unfortunately, some literary authors also believe that poetry is a form of fantasy and reverie. All poems (of decent quality) derive from facts, including social facts and psychological facts. At a basic level, authentic poets are analysts who will methodically research their subject of interest before writing a poem related to that theme. Without conducting research, without meticulous observation of the intended topic, poetry becomes a kind of tinkering with language and a meaningless vocation because even a laborer who manufactures chairs is attached to the fact that the chairs he makes have to pass quality control based on their practical use by people in real life. Thus, the spirit for returning research and observation to the lap of poetry is important both for the public at large and for poets who tend to believe that poetry is just the result of fantasy and mere dreams.

Literature remains distant from the public for two reasons. First, reading poetry has yet to become a tradition and thus an important part of the educational process to create an educated class that is literate<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> For comprehensive explanation of literacy and orality, see Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (2nd ed.) New York: Routledge, 2002.

Secondly, literary authors are not involved in writing about the themes and problems of the current era, including the crucial issues that confront the general public.

Chairil Anwar was widely recognized by Indonesians due to the two reasons mentioned above. His poems were taught and recited in the public schools, and he wrote from the heart of the Indonesian revolution (against Dutch colonialism), which represented a major theme for the public during that historic era.

Finally, poetry by its fundamental nature is a form of communication. Communication within literature tends to be construed in two ways: pure poetic communication and general communication. Believing that literary communication serves the purpose of communicating pure poetic ideas, the poet is often tempted to play around with language with the mistaken presumption that making his phrasing less common necessarily makes it better or that violating grammar rules makes his verses shine. A certain poet has engaged in reduplication of words by uniting the repetitive pair as one word (and obscuring the elements of the reduplicated words along with their meaning). Another poet removes affixes from verbs turning them into basically meaningless words even though a

verb is syntactically appropriate, e.g. “the moon pale, the wind quiv” when the correct form would be “the moon is pale, the wind quivers.” This meddling with linguistic rules appears creative, but it reduces intelligibility and communicative value.

On the other hand, by supposing that literary communication has a general communicative purpose, some poets may tend to choose verb phrases that are easily understood but lack poetic aspects.

However, there are many possibilities and opportunities in poetic communication which can be utilized, starting with diction (e.g. word choice), form, design, meter, connotation, as well as figures of speech and literary devices (e.g. metaphor, metonymy, and repetition). Indeed, a poet may exploit non-poetic forms to facilitate poetic communication, similar to Rendra’s use of a pamphlet to effect poetic communication in his verses that evoke social criticism. Some readers at that time thought that this was a real pamphlet, without considering the possibility that the form of the pamphlet was adopted by Rendra as a ruse to momentarily stray from the routine design of lyrical poetry and then abruptly strike the reader by resuming his parody in the form of a pamphlet.

Diction, as well as poetic form, can be orchestrated by the intense involvement of the poet in consideration of the object of a certain poem. This intensity demands the determination of the poet to seek the appropriate form of communication, one that can optimally express the ideas that are signified within the creative consciousness of the poet.

The spirit that required to make a poem an active expression of a crucial issue that concerns the public and also processes the *zeitgeist* of that era; the spirit that necessary to present the poem not as an extension of the public viewpoint or social stigma that thrives among the populace but instead as a means for assessing everything that exists within the particular lives of the affected people; the spirit to effectively recognize objects and themes which are meant to be written as poetry, both through research and through intense observation; the spirit to become involved with hard facts related to social phenomena which cause suffering for many Indonesians who are marginalized by various forms of intransigence; and the spirit to realize that a poem from its initial lines until its final verse is a form of communication, are the spirit that represents the foundation for explaining why “essay poetry” has become an

integral part and movement within *Jurnal Sajak*.

We believe that Indonesian poets can render their best contributions and that these may produce unexpected and valuable achievements to the point that Indonesian poetry becomes an inherent part in addressing the dreadful pain and throbbing hopes of the Indonesian people.

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# *Puisi Esai*: What is it all about and How Might its Future Development look like?

BERTHOLD DAMSHÄUSER

About ten years ago, I first came across the term *Puisi Esei* (Essay Poetry). Perhaps I would not have been particularly interested in it, but it turned out to be related to the poetry magazine *Jurnal Sajak*, where I was an editorial board member. So I guessed I had no choice but to get involved with it, especially since I learned that *Jurnal Sajak* would have a section titled *Puisi Esei* starting with issue 3 of 2012. As a first step to find out what *Puisi Esai* was all about, I visited an internet website with a collection of poetry entitled *Atas Nama Cinta* (In the Name of Love), written by Denny J.A. I read five long footnoted poems that were characterized by addressing important and socially relevant themes, whose language was quite simple and hardly distinguished by poetic quality. From a literary perspective, it was obviously nothing particularly impressive, by no means something that could be called a linguistic work of art. I was disappointed. And the term *Puisi Esai*, which the author had chosen for his poems, did not convince me in any way, let alone the claim that this was

a new literary genre. And a section of *Jurnal Sajak* should now be devoted to works of this kind. Oh dear ...

In an editorial for *Jurnal Sajak* 2/ 2011, entitled *Merindukan “Puisi yang Bukan Prosa: Merindukan Sajak”* (Longing for Poetry that is Not Prose, Yearning for Verse), I had presented what kind of poetry I love and what kind of poems *Jurnal Sajak* should primarily advocate. Namely *sajak*, whereby I understand by *sajak* the opposite of prose, i.e. verse. Or, to quote directly from the editorial, it is:

*a linguistic work of art that meets the conditions to be called “music”, a work of art that produces sounds, taking into account rhythm and meter. Works that can even “surpass” music by conveying thoughts, ideas, facts and narratives, namely all that can only be conveyed through language as a rational medium. Works, then, where sound and rhythm serve the intention of the text, which means that they support, expand and intensify the rational message of a text, precisely through feelings generated by its musical elements.*

All this—and it became immediately clear to me when I read the collection of poems *Atas Nama Cinta* by Denny J.A.—were by no means the characteristics of *Puisi Esei*. These poems were obviously committed poetry, in the context of which

messages are conveyed to as many readers as possible, probably also to those who have no particular interest in literature in general and hardly in poetry. These *Puisi Esei* have in so far a clear element of pop and are not aimed at lovers of pure poetry or readers who have long been intensively engaged with poetry as linguistic works of art, i.e. those works that I personally appreciate so much.

However, I also realised that my stance as a defender of “pure” or “supreme” poetry was rather elitist, and that I was not entitled to reject so easily what was called *Puisi Esei*. Through discussions with my fellow editors at *Jurnal Sajak*, I heard several arguments in favor of *Puisi Esei*, including the argument that this type of poetry deserved to be called “a new genre”.

And soon I witnessed that the concept of *Puisi Esei* was welcomed in circles of the literary community in Indonesia. A substantial number of well-known poets began writing *Puisi Esai* and hundreds of amateur writers felt compelled to convey their thoughts and emotions via this new genre, especially to defend the victims of social injustice and abuse. I concluded that it would be fitting for me to welcome this kind of development and even more so deserving to be proud that *Jurnal Sajak*—through its dissemination of *Puisi Esei*—had

pioneered a new literary movement that took up the struggle for tolerance and pluralism as well as the fight against discrimination.

According to Denny J.A.'s own definition, *Puisi Esei* is a long poem divided into chapters, written in poetic but simple or communicative language. Its themes are social problems as a factum, presented from the perspective of those who have become victims of injustice or discrimination. The respective problem or grievance is presented in *Puisi Esei* by means of a fictional and touching story, whose connection to reality needs to be substantiated through obligatory footnotes. These footnotes are an inseparable part of every *Puisi Esei*. Through the footnotes, the author must provide sufficient information on the background of his fictional story. In this manner, fiction is repleted with facts (factum).

Now, of course, the question arises whether the term *Puisi Esei* is appropriate to describe the characteristics presented by Denny JA. It seems that the term must be interpreted in the sense of "essayistic poetry", or as a kind of synthesis of poem and essay. But is it convincing to use the term "essay" in this context? Appropriate in order to explain that a *Puisi Esai*, like an essay, must be based on facts? No reader of a *Puisi Esai* will spontaneously have the impression that Denny

J.A.'s *Puisi Esai* are essays. In a *Puisi Esai* the reader will probably not recognise more than a narrative long poem with footnotes.

In his editorial in *Jurnal Sajak* 3/ 2012, Agus R. Sarjono states that he does not consider it necessary to question the exactitude of the term *Puisi Esai* and that he is instead more interested in the question of what the spirit of *Puisi Esei* is. I believe that Sarjono's view is an appropriate opinion to hold. In literary studies, so many unconvincing terms are used, including many terms for genres, for example "nouveau roman" or "contextual literature", as if there were not new novels with new forms all the time, or as if literature without context existed at all. And besides, as Friedrich Nietzsche says, words are anyway "pockets, into which this, that, and more have been put at once!" Ultimately, language and terminology are always subject to convention. And it would be a bit exaggerated if we were all too inflexible and dogmatic with regard to a term that became widely accepted and has now even been included as a lemma in the dictionary of Indonesian language published by the National Language Board.

But is it justified to call *Puisi Esai* a "new literary genre"? For this, it is worth looking at the definition of the "inventor", i.e. Denny J.A.. In his definition, he speaks of three obligations



that the author of a *Puisi Esai* has to fulfill, namely:

1. An obligation to use language that is easily understood;
2. An obligation to select a certain (social) theme; and
3. An obligation to use footnotes.

In my opinion, it can be deduced from this that *Puisi Esai* can indeed be understood as an independent literary genre. For there is no other literary genre that is characterized by the combination of such qualities (“obligations”).

Among these three compulsory elements, the matter of easily understood language is not an exceptional factor. Language found in “pure poetry” should also use understandable language, because every text should ultimately be communicative, even if the forms of communication by means of poetry take place on different levels, perhaps with different types of logic in each case, which may not be immediately apparent to every reader. Now, by imposing on the author of a *Puisi Esai* to use “easily understandable language,” the author is obviously reminded not to use linguistic experimentation, but instead to convey a conventional “story” in conventional language. Nevertheless, it is true that even the use of “simple” language does not preclude the

possibility of creating a poetic text.

The matter of “the obligation to choose a certain theme” is certainly far more relevant. As discussed earlier, the theme of a *Puisi Esai* must represent a social issue (or fact) affecting the general public that is conveyed through the perspective of a person who has suffered injustice or discrimination. Due to this obligation, *Puisi Esai*, *Puisi* is committed poetry, poetry that confronts social problems and takes the side of the victims.

In recent years, however, there has been a development of the genre *Puisi Esai*, which could be said to have “gone off the rails”. One of the many examples of this is the *Puisi Esai* of the talented young poet Mahwi Air Tawar, entitled “Saini KM”. This *Puisi Esai* is about the life of the poet Saini KM and refrains from depicting real social problems. Of course, *Puisi Esai*, if this genre is signified specifically as long narrative poetry accompanied by footnotes, could conceivably and fundamentally encompass any topic. However, in my opinion, the special quality of *Puisi Esai* as committed poetry should not be sacrificed. And not only because otherwise the basic idea of the founder of this genre would be violated.

The most important feature of *Puisi Esai* is certainly the footnotes. In this context, misunderstandings have arisen, especially among people who

oppose the claim that *Puisi Esai* could be a new genre, and who point out that there have always been narrative poems with footnotes. This ignores the fact that the peculiarity of *Puisi Esai* is that these footnotes are obligatory. That the footnotes are the unique feature of *Puisi Esai*, distinguishing it not only from other genres of poetry, but but also from all other literary genres.

In the last part of this essay, I would like to deal specifically with these obligatory footnotes starting from the fact that, that many authors of *Puisi Esai* are not aware of the real function of footnotes in this new genre. There are, for example, footnotes whose only purpose is to explain abbreviations like NU (= Nahdlatul Ulama). Of course, this is not at all the function of footnotes in *Puisi Esai*. And the same applies when someone writes a long narrative poem and then devised some random footnotes so that the poem would be considered a *Puisi Esai*. In my view, such an approach represents a real obstacle to the further development of *Puisi Esai*.

The footnotes in *Puisi Esai* are actually a kind of metatext (in the sense of the Greek word *meta* meaning “together with”), that is autonomous or at least relatively autonomous. This metatext is an adjunct that complements and expands the narrative and poetic text of a *Puisi Esai*.

There, it is the fact(um) that illuminates or explains the background of the fiction. It represents the scientific aspect in *Puisi Esai*, and because of this, it should be written according to scientific standards. Since social problems (discrimination and similar phenomena) represent the starting point for an *Puisi Esai*, the composition of an essay poem must begin with investigation of a specific social issue. Thus, with regard to the *Puisi Esai*, the following applies: First the factum, then the fiction. And, based on the facts that emerge from the investigation, the material for the footnotes and, of course, that for the fictional story about a social problem emerges. And then, in the fictional or narrative part of a *Puisi Esai*, the respective social problem is individuated through the portrayal of fictional persons who have become victims. The poetic and fictional text and the footnotes complement each other, both are basically autonomous but at the same time linked to each other. There is no hierarchical relationship between these two elements, although from the angle of the initial phase of the creative process, it may be surmised that research or investigation precedes the composition of the poetic text.

A characterization of footnotes as metatext (although the designation “paratext”<sup>1</sup> would also be conceivable) corresponds, in my opinion, to the

basic idea of what Denny J.A. intended in the conception of the *Puisi Esei* as a new poetic genre. But now, thinking about the essence of *Puisi Esei*, it occurred to me that Denny J.A.'s idea could well be developed further, by transforming the metatext into "hypertext" (the Greek word "hyper" means "beyond" or "above").

In contemplating the essence of essay poetry, it occurred to me that there is actually a possibility for developing this idea; i.e. the development of the metatext becoming a *hypertext* (*hyper* in Greek meaning "beyond" or "above"). What do I mean by that?

Well, I see the possibility that the role of the text within the footnotes of *Puisi Esai* can be increased to a text whose function is not or not only to provide scientifically based facts to the background of the fictional part, but acts as a text that goes beyond this poetic narrative part. To do this, footnotes would have to be created that go into a "higher dimension". This could be achieved by assigning additional functions to the footnotes, depending on the creativity and ideas of the author. In footnotes with the character of a hypertext, the author would, for example, be able to communicate the reasons for which he has decided on a certain topic. He could describe the process of creating his work. In this way he would involve

himself, as a "lyrical self". He could also enter into a dialogue with himself, or "converse" with the characters in his poem. The latter would mean that the characters themselves would become part of the hypertext of the footnotes, thus overcoming their role as victims and becoming actors in their own right. All characters would have the possibility to take up attitudes and opinions by commenting on and evaluating the events of the narrative part of the respective *Puisi Esai*. The *Puisi Esai* would then develop as a whole into a dialectical discourse, containing thesis and antithesis, also characterized by self-irony and parody. Ultimately, a dialogue would emerge between two texts, the narrative-fictional text and the hypertext of the footnotes, which itself could have a poetic character. Such a *Puisi Esai* would be a multidimensional literary work, in it everything would be possible, depending on the imagination and creativity of the author. One should try!

In any case, footnotes fulfilling their purpose as an obligatory complement to the fictional part has already made the *Puisi Esai* a genre *sui generis*. And if *Puisi Esai* were a soulful person capable of self-reflection, it would perhaps be proud and happy to have a father or a creator. Unlike many of its fellow genres, for example ballad

and pantun, whose parentage and date of birth are vague and uncertain. Perhaps it would also be glad that it was not simply born, but that it was moreover proclaimed. Certainly it would be happy about the fact that it was perceived and accepted so quickly, which rarely happens to other genres. Probably it would have been shocked when it suddenly was opposed and brutally attacked by some, and it would have smiled when others willfully ignored it. Its future is uncertain. Perhaps it will be forgotten, perhaps it will develop splendidly. And cer-

tainly it will change in growing up and becoming adult.

And what about its father, its inventor? Probably he will not be able to control the development of his child. At some point, his child will go its own way in the jungle of literature. It will suffer the same fate as other literary works. Once written, it belongs to the reader, to the public. That's why some say, "The author is dead."

And perhaps inventors of a genre might meet a fate not quite different to that of authors.



# Denny JA's Essay Poetry

**ASHADI SIREGAR**

This essay is a review of the 22 literary works available at the webpage <http://dennyja-world.com> concerning Religion and Discrimination, called essay poems, the creation of Denny JA. My taking note of literature is rather infrequent; not every new work of literature deserves my comments. However, I need to clarify that writing this review is not intended to “disturb” the assimilation of the audience. This is because whenever a new work of literature is published, it becomes a subject that

is self-expressive, and it is left to the readers to interpret, enjoy, and appreciate it. Therefore, this discussion is only my own subjective view, and its stature is not more valuable than how this literature is received by the general audience. In other words, if you, as an actual reader of Denny JA's poetry, have already enjoyed these works and are already comfortable with the feeling that has been absorbed, insofar as the purpose of reading works of literature is to attain subjective enjoyment, it is not necessary to

read this review. It is possible that a review from this smug analyst could actually spoil your enjoyment.

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Essay poetry has already been designated as a distinct literary genre. Texts are generally categorized according to three major forms, namely journalistic, intellectual, and expressive works. *First*, journalistic works manifest facts, such as news articles and features. *Second*, intellectual works actualize or reflect facts; these include scholarly articles and opinion pieces. *Third*, expressive works articulate fiction in the form of poetry, stories, and essays.

Thus, in a broad sense, communication makes use of facts and fiction. In learning the fundamental aspects of writing, we are always reminded that writers rigorously choose between the factual domain and the fictional domain. These two domains cannot be compromised because doing so would cause ambiguity between fact and fiction. At times, fiction uses facts from personal or social lives, creating a biographic novel or a docu-drama (a dramatic film based on true events). On the other hand, some magazine articles may feature a journalist using an imaginative reflection when this is appropriate to the ambience of the subject. However,

one is not permitted to alter the substance of factual information to the extent that fiction within the mind of the writer must not betray authentic facts.

Facts are organized and recorded by academicians and journalists, and these groups rely on a basic methodology as a process for conveying facts objectively in order to obtain the truth. Truth is substantiated through principles of factuality and objectivity. In this regard, methodology renders the function of objectification for the reading audience. Simply stated, objectification can be seen as a process that facilitates an objective understanding toward the outer world. Moreover, reality of an objective nature is required by people as a firm foundation for comprehending social life so that it can subsequently be integrated accurately within our documentation of social life.

Fiction, which represents an imaginary world, fulfills the function of subjectification, which purports to develop subjectivity for the “inner world” of the reader. The domain of fiction provides a psychological effect for the consumer which can stimulate appreciation of values and provide a subsequent opportunity to share ideas in cultural life. This process of appreciation ranges from a pragmatic level of psychological enjoyment to a more

aesthetic level of appreciation, which serves the basis for sharing within various spheres of cultural life. In other words, it is expected that each work of fiction can sharpen and enhance appreciation by exciting the emotions of the reader and that this, in turn, will strengthen the reader's regard for human life.

Factual and fictional information have reciprocal functions. They are equally important, but academicians and journalists are required to exclusively write or communicate facts. However, not all facts are worthy of inclusion within intellectual and journalistic articles. It is also possible that facts that are directly experienced by a person may excite the imagination. Imagination represents a human asset and aptitude that should be continuously cultivated. By applying discipline in developing the imagination, it is hoped that writers can truly experience and appreciate the facts of human existence.

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Let's discuss essay poetry. These are poems, derived from a verbal or visual text, which impart an ambiance that embraces appreciation, is an essay in prose format that conveys authentic ideas based on subjective experiences. The strength of poetry lies in the atmosphere that can be

experienced, while an essay is assessed according to the subjective authenticity conferred by its creator. Thus, it is hoped and expected that the essay poem genre will provide an appreciative atmosphere for the reading audience, who will ascertain the meaning of the text while enjoying its poetic aspects, as well as catch the strengths of the writer's subjectivity and thus deduce the parallel objectivity when engaged in reading the essay aspects of these poems.

How should we assess Denny JA's literary works? What niche do they occupy in the arena of modern literature? The unique value of his poetry should not be detached from his essential personality and accomplishments, which deserve to be thoroughly examined and appreciated.

Denny Januar Ali, or Denny JA (as he is usually called), was born in Palembang, South Sumatera on January 4, 1963. Denny is an *intellectual entrepreneur* and a best-selling author. He holds records in academic, political, social media, literary, and cultural fields in Indonesia. He holds a Ph.D degree in Comparative Politics and Business from Ohio State University in the United States. Denny JA is also recognized as a social activist, who has promoted and supported campaigns for non-discriminative movements, and financing these



movements from his own funds, which he was able to save following his success as a businessman. Denny JA was awarded special recognition by *Time Magazine* in 2015 as one of the 30 Most Influential People on the Internet. Other luminaries who were honored by inclusion on this list were Barack Obama and Christina Fernandez de Kirchner (U.S. and Argentinean Presidents), Narendra Modi (the Prime Minister of India), and other world-renowned celebrities, such as Shakira, Taylor Swift, and Justin Bieber. This special honor was bestowed in recognition of Denny JA's crucial role in social media, public opinion, and political surveys leading up to the Indonesian Presidential Election in 2014 ([https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denny\\_Januar\\_Ali](https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denny_Januar_Ali) ).

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It is apparent that Denny's role as an expert consultant on social and political affairs has greatly influenced his creative process in composing fiction. This is a common occurrence for intellectuals who are engaged in the facts of various phenomena that they encounter. Applying sociological methodology, social commentators need to remain "cool" (objective) in approaching the subjects of their studies; however, according to a form of *engaged analysis* in cultural studies, the research methodology can be

carried out in a "warm" (sympathetic) context, which can result in reports that are more straightforward. However, Denny JA takes *engaged analysis* a step further not just by taking a "warm" perspective of social issues; instead, he views restlessness, tension, and frustration as social facts that deserve attention. Because of this approach, one begins reading one of his essay poems by exploring a certain theme, which is derived from facts connected to disquieting social phenomena. As an intellectual, he could easily compose an op-ed article of an analytical nature, which could touch various cognitive aspects for his readers. However, this is different when compared to the impact of an essay poem (or perhaps its separate components, i.e. an essay or a poem), whose purpose is to specifically take control of the affective concerns of the audience.

Therefore, Denny JA's 22 books of essay poetry can be read through facts that are processed as essays and then expressed as rhyming verses. This type of sequence can clarify the organization of the text in the format it appears. Whether he succeeds in developing a poetic ambience can be argued at length. We should remind ourselves, though, that a poetic atmosphere is experienced in a personal, subjective manner; hence, it is not possible to

expect uniformity in how the reading audience reacts to and appreciates each essay poem. The following is a treatment in essay format which is effective in helping us conceptualize the restless concerns of the writer. However, what is paramount is the affected demand in inviting the audience to jointly experience his agitation through encountering facts that surround us in our daily lives within the public sphere.

Of course, I am not personally cognizant of the precise level of subjective anguish that Denny JA feels. However, one could imagine the personal disposition generally experienced by a group of intellectuals. To do so, let's look at a basic level, through the framework of categorical thinking, and by viewing people as physical and spiritual creatures (e.g. as body and soul) in a two-dimensional plane that does not distinguish one person from another. In parallel with this model, in a different conceptualization, everything can be reduced and placed into one of two categories, the first containing the pragmatic world, which deals with facts and reality, and the second containing the cultural world, which deals with meaning in the context of a certain cultural mindset (including emotions and feelings).

In the pragmatic world, life can be viewed via political, economic, and social dimensions; thus, every human action can operate within the framework of its utility and value, or its cost-effectiveness. Pragmatic existence possesses dynamics that are based on three aspects: objective, knowledge, and method. Pragmatic objectives motivate people to take initiative and be active; knowledge provides directions to target and achieve the objective; and method represents the most effective or efficient pathway for this process. Formal education focuses on pragmatic instruction, regardless of the name of the school and curricular disciplines; fundamentally, the institution will promulgate and prioritize these three aspects. Beyond that, pragmatic existence demonstrated through the activities of various sectors is maintained as the foundation for life in modern human societies.

A pragmatic orientation is important in human life. Pragmatism has become the foundation for shaping policy that is executed by countries within various sectors; it represents a significant force in the life of many nations. Because of this, questions surrounding national policy that have pragmatic characteristics need to be perceived as key issues, i.e. is the policy intended to strengthen or ex-

pand political, economic, and social institutions? Furthermore, is the purpose of institutionalization only oriented to enhancing authority and amassing capital? Or could it mean more than that, namely to improve the standard of living for its people? A crisis occurs in the pragmatic world whenever personal behavior and decisions are done to benefit social and financial power within the scope of a certain institution to the extent that that institution becomes detached from its original social purpose and context. In common parlance, this is known as “tech-nocratism,” which abandons the principles of humanism; in this process, it forsakes the importance of cultural institutions and values. This situation is even worse if pragmatic life becomes pathological, i.e. when corrupt and fraudulent activities misappropriate power and authority for subjective purposes. Corruption not only represents a behavior that inflicts loss for national life but also leads to the decay of cultural life.

In the cultural world, there are efforts to seek, affirm, and develop the meaning of life. Cultural meaning by its very nature consists of positive values for life, which are elaborated within three dimensions, e.g. epistemological values, ethical values, and aesthetic values. The epistemological dimension concerns rational values,

articulated through achievements in science and technology; the ethical dimension involves appreciation and praxis of the universal human virtues of life; and the aesthetic dimension considers the appreciation of beauty which is expressed from and for human existence. Mankind experiences all three values, perhaps in different gradations of each value compared to the others but not exclusively within one of these dimensions, i.e. only epistemological, only ethical, or only aesthetic. Having mankind experience only one of these dimensions would represent a crisis in man’s self-concept.

The cultural dimension considers how man achieves something that is meaningful, as a specific practice (or pragmatic act) as well as through a certain product (objective). Whenever the repute of a practice or product is enhanced, thus adhering to the collective values of a certain nation, it is designated as national culture. However, this setting can only be plausibly achieved through creativity and personal expression. On a personal level, man must be stimulated to be motivated to carry out a role within the cultural dimension, namely by creating literature. Literature is not merely a kind of verbal language usage for the purpose of creating an aesthetic text or, even more narrowly defined, only to compose poetry and prose. Literature, as understood in our

archaic tradition, is more extensive than verbal aesthetic language. Literature completely represents every expression of the cultural dimension. Ancient libraries that contain the historical records of a society's ancestors, celebrity updates, medical prescriptions, running the gamut to magical spells, engraved on strips of bamboo, as well as wood and animal skin parchment, are all examples of literature; it represents the cultural expression of a community of culturally involved devotees. And culture should not be narrowly defined as simply one of many aspects of human life.

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Denny JA's role within the pragmatic dimension has apparently already been proven. His success within the world of politics and finance has evidently not made him wallow in self-satisfaction. He demonstrates distress because he senses how the pragmatic world which unfolds in the public space has promoted life-styles that are replete with extreme attitudes and acts of violence, a kind of life that has lost its cultural meaning.

The *engaged* intellectual class can certainly feel but will feel stifled with regard to the public space in Indonesia. Religious life is becoming more pervasive, although religion ironically

demonstrates discrimination and rigidity toward social differences. Denny JA's literary works at a basic level emerge from some key questions; first, does being religious necessarily make a person's life happy? second, does being religious mold good behavior in one's real life?; and third, why have Muslim people in Indonesia lost their (previously) inclusive orientation, making harshness an ideology in the public arena? This implies that the religious behavior of a significant segment of Indonesian followers of Islam has promulgated a rigid interpretation based on religious instruction as a (repressive) ideology within the public space. At this juncture, religious values have lost their spirituality, reduced to an ideology in the scuffle to achieve dominance and hegemony in the public space. Thus, the meaning of being religious has already formed the basis for constructing a certain communalism which resists, combats, and defeats other dissimilar collective identities.

The answers to these questions can be sought via concepts and data, which are subsequently disseminated within a literary format. This is the unique quality of the essay poetry composed by Denny JA, Ph.D.

In a broad sense, Denny's literary works can be viewed from the tech-

nical aspects of his creations. The utilization of various examples of metaphor and contrast are characteristic of these aspects. Metaphor, a symbolic expression for facts or religious concepts, is exemplified by a bird, a dragon, a cat, etc. (See *The Trilili Bird*, work #1; *The Dragon of One-Thousand Faces*, work #2; and *Because of an Angora Cat*, work #3.). As these metaphors consist of implicit attributes, the reader is invited to interpret their meaning by making use of authentic experiences, based on situations which the reader has experienced.

Another technical aspect of Denny JA's poetry can be found in the use of contrast in various works, by presenting two contradictory worlds, e.g. the twins who have divergent orientations, comparisons between countries, etc. (See *The Ballad of Wahab and Wahib*, work #7; *Astounded by Research*, work 9; *The Two Faces of the Religious Expert*, work 10; *The Wisdom of Singapore*, work 11; *The Lottery of Life*, work 12; *The West is More Islamic*, work 18; and *The Gay Religious Cleric*, work 21.) The works that exploit contrast require some referential background knowledge in order to grasp the differences between the subjects that are being compared, especially for works that are accompanied by data.

In addition, there are also poems that criticize religious fanaticism by

demonstrating that a certain rigid understanding actually derives from a perception that is characterized by having multiple interpretations. Literary works that employ metaphor as their foundation elaborate this theme. Examples of this are: *The Plenary Session on Religion* (work #6), *Searching for Happiness* (work #19), and *A Bloody Rose* (work #20), which examine the theme of human perception.

Referring to Denny JA's characteristic literary technique, it is possible to read his essay poems in two broad ways, namely for exploration of spirituality or religious behavior in the public sphere. Spirituality goes beyond the limitations of religion because it is transcendental in nature. This contrasts with religious behavior, which is visible within social life. Therefore, spirituality will be relevant for anyone who investigates this value. Works, such as *Searching for a King Within a King* (work #5), *The Ballad of Aneta* (work #15), and *Searching for God* (work #22) can be read as themes related to spirituality.

Essay poems that investigate pathological behavior in religion within the public space are pervasive within Denny JA's repertoire of essay poems. This behavior emanates from religious life that has lost its spirituality, but it is generally a consequence of interpretations of an absolute nature which

have lost their original context in religious teachings.

*The Kinsey Scale of Sexual Behavior* represents a concept that describes sexual orientation as comprising 7 degrees on a gradual scale rather than an absolute dichotomy according to one's gender.

"Kinsey has a scale  
This research is proven by science  
The sexual rating of human beings  
Is more than just being a man or a woman"

"Kinsey assigned a score of zero  
through six  
A score of zero for pure heterosexuals  
A score of six for pure homosexuals  
A score of three for bisexuals  
This scale applies to everyone  
It is completely normal."

Meanwhile, Denny JA is bold enough to explicitly defend the group that has experienced this form of discrimination:

"A baby does not request or desire  
to be a man or a woman  
Or to be white-skinned or red-skinned  
Or to be heterosexual or homosexual  
It just comes along on its own..."

...  
"Those who are homosexual,  
those who are LGBT  
They are also human beings  
Who want to be loved  
Who want to love"

"They are also human beings  
They can feel lonely

They can cry  
They are only different  
Because of their genetic makeup."

(Excerpt from *The Gay Muslim Cleric - Nature vs. Nurture*,  
<http://dennyja-world.com/buku/read/14653623849354>)

In some of his works, Denny JA does not include an opening or key stanza; thus, he is leaving it to the reader to deduce some important ideas independently. I prefer not to point out such verses which possess implicit characteristics because I do not want to reduce the pleasure of the reader in finding these, which is what the author intended. Implicit communication is also open logically to multiple interpretations, based on the references and authentic experiences that the reader attaches to these ideas.

At this point, I would like to quote from some of Denny JA's poems, which explicitly analyze a thesis for a theme he is developing in verse:

"Knowledge, authority, wealth  
ho ho ho ho ho...  
these are important for civilization  
It's so wonderful  
that you have mastered these  
It's truly important that you  
have experienced them"

"But the science of happiness  
is an intrinsic discipline, my sons...  
It does not depend on what you stow  
in your pocket

It does not depend on the power  
of your authority  
It does not depend on the extent  
of your wealth  
It does not depend on the kind  
of knowledge you've acquired"

*(Pursuing Happiness – The Story of a  
Cucumber, Egg, and Spices,  
[http://dennyja-world.com/buku/read/  
14642589936680](http://dennyja-world.com/buku/read/14642589936680) )*

The issue of perception is also  
concluded in this manner:

Father reminded himself again of  
The significance of the Rose on that day  
"May God open their eyes  
May God penetrate through their eyes"

"Is this what it means?," Father exclaimed  
in a shaking voice  
Based on one concrete event  
Many perceptions are created  
Surely more so regarding abstract truth?

*( A Bloody Rose – Perception vs. Reality  
[http://dennyja-world.com/buku/read/  
14653620209168](http://dennyja-world.com/buku/read/14653620209168) )*

The highest purpose of life  
Life has essence  
It obtains this not in leaving  
Not in leaving life behind day after day  
Not by disposing of worldly possessions

Indeed, however, it must endure as usual  
Only with a heart that is different  
Live in a normal fashion  
But with a fractured heart  
A heart that opens up pastures  
For God to dwell in

God who is always being sought  
Is actually very near  
He is not off somewhere else  
He resides in our heart

*(Hunting for God – Petuah Tiga Guru,  
[http://dennyja-world.com/buku/read/  
14653625275492](http://dennyja-world.com/buku/read/14653625275492) )*

As a last note, I believe that a greater appreciation of Denny JA's works can be obtained and enjoyed if they are realized through other media. By presenting them in a digital medium, such as a printed text accompanied with pictures or in an audiovisual format, the meaning of certain verses can be conveyed more effectively. However, ideas and rhyme in several of these literary works possess strong theatrical value; thus, these works would be showcased more effectively if they were presented on stage. While perusing the digital books, I imagined how much more receptive and appreciative a viewing audience would be if a dramatist were to choreograph these works, especially with the author's assistance in arranging dialogue and singing parts. Thus, after reading and listening, as well as viewing the visual illustrations in digital format, I feel that the experience would be enhanced and more inspiring whenever a theatrical production of these works could be watched. A visual medium would enrich the ideas that are contained within Denny JA's works.

# Quenching the Thirst for Religious Meaning in Denny JA's Poetry

PHAOSAN JEHWAE

Denny JA's poems are neither ordinary works of poetry, nor are they poems that can be understood after one reading; this holds true even more so for common readers among the general public. It is likely difficult for them to comprehend the implied meanings that can be inferred in reading these poems. However, this does not mean that Denny's poems are unfathomable.

Thus, anyone who wants to appreciate works of literature, especially poetry, needs to realize and agree

beforehand that a poem represents a work of art (literary art). A work of art always springs from the imagination of the poet, who engages in a process of contemplation toward events that have occurred within a society or a spiritual experience that the poet has personally undergone. At the same time, poems are also works of art that employ esthetic language as a medium for conveying the poet's ideas to his readers.

It is important to affirm that a poem represents a literary work that



is imaginative and is dispensed into the esthetic medium of language; however, it is not free of noble values and messages which are conveyed to the reader. Esthetic language is an instrument that the poet uses to communicate messages through poetry. This esthetic language can appear in the form of symbols, logos, and figurative language, such as metaphor, allegory, and similes. Thus, poetry is appealing, meaningful, and lively. This is certainly true for the assorted poems written by Denny JA.

Through esthetic language, various connotations and messages can be inferred, like those that serve as the ideas that the writer wishes to convey through his poem. Unfortunately, however, not every reader is able to discern the beauty and meaning of the language in a poem. This is often precisely what Bisri (2014)<sup>1</sup> contends, i.e. that the best poetry is the most difficult to comprehend. If you are included among the majority of people in this regard, you shouldn't expect to understand poetry. Poetry that is simple to understand, like the experience of reading a newspaper article or listening to a speech, should not be considered true poetry. These are the opinions, idle chatter, and

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<sup>1</sup> Bisri, A. Mustofa. 2004. *Koridor*. Jakarta. PT Kompas

complaints that we often hear. However, it may be that these viewpoints, chatter, and complaints are extraneous to the issue. Who knows, this may just be the reality of high-quality poetry. Hence, poetry that is difficult to understand is truly more enjoyable and appealing for the purpose of meditating on various interpretations that a first-rate poem affords the intelligent reader.

Reading Denny JA's poetry can be an unfortunate experience if the messages and values that can be inferred within the body of each poem are neglected by the reader. This holds true even more so for poetry in the form of essay poems, which are communicated in the form of a story. Therefore, in order to comprehend the meaning and appreciate the general concepts within Denny JA's poems, it is advisable to read the following analysis or examination of his ideas beforehand:

### **/1/ Sidang Raya Agama (A Plenary Session on Religion): What is Apparent and What is Inherent**

Life should be similar to meeting and departing, in defining what is apparent and what is real. This is the main idea that Denny JA pours into his poem, *A Plenary Session on Religion: What is Apparent and what is Real*. For many centuries, religion

has been an inspiration to the lives of millions of people. Indeed, religion has become a way of life that can guide people to understand every aspect of life. In discussing religion, what is clearly apparent cannot be separated from what is real, and Islam is not an exception in this matter.

Reality represents truth or something that is authentic. In Islam, man needs to recognize the reality within himself so that his intellect, which he uses to control nature and the universe, can be directed by faith. On the other hand, man also needs to comprehend the scriptural verses pertaining to Allah to be able to bring meaning and purpose to his life by obeying His commandments. Finding meaning in life is accomplished both through what is apparent and what is real. These two concepts must accompany and balance each other.

In Denny JA's poem, Ahmad, the protagonist who is portrayed as a policeman (who serves as an enforcer of religion), is confronted by questions of life: Should he defend the truth and help the weak in the name of religion, which represents his life principles? Through the character of Ahmad, Denny JA is conveying that not all human behavior corresponds to the essence of religion even though mankind strives to behave properly in the name of religion. This issue is

expressed in the following excerpt from the poem: *Have mercy, Oh God. Bestow mercy, Divine One. // A young maiden was nearly beaten to death // Ani had just been protecting her merchandise // Ahmad had acted in the name of religion // Ani was lying in a pool of blood // Among some broken bottles of liquor // "Oh, God, it was not my intention to kill" // Ahmad was trembling, soaked with sweat // Yes, yes, yes... Ahmad was his name; for three years, he had been a policeman who enforced religious tenets //*. In this excerpt, fervent religious fundamentalism is evident.

Emerging from this subject, Denny JA tries to articulate fundamentalism within religion. Religious fundamentalism has two compelling but problematic features that lie across from each other, ideology and politics. Religion can always be found midway between these two poles. People do not really understand this matter, in that fundamentalism in a haphazard manner is considered to be an integral part of the substance of religion. So too with Islamic fundamentalism, political poles of attraction and fanatic dogmatism have already developed ideological constructs in people's minds. This is what compels some people to act indiscriminately, temporarily disregarding the true values of religion.

Power and forgetfulness represent two influential entities that appear in discussion of human nature. Struggling to reveal the truth through an amalgamation of religion and authority will always cling to one of these two forces. In this regard, it is appropriate that Islam be uprooted from the foundations of its doctrines to the point that it becomes unclear and bereft of meaning. This notion is also conveyed by Denny JA via the following poetic excerpt: *In his youth, he had not yet indulged his senses in the colors of the world // It was as though he had been wearing horse blinders // Harshness and rigidity were applied as standard practice // "There was only one word: Oppose // Against the violators of God's laws // Through the application of one's tongue or violence // "The world must be saved!" // In this manner Ahmed led a division // He wanted to normalize the inhabitants of the country // Several times he had to deal with the police // Faith had made him fearless of death //*. This is one form of merging religion and power. As a result, man acts indiscriminately, neglecting social norms of behavior.

In observing this situation, religion does not really need to be dragged into political conflicts. Islam is sufficiently understood to be limited to religious concepts and issues of

faith. The same can be said for power, which adequately encompasses political actions and the objective of wielding authority and control. However, this hypothetical situation is diametrically opposed to reality. This happens because man is a creature whose behavior contradicts his own best interests. In the midst of his awareness which is exerted by applying common sense and righteous religious faith, man is not entirely mindful of religious exaltation (Fouda, Faraq, 2007)<sup>2</sup>.

The glory of human faith frequently appears when witnessing upsetting behavior. Human instinct emerges when people become aware of unexpected events. This motif is also evident in the poem *A Plenary Session on Religion: What is Apparent and what is Real*. However, *Ani had almost died // Causing great agitation to Ahmad who possessed a heart // It was as though he had seen his own mother // He felt that he had already surpassed his limits // For the past three days Ahmad had secluded himself // He had pleaded for divine forgiveness // "Have mercy on me, Allah..." // "Please forgive me..." // "Please*

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<sup>2</sup>. Fouda, Faraq. *Kebenaran Yang Hilang*. Jakarta. Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina. 2007. (page 221)

*grant me enlightenment before my mind deteriorates” // “The remorse within my soul is echoing” // “My room is full of tears” //*. In this excerpt, Denny JA capably knocks on the door of man’s sense of compassion, even though people frequently behave in a manner that transgresses against social norms.

What Goenawan Muhammad calls “faith as a beacon” represents religion that resides within faith. Thus, faith that is inspired by truth will always need to be corrected because truth itself is always fractured; it experiences tremors. Like a torch which distinguishes reality from a less radiant source of light, in this manner, too, is the faith of religion. People always exist within an environment that continuously demands truth for the purpose of summoning goodness and respecting differences. It is not impossible to shift or reposition faith so that it touches matters of conscience. This is where the conflict between faith and conscience emerges.

A person’s convictions are continuously tested through many of life’s tribulations. In this modern era, mankind can easily lose balance in the absence of strong convictions. Moreover, modernization also generates tension between religion and authority. The conflict between these

two entities is more directed against religious symbols that have become instruments that accumulate power. This perspective is presented in the following excerpt from the poem: *What made Ahmad so astounded and stunned // Was that the shop was trading in religion // They were competing... They were highlighting their advantages // In one store was a sign: Please line up in a disciplined manner; this is the newest religion” // We guarantee you won’t find anything newer // The price is negotiable // In this night market // The price of religion is declining // Ahmad was quite bewildered // Is this what was happening nowadays? //*

A concept of religion that tends to effect security and tranquility truly abandons the values and wisdom of religious teachings. This reality clashes with Professor John Caputo’s assertion that any religion would be enhanced by specifically “not” proclaiming itself as the only valid religion at the expense of all others, as though some religions exist within the context of relinquishing one another for the sake of religious truth; they must discard the concept of being the pre-eminent truthful religion. In the real world, religion does not concern politics and power. Thus, the spheres of religion, politics, and power are already divided among themselves. Each of these

three entities has its own nature in the real world.

The nature of mankind is to realize the truth that only the human species is capable of being religious. In leading our lives, the essence of religion and what is apparent in our daily lives need to be balanced. Everything will appear futile if man does everything for its future benefit (which is apparent) without paying sufficient attention to his true nature. This issue is evident in the following excerpt: *“Is this pious teacher a symbol of the prophets?” // “From the garments and pottery which he brought “ // “This pious teacher has come from a different century // He has brought water to give to every person // One teacher has brought red water // In a copper vessel // A different teacher has brought blue water // In a terracotta vessel “ // But what happened in a subsequent century? // The people in that land fought with each other // “Life-sustaining water was brought in terracotta vessels” // “You are all wrong! The vessels that contained that special water were made of copper” // “No, you’re all wrong! The truth is that the vessels were gold-plated” // Ahmad winced // They are only fighting over what is superficial // Not about what is essential //* Denny JA’s poetry implies that substance is often overlooked by people because they tend to

appreciate specifically extrinsic aspects.

## **/2/ *Terkejut Oleh Riset* (Astounded by Research: Happiness and Religion)**

Denny JA’s poem *Terkejut Oleh Riset* (Astounded by Research: Happiness and Religion) is generally and truly written in a soft voice concerning human and world affairs, in which the mundane world offers substantial inspiration: regarding happiness and religion, praise for God, and the nature of happiness, which are signified in the poem via the perspective of empirical science. If we refer to the writings of Sheikh Aidh al-Qarni, one sign of happiness of a servant is concealing secrets from him and planning the path of his life<sup>3</sup>. The connection to the issue of happiness is that anyone can spread grief, and consequently, people will generally experience feelings of regret.

Happiness and sorrow are two sides of the same coin. They always accompany each other, but only one of them will be evident at any time. In connection to this topic in Denny JA’s poetry, the author stipulates that happiness, peace, and serenity are

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<sup>3</sup> Aidh al-Qarni. *La Tahzan*. Jakarta. Anggota IKAPI. 2004. (page 67)

invariably derived from religion and science. This is because both religion and the empirical sciences are able to penetrate what is obscure, find what was lost, and reveal what is concealed. In addition, instinct and the human spirit always endeavor to discover new ideas and express something interesting.

Religion, the empirical sciences, and happiness frequently accompany each other. An explanation for this has generated an Arab proverb which is familiar to the ear of many Indonesians. Indeed, in the following excerpt from this poem, Denny JA expresses the co-existence of the three sciences of religion, knowledge, and happiness. // *Pursue science all the way to China // This is a religious commandment // Be appreciative if this makes you happy as it is also a religious edict*” // *This was often recited by heart by Ustaz Jaka // Both inside and outside the prayer room //*. Religion provides shelter for scientific inquiry and also increases happiness. These three interwoven concepts possess a great influence on each individual.

The connections that tie religion, the empirical sciences, and happiness together represent a complex reality. They form a complicated network that rests on two divergent aspects of reality, namely the abstract/ ideological and the concrete/ operational.

These three elements are interdependent to the extent that analysis that considers the relationship among religion, the physical sciences, and happiness must (one way or another) rely on the relationships among these aspects. Any related study that neglects one of these aspects would only produce lopsided conclusions. This notion was also elaborated by Dr. Suryo Ediyono who contends that a simple resolution regarding a certain relationship of this complex reality does not exist<sup>4</sup>.

In Denny JA's poem, *Astounded by Research (Happiness and Religion)*, he conveys the idea that man's intellectual capacity cannot grasp the benchmark for happiness. Is this benchmark related to the religious faith that individual people adopt to secure happiness, or could it be that happiness can be felt even by individuals who have never espoused religious beliefs? This issue is presented within the following excerpt from this poem: // *Again and again he read it // The conclusions of the research concerning happiness // Of the nations of the world // He made a connection with religion // He brought the news article with him to the college campus // The place where his close friend worked // He asked*

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<sup>4</sup> Ediyono, Suryo. *Filsafat Ilmu*. Yogyakarta: Kiliwangi. 2015. (page 165)

*Professor Daus: "Try to read this; could it be that these are the happiest countries in the world?" // "Countries that lack religious belief...?" //*. This excerpt indicates that happiness does not have a precise benchmark. Happiness cannot be correlated with any specific aspect.

This borrows from Socrates' maxim that true happiness is not located in possessing an abundance of external goods, such as material luxury, political power, or good health. True happiness resides in a lack of dependency on anything that is random and variable. Because the benefits of happiness are like this, any person can obtain it<sup>5</sup>. This is what Denny JA is also saying in his essay poem: // *"Switzerland is the happiest country" // "Followed by Iceland, Denmark, and Canada" // What is being measured is not merely financial success // Honesty is also being measured // Justice and freedom are also assessed // So then, what is your problem, Jaka? //*. Happiness cannot be measured by external evidence only.

According to his conceptualization, Denny JA asserts that man is a creature that seeks truth. The truth

often collides with reality. In this regard, both religion and scientific inquiry play an important role in analyzing truth. Methods of scientific inquiry are used to comprehend concrete systems that have structures and rules regarding certain matters. On the other hand, religion in this context is signified as a system of human beliefs and convictions. Religion and the empirical sciences have a similar vision, namely pursuing the truth. Religion and its characteristics provides answers to basic questions, including those concerning happiness, that people often ask.

Occasionally, reality and happiness are out of step with each other. People cannot appraise the value of things only from an external impression. This matter makes speaking about happiness difficult to analyze. In the following excerpt, Denny JA conveys this difficulty: // *"Yes, Jaka; it's a fact" // "You can't expect an apple to become a date." // "Don't perceive a ball to be a coconut." // "Accept reality, whatever it is." // "In Switzerland all the way to Canada." // "The public is abandoning religion" // "But the inhabitants of these countries are happier." // "What can be said?" //*. Idealism according to one's way of thinking often does not correspond to reality. However, accepting a certain aspect of reality can promote happiness.

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<sup>5</sup> Gaarder, Jostein. *Dunia Sophie*. Jakarta: Mizan. 2010. (page 342)

It is difficult to find the endpoint of matters that concern religion and happiness. Denny JA uses an interesting analogy regarding happiness and religion, as follows: // *For many hours, he paced back and forth // squatting and stooping like a fool // His neighbors came to visit him // "Hi, Nazaruddin, what are looking for?" // "I'm searching for the key to my room" // "And you still haven't found it?" // The neighbor asked again: "Where did you lose your key?" // Nazaruddin said, "I lost it somewhere over there." // "But it is pitch black where I lost it." // "Thus it is better for me to search here." // "There's light, and it would be easy to see it." // "Ha ha ha ha ha ha..." // The Professor and Jaka burst into laughter. // The story of Nazaruddin and his misplaced logic // The key disappeared somewhere // But he looked for it somewhere else //*. The meaning that can be deduced from this analogy is that it's possible that happiness can enter someone's life if he looks for it in the wrong place.

If religion is not able to make people happy, this is an inaccurate perception. What is wrong is not religion but rather how people fulfill religious precepts. A middling understanding of religion creates a negative perception within people. This is the reason that recommendations to comprehend religion with great dedication

should be followed so that man can attain true happiness. Thus, Denny JA concludes his essay poem in this spirit: // *Jaka said, "Please wait... This is exactly what I have trouble agreeing with..." // "Is it really true that religion..." // "Fails to make people happy?" // Jaka then quoted various verses. // With a slashed heart // How great religion is as a source of joy // Tear drops... there are not even two // The professor replied, "That's the main idea..." // "If religion failed to make people happy..." // "Some things are amiss in this world..." // "But not specifically with religion..." // "Instead, it is with how we engage in religious practice." //*. This means that happiness depends on how mankind perceives everything that exists. On the other hand, happiness can also be acquired from a complete understanding of both religion and scientific inquiry.

### **/3/ *Mimpi Sepeda Ontel* (The Dream about a Bicycle: Daring to be Different)**

Writing poetry is not a simple matter of just choosing elegant words. Composing poems is also not just about expressing ideas through typography so that they will be thought to possess esthetic value. More than that, writing poetry also records traces of



history and expresses matters of reality. Because of this, social sensitivity, proficiency in processing language, and intelligence in processing thoughts are required of writers. This concept is also found in the poem, *Mimpi Sepeda Ontel* (The Dream about a Bicycle: Daring to be Different), a work of literature by Denny JA.

Denny JA, who is known as an intellectual entrepreneur, has achieved many breakthroughs in the literary world and in Indonesian culture. One of these innovations has been his creation of essay poems. Denny JA's essay poems are beautifully narrated to the point of shaping a story that is packed with meaning. This is true of the poem, *The Dream about a Bicycle: Daring to be Different*, which contains the message, "It is preferable to live alone than to live together among a throng of people with whom you are incompatible."

Denny JA selects Nadia as the protagonist who plays a major role in this essay poem. The restlessness of this 21-year-old woman is caused by confusion in choosing between following her intuition or supporting a religious organization which has been embraced by her. Nadia is described as a young woman who is working as the bookkeeper in a certain Islamic organization. She appears agitated because

what she does often conflicts with her principles. The financial discrepancies that were carried out by the organization where she worked made Nadia feel dispirited and made her want to resign. Meanwhile, the people around her, such as her parents and boyfriend, were becoming more supportive of the religious organization where she worked.

Through the character of Nadia, Denny JA endeavors to convey that several years ago, there were many cases of human behavior that involved defamation of religion. They were shielded by religion, but they executed random acts of corruption to the point that they disregarded the true essence of religion. In the following excerpt, Denny JA describes this situation: // *The houses of worship of the heretics were closed and squashed // The households of the heretics were assailed with curses // The beleaguered sect experienced both fear and misery. // In a resounding voice, they cried out the name of the one God // What about a response from the country and the police? "We are the religious police. What do you want?" //*. Through this fragment of poetry, it is evident that Denny JA is expressing heroism shrouded in the guise of religion.

Religion as a pathway to holiness is oriented to a mechanism that lies between nonexistence and complete

faith. Religiosity and spirituality may differ but are correlative. Religiosity itself is defined as what refers to participation in rituals based on belief in conjunction with experiences encountered by a religious community. On the other hand, spirituality contains a more extensive meaning. Spirituality refers to a personal perspective regarding the meaning of life and its connection to transcendental aspects of efforts in reaching one's objectives. There is confusion between the definitions of these two terms, which occasionally causes differences in perception.

Negative political phenomena have captured the attention of the public; one of these involved a case of violence tinged by religious sentiment, which occurred in Sleman (Yogyakarta) in May, 2014<sup>6</sup>. The attack, directed against the Catholic community who were in the middle of a prayer service (which ended tragically), was executed by a group of Muslim radicals wearing long robes. This incident, whose motives were unclear, caused extensive damage and loss. A young child became the victim of torture carried out by a group that declared itself a civil organization. This event represents practical evidence that savagery is conducted in the name of God.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.tempo.co>

Religion is a very sensitive subject. Thus, Denny JA records the role religion plays in public life within his poems. Nadia, a figure who serves as a protagonist in the poem, *The Dream about a Bicycle: Daring to be Different*, is depicted as having experienced some turbulence in her life. Here is an excerpt from the poem: // *Nadia had been meditating daily for a long time // This always brought her attention back to her heart // Sometimes she was carried away in dreams // Her heart beat sharply as if it was consumed by flames // "Enough already," Nadia convinced herself that "My heart is no longer there" // But leaving the organization // Turned out to be a more difficult task than she had anticipated // Oh, it is so unfortunate... My father, my devout teacher, and my boyfriend have become obstructionists...* //. Nadia experiences an uncomfortable feeling that encourages her to rebel.

When one's conscience and thoughts are diametrically opposed... This is the description that is most suitable for describing Nadia's situation in Denny JA's poem. The activities that were pursued in the organization she worked for were often done in the name of God. Defending religion arbitrarily with deceitful behavior snatches away civil rights, and this is often done by

certain religious organizations. This is the basic rationale that compels Nadia to leave and be free of the organization. Based on the *Broad Guidelines of State Policy* (GBHN), the organization's mission contravenes the functions and responsibilities of religion<sup>7</sup>. The function and duties of religion are to lay a sturdy moral, ethical, and spiritual foundation for the life of the people, nation, and country.

When the role of religion clashes with religious principles, this causes anxiety for the public. In Denny JA's poem, Nadia represents a character who is troubled by fraudulent behavior that deviates from religion. If we link this to the reality of daily life, there are times when certain religious parties damage the general public's view of a certain religion. An example that hints at this would be the violence that took place in Ambon and Poso. Other examples are the bombing of night clubs in Bali in 2002 and the bomb which shook a traditional pork market in Palu in 2005. How is it possible for events that sacrifice human life to be reconciled with pretexts that appeal to conscience on the basis of religion?

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<sup>7</sup> El-Guyanie, Gugun et al. *Kekuasaan dan Agama*. Purwokerto: STAIN Press. 2008. (page 143)

Religion is closely related to faith and moral character. This notion is also evident in this short excerpt from Denny JA's poem: // *Because Nadia wanted to focus first on college, she greatly desired to acquire a strong grasp of science // "Don't do that, Nadia," her father said harshly // "This organization is dedicated to faith" // "Science is actually quite important" // "But charitable acts are even more significant" // "What authority does science have without charity? This organization is charity" // It was Father who invited you to go there, but now Father needs to supervise you" //* Joining them is a form of charitable activity in religion. This is also the conceptualization of a certain group that invokes religion as the basis for every aspect of life. On the other hand, deciding to leave the organization is not an easy task. The people who are closest to Nadia frequently impede her efforts to leave.

In his poems, Denny JA explains in great detail the power of prayer through the challenges that Nadia experiences. Nadia becomes closer to God through submission and praying to request guidance for finding a way to leave the organization. Through the efforts that Nadia makes, the poet Denny JA articulates ideas regarding divine assistance that people acquire

through their dreams. This concept is presented in the following excerpt: // *In a dark and mystical night // Nadia offered up a prayer for her grandmother who had been her close companion // She cries incessantly // She imagines that her grandmother comes to her heart // That night // And the following night // Each night she sends the same prayer to her grandmother/ // "Oh, God, please give me a sign. Open my heart to have an eye to see with"// Nadia was drowning in her tears (air mata) // She hoped the spring (mata air) would open // At that moment, a bicycle appeared // "Yes, Grandmother, a bicycle, just the three of us" // "The dream was so symbolic (simbolik) // I hope it came from the Creator (Sang Khalik)" //.*

The essay poem, *The Dream about a Bicycle: Daring to be Different*, discusses divine assistance that is granted on one condition. The pathway for leaving the organization is conditional in a manner that relates to the bicycle in Nadia's dream. // *In the village, they took turns riding one behind the other. They pedaled the old fragile bicycle. // The villagers saw them. They kept scolding and reprimanding the couple. // In the next village, they just walked the bicycle // Grandmother strolled on the left-hand side // Nadia walked on the right-hand side // The villagers who*

*saw them walking by also scolded and reprimanded them // "Why is each way wrong, both Grandmother and Nadia asked?" // Nadia's dream indicates that every path that man chooses entails risks, even more so regarding religion and truth. We should remind ourselves that there is no genuine truth in this world. The truth depends on the distinct perspectives that different people have.*

Departing from that issue, Nadia views Islam not as a religion that is synonymous with violence. This belief manages to influence her perception to the point that Nadia is able to make a decision. // *That very morning Nadia motivated herself to write a letter // To resign fully and completely // From the hard line religious organization // However, her recollection of the three bold men was still intensely lodged in her heart // She had just composed the first line // Her hand stopped writing // "Am I brave enough to be different? Among shades of the color green // Am I brave enough to be orange? In the midst of a jasmine garden // Am I brave enough to become a rose?" // This excerpt implies that becoming your own self is preferable to living within a crowd of misguided people.*

In brief, within his essay poems, Denny JA expresses the idea that

religion is suffering from credibility issues that are very difficult to change. No organized religion teaches its people to engage in violence. Organi-

zations do not intend to shape religions to overlap each other. If this matter resides in our midst, do not fear being different.

# Denny JA: The Architect Of Essay Poetry

AHMAD GAUS

The name Denny JA is widely recognized by people in the political arena. His reputation as a political consultant soared after twice being the architect for Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's victory in two presidential elections in Indonesia (2004 and 2009); he was also instrumental in electing 23 governors (out of 33 provinces in Indonesia) as well as 51 regents and mayors. This impressive series of success has made this Palembang native (born January 4, 1963) crowned as "The Kingmaker of Indo-

nesian Politics"<sup>1</sup>. It is not astounding that his sudden emergence in the world of literature is rather surprising both in literary and political factions. Even more impressive was that his appearance in the sphere of literature was accomplished by publishing a book which he labeled "essay poetry".

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<sup>1</sup> "Denny JA, King-Maker of Indonesian Politics," Men's Obsession magazine, Edition 36, April-May, 2007; this article can also be found at: <http://suarapub-lik.co.id/web/2013/02/08/denny-ja-king-maker-indonesia>. Accessed 7 June 2013.

The form and style of poems as well as essays had been long known to the public, but “essay poetry”? A number of questions, both supportive and critical, immediately surfaced regarding the legitimacy of this new literary form<sup>2</sup>.

Denny JA’s struggle with the world of cultural art, and certainly literature, is truly nothing new since this has happened before in history. Before propelling himself into the world of politics through his survey agency and political consultancy, he had already wrestled intensely in the world of cultural art, both as a cultural editor as well as an author of newspaper columns and essays on social culture. Indeed, he was quite active in various forums that discussed cultural art.

In intellectual circles and among contemporary activists, Denny JA was known as the muse behind college study groups in the 1980s. At that time, these study groups were experienced as an escape route that was both sensible and strategic given a political system that was completely

restrictive for college activists who were forced to distance themselves from politics by Soeharto’s Orde Baru (New Order) via NKK/ BKK. It did not take long before college study group became a movement throughout Indonesia to the extent that their journal *Prisma* elevated it as a special theme, and the Soeharto government (through the Director General of Dikti) “was forced” to take notice of these developments. This led to the invitation of various college study groups to a special meeting in order to observe and listen to their ideas<sup>3</sup>. Denny JA himself established The Study Group Proclamation, which in his view constituted a “reincarnation” of the early college study groups in the 1920s, the era when Bung Karno (Soekarno) and Bung Hatta (M. Hatta) were active<sup>4</sup>.

It is clear that he already had a talent as a pioneer within him. It is not surprising that after successfully receiving a Ph.D. in the field of Comparative Politics and Business

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<sup>2</sup> Articles expressing varying perspectives, pro/con/neutral, were collected, edited, and prefaced by Acep Zamzam Noor and published in book format: Acep Zamzam Noor (editor), *Essay Poetry: A New Potential for Indonesian Poetry* (Jakarta: Jurnal Sajak, 2013). This anthology contains essays written by well-known intellectuals and literary figures regarding essay poetry.

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<sup>3</sup> This meeting was held under the auspices of the Director General of Dikti at Partere Bumi Siliwangi IKIP (currently UPI) in Bandung, West Java, which was attended by a group of former activists from the *Kelompok Studi Mahasiswa*, including Erick Wardana, Agus R. Sarjono, Taufik Rahzen, and M. Toriq.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding the *Kelompok Studi Mahasiswa* (College Study Groups) in the 1980’s, see Dr. Abdul Rivai’s account in “*Student Indonesia di Eropa*”. Jakarta: KPG, 2000.

History from Ohio State University in the U. S., he returned to Indonesia and pioneered as well as popularized the use of public opinion surveys that could scientifically predict the victory of political candidates in local and national elections. Thus, he was again designated as a thinker who conceived of and pioneered novel practices in Indonesian politics. From this perspective his emergence within literary circles can be seen. And a year ago, this man who won 11 awards from the Indonesian Museum of Records (MURI) in academics, politics, and journalism has returned to make his mark again. However, this time in the arena of literature, not in the world of politics, i.e. by publishing the book *Atas Nama Cinta (In the Name of Love)* as an anthology of essay poems<sup>5</sup>. Once again, although the terms poem and essay are commonly understood by the masses, in any case merging both of these to form a new genre certainly generates its own semantic consequences<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Denny JA, *Atas Nama Cinta (Sebuah Puisi Esai): Isu Diskriminasi dalam Untaian Kisah Cinta yang Menggetarkan Hati* (Jakarta: Penerbit Renebook, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of poem and essay genres, as well as the semantic consequences of combining these (in the form of the essay poem), see Agus R. Sarjono, "Puisi Esai: Sebuah Kemungkinan, Sebuah Tantangan" in *Jurnal Sajak*, No. 3, III/2012.

According to Denny JA, an essay poem is a long poem and is structured in chapters because it basically a drama or fragment thereof which has been rendered in a poetic style. He continues by stating that within an essay poem, it is appropriate to portray the dynamics of the main character or protagonist as well as a specific change in social reality. The dynamics of characterization and changes in social reality in and of themselves require a story line that is separated into chapters<sup>7</sup>. Since the publication of Denny JA's book, essay poetry has become a new term which had never been known previously in the history of poetry writing in Indonesia. Thus, this has not only introduced a new name, it has also presented a new concept for writing poetry, which will be discussed later.

With the concept of narrating a story, Denny JA's poetry in *Atas Nama Cinta/ In the Name of Love* can be read as one would normally read a short story or classic Melayu poem. In contrast to lyric poetry, essay poems may evade symbols and metaphors that normally attach personal meanings these may hinder the comprehension of the reader. Each expression, even symbolic and

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<sup>7</sup> Denny JA, "Puisi Esai: Apa dan Mengapa", in *Jurnal Sajak*, No. 3, III/2012.



metaphorical references, is always elucidated through story elements that involve characterizations, plot, background, and perspectives.

Therefore, if there are symbols, metaphors, or bizarre expressions, the reader can make sense of these by referring to character development, setting and sequence of events, a consistent viewpoint, and motifs that shape the plot. Even ambiguous ideas that commonly appear in lyric poetry can be diminished and understood by relying on intrinsic narrative elements of the essay poem, as well as by referring to the provided footnotes. These footnotes are an intrinsic feature that signify essay poems. Through the inclusion of footnotes, each factual clarification and reference which is needed to contextualize character development, setting, events, and certain attitudes becomes clear and available to the reader to verify, supplement, or rebuff. There are those who believe that the footnotes within essay poems just provide supplemental clarifications or are just for show. In fact, the footnotes in essay poems can be considered an essential principle since they guarantee the tension between fact and fiction and authenticate the underlying reality so that fact and fiction are not mixed up or misconstrued. This concept can be

understood when we recall that Denny JA is fundamentally a social scientist as well as a social activist. As a social scientist, he can write an analysis or commentary as well as his opinion in the form of an analysis, research paper, or newspaper column. However, in his role as a social activist, Denny JA needs to arouse and encourage social awareness and conscience concerning social phenomena not merely with a cognitive approach but mainly with an emotional appeal. In the following quotation, Denny JA admits this himself:

*“As a writer, activist, and analyst, I have for a long time considered how to present various issues related to social discrimination to the public in a manner that captivates the common reader’s attention. If a situation is conveyed through an academic paper, newspaper column, or regular essay, it is difficult to portray the emotional sensitivity and internal psychological mood pertaining to victims of discrimination. If a story is written in standard poetry or lyric prose, it is also difficult to present statistics regarding a factual issue, which at the very least requires the supportive presence of footnotes. I am not a poet and do not pretend to be a poet. However, it is much more effective if these types of stories are*

*presented through a new medium, which I call Essay Poetry*<sup>8</sup>.

His anxiety as a social activist motivates him to raise social issues, in this case issues of social discrimination, in order to attract the widest attention of the general public. Issues of discrimination are considered insufficiently stimulating to arouse the interest of the public if it is written in the form of an academic paper (and this is even more true if a research paper is circulated specifically within academic circles and becomes the focus of conversation only within a restricted group of social academicians). On the other hand, if it written in a literary genre (short stories or poetry), as has been known for many years, it is feared that these issues of social discrimination would manifest themselves as fiction and thus accepted as describing fictional events which in a more realistic or factual sense could conceivably happen anywhere. Therefore, the main problem is that Denny JA does not intend that the social issues he describes be considered fictitious occurrences that could happen anywhere. He specifically wants to impress that the issues and social cir-

cumstances which he describes have already happened (not that they *might* or *could* happen) in a certain unambiguous place and time (not just anywhere) and that the discrimination he depicts has already consumed many real victims. It is apparent that a series of troubling events prompted Denny JA to arrive at the term “*essay poem*,” which is neither a *poem* nor an *essay*, but instead an *essay poem*. Denny JA’s book, which consists of five long examples of these poems signals the advent of a new genre: *essay poetry*.

In his commentary regarding *Atas Nama Cinta*, Abdul Kadir Ibrahim, an author and literary critic who hails from the Riau Archipelago, contends that:

*“In Denny JA’s hands, poetry is no longer just something pretty and precious, or a message or something to savor, but instead simultaneously evokes ideas, knowledge, and experience, the words and poetic lyrics present new, potent meaning because they are supported and bolstered by the presence of data and facts... People who read this kind of poetry can enjoy both its beauty and intelligence at the same time...”*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Denny JA, “Pengantar/Preface”, *Atas Nama Cinta (Sebuah Puisi Esai): Isu Diskriminasi dalam Untaian Kisah Cinta yang Menggetarkan Hati*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Renebook, 2012).

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<sup>9</sup> Abdul Kadir Ibrahim, “Puisi Esai: Kalam Menyerbak Kemanusiaan”, in Acep Zamzam Noor (editor), *Essay Poetry: A New Potential for Indonesian Poetry* (Jakarta: Jurnal Sajak, 2013), page 145.

The inauguration of something new, which differs from the mundane has appropriately raised some questions and criticism, both supportive and dissenting. Thus, the birth of essay poetry has stirred up debates in social circles, literary communities, and the printed media<sup>10</sup>. In their Twitter accounts, well-known poets, such as Goenawan Mohamad, Sitok Srengenge, and Nirwan Dewanto have assailed both essay poetry and its creator, Denny JA, either directly or indirectly. Various arguments and issues regarding the advent of essay poetry have been publicized through various media, as mentioned above, and these have been documented in a book by the poet Acep Zamzam<sup>11</sup>.

Viewed from the perspective of its form, essay poetry can be said to represent an innovation that derives from common forms of poetry that have been known for a long time. This is even more true when we recall that for many decades the modern traditions of Indonesian poetry have been dominated by lyricism. Under the dominant tradition of lyric poetry, it is not surprising if every form of

poetry that has social content as well as strong social criticism has been disparaged<sup>12</sup>. Even more so, the appearance of Denny JA's essay poetry has granted the opportunity for non-poets to take part in composing this type of poem. In this sense, Denny JA's venture can be seen as democratizing the discipline of poetry, which was previously restricted, as expressed by Chairil Anwar, "those who are not poets cannot participate". Analysts, social activists, legal activists, women's rights advocates, environmental activists, and others are now empowered to document the results of studies and personal observations within the form of essay poems.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Sapardi Djoko Damono has even stated that social criticism within literature is analogous to a bee without a sting. See Sapardi Djoko Damono, "*Kritik Sosial dalam Sastra: Lebah Tanpa Sengat*", in *Prisma*. Criticism and scorn were leveled against Rendra when he shifted away from lyric poetry and ballads to fierce social criticism in the format of pamphlet poetry, as seen in the book "*Potret Pembangunan dalam Puisi*". Also see Agus R. Sarjono, "*Kritisnya (Sajak) Kritik Sosial*" in *Jurnal Sajak*, No. 4. III/2012.

<sup>13</sup> All innovations certainly assume some connection with something which is not new since "there is nothing new under the sun". For instance, Chairil Anwar's innovations were connected to contemporary poetic movements in Europe, and the poetic innovations of Sutardji Calzoum Bachri were related to preexisting Melayu mantras. Essay poetry itself has precedents in the spirit of sonnets in classic Melayu poetry as well as the traditions of epic poetry, such as ballads. However, just as Sutardji's poems depart from mantras, essay poetry also differs from ballads and sonnets.

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<sup>10</sup> An example appears in an article by Maman S. Mahayana, "Posisi Puisi, Posisi Esai", *Kompas*, 30 December 2012, as well as the view of Leon Agusta, "*Mem-persoalkan Legitimasi Puisi Esai*", *Kompas*, 13 January 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Acep Zamzam Noor, *loc. cit.*

Denny JA, who still participates in this previously mentioned process of democratization, has published his essay poems at the essay poetry website. In the span of one month following this publication at his website, he counted more than 1 million hits by internet users. In addition to this achievement, numerous essay poems, as well as anthologies of essay poems, were composed by various intellectuals, instructors, school teachers, activists, and journalists, as a result of being inspired by the ideas in Denny JA's essay poems. Following the publication of Denny JA's anthology of essay poetry (*Atas Nama Cinta*), numerous books of essay poetry have been published by writers from a variety of backgrounds, listed here:

- *Kutunggu Kamu di Cisadane* (I'll Wait for You at Cisadane) by Ahmad Gaus; preface by Jamal D. Rahman; published by Komodo Books, 2012;
- *Manusia Gerobak* (Wheelbarrow People) by Elza Peldi Taher; preface by D. Zawawi Imron; published by Jurnal Sajak, 2013;
- *Mata Luka Sengkon-Karta* (The Wounded Eye of Sengkon-Karta) an anthology written by Peri Sandi Huizche, Beni Setia, and Saifur Rohman; the poet Agus R. Sarjono

acted as the editor and also wrote the preface; published by *Jurnal Sajak*, 2013;

- *Dari Rangin ke Telpon* (From Rangin to the Telephone), an anthology which includes essay poetry written by Katherine Ahmad, Kedung Darma Romansha, Rahmad Agus Supartono, Wedoko, and Yustinus Sapto Hardjanto. The poet Acep Zamzam Noor functioned as the editor and wrote the preface for this anthology; published by Jurnal Sajak, 2013;

- *Dari Singkawang ke Sampit* (From Singkawang to Sampit) an anthology which includes essay poetry written by Arief Setiawan, Arif Fitra Kurniawan, Catur Adi Wicaksono, Hanna Fransisca, and Jenar Aribowo; the poet Jamal D. Rahman acted as the editor and wrote the preface for this anthology; published by Jurnal Sajak, 2013;

- *Mawar Airmata* (The Rose of Tears) an anthology which includes essay poetry written by Nur Faini, Onik Sam Nurmalaya, Sahasra Sahasika, Syifa Amori, Stephanus P. Elu, and Yudith Rosida; the preface to this anthology was written by the literary critic Sunu Wasono, and the poet Jamal D. Rahman functioned as the editor; published by Jurnal Sajak, 2013;

• *Penari Cinta Anak Koruptor* (The Love Dancers of the Corruptor's Son), an anthology which includes essay poetry written by Alex R. Nainggolan, Baiq Ratna Mulyaningsih, Carolina Betty Tobing, Chairunnisa, Damhuri Muhammad, and Huzer Apriansyah; the poet Nenden Lilis Aisyah wrote the preface for the anthology, which was edited by the poet Jamal D. Rahman; published by Jurnal Sajak, 2013;

• *Puisi Esai: Kemungkinan Baru Puisi Indonesia / (Essay Poetry : A New Potential for Indonesian Poetry)*; this book represents an anthology that contains the writings of leading literary and intellectual figures regarding essay poetry; the poet Acep Zamzam Noor acted as the editor and wrote the preface for this book; published by Jurnal Sajak, 2013; and

• *Imaji Cinta Halima* (Halima's Romantic Image), written by Novriantoni Kahar with a foreword by Goenawan Mohamad; published by Renebook, 2013.

In this regard, a Contest for Essay Poem Writers has been held since 2012 by *Jurnal Sajak*. Recalling the enthusiasm of the participants in the Contest for Essay Poem Writers in

2012, which entailed as many as 450 authors, it is not impossible that the Contest for Essay Poem Writers in 2013 may exceed this number.

It is also not impossible that in the near future, the number of published books of essay poetry will swell. The fact that a new literary "movement" has already generated debate and given birth to works of literature that involve the creative talents of writers from many walks of life certainly represents an interesting phenomenon whose momentum should not be restrained or abandoned.

### **Departing from the Center Lane**

Based on the prior discussion, essay poetry differs from lyrical poetry, which has been better known by the literary public and has been the main current in Indonesia's poetic traditions<sup>14</sup>. Lyricism within the historical development of Indonesian poetry has dominated every slot of creativity and has even achieved hegemony among the community of poets. Despite this, many poets are looking for opportu-

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<sup>14</sup> Lyric poetry as a mainstream current in traditional Indonesian poetry is expressed in the discussion "*Imperium Puisi Liris*" at Bentara Budaya Jakarta (on 19 March 2008), which was attended by the poets Afrizal Malna and Sapardi Djoko Damono.

nities to leave the mainstream of lyrical poetry and develop a new poetic paradigm<sup>15</sup>.

Essay poetry constitutes a distinctly different path which lies outside the center lane of lyricism. Essay poetry assumes a form of poetry which, according to Denny JA, has a very clear message as well as a social setting and context that are lucid rather than secretive. Moreover, the language that is used in essay poems is deliberately easy to comprehend<sup>16</sup>.

It reminds us of the close relationship that classical poetry had with the public. The subgenres of traditional poetry, such as quatrains, sonnets, and couplets, represented poetry that belonged to the common people in a manner that all people could become actively involved in enjoying, comprehending, as well as creating poems by themselves. The common folk felt an intimate connection to these forms of traditional poetry to the extent that in

previous generations they took responsibility for maintaining and revitalizing this important part of their cultural heritage. It is unfortunate that that period has already passed. In our current era, poetry hardly has any value or purpose among the general public.

From Denny JA's perspective, symptoms of elitism within modern lyric poetry have alienated the public from engaging in this form of literature, which used to be so popular. This predicament, in his opinion, is not only expressed in Indonesia but also occurs worldwide to the extent that a general sense of malaise has disaffected people who would normally want to read poetry. In this regard, Denny JA cites the viewpoint of John Barr, a former president of the Poetry Foundation. In an article entitled *American Poetry in the New Century*, which was published in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* in 2006, Barr asserts that poetry has become esoteric and difficult for the public to comprehend. He also claims that the composition of poetry has become stagnant because very few developments or significant changes have occurred in writing poetry during the past several decades. Thus, the general public feels distanced from the world of poetry.

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<sup>15</sup> For example, in the early 1970's, a new genre of poetry, called *mbeling* poetry, was introduced by Remy Sylado. According to Sapardi Djoko Damono, *mbeling* poetry originated as an exercise for liberation. Damono claims that the term *mbeling* more or less means *naughty, impudent, obstinate, or rebellious*. (See *Bahasa dan Sastra*, No. 3, IV/1978, Pusat Pengembangan dan Pengembangan Bahasa Depdikbud.)

<sup>16</sup> Denny JA, "Puisi Esai: Apa dan Mengapa", in *Jurnal Sajak*, No. 3, III/2012, pages 68-75.

Denny JA continues to quote John Barr's remarks in which Barr claims that modern poets are either self-absorbed and obsessed with their own imagination or are only responsive to the ideas and concerns of other poets. Thus, in his view, modern poets have distanced and isolated themselves from issues that are relevant to the public at large. Barr longs for the type of poetry and literature which were common during Shakespeare's era. At that time, poetry represented a magnetic force that was widely discussed and appreciated by the public; thus, poetry reflected and had a synergistic relationship with social developments experienced by the general citizenry. Hence, poetry naturally depicted the aura and issues of that era.

Denny JA's book of essay poems, *Atas Nama Cinta*, reverts back to the tradition of being responsive and relevant to the issues that the general public grapples with. He renders his poems in plain, easily understood language so that the social issues he conveys can be readily discussed by the public.

### The Concept of Esthetics

The publication of the first essay poetry anthology, *Atas Nama Cinta (In the Name of Love)* was greeted with questions concerning the esthetic

concept that is presented<sup>17</sup>. This is because a new genre needs an esthetic concept which is relatively clear so the public can distinguish it from the conventional esthetic concept that has been associated with more common poetry. Somehow, each work of literature, and more precisely each work of art, is presented to the public with a certain concept of esthetic beauty. The concept of beauty that is offered by *Atas Nama Cinta* does not lie within the elegance of its verse and rhyme, and not substantially due to its diction (word choice/phrase construction), which would be common and appropriate for new poetry; instead its esthetic qualities emerge from the entirety of its construction, including the structure of the embedded story and its underlying messages. In a philosophical discourse, the degree of beauty is linked to the ability to make "discrimination", for instance, a sensory experience that connects us to an object whose presence we can see or feel. A person can obtain a sense of beauty concerning a certain object through personal experience that possess special characteristics. However, the

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<sup>17</sup> See Maman S. Mahayana, "Posisi Puisi, Posisi Esai" in *Kompas*, 30 December 2012, and a refutation of Mahayana's position by Leon Agusta in his defense of essay poetry in "Mempersoalkan Legitimasi Puisi Esai" in *Kompas*, 13 January 2013.

concept of beauty for a person (who has particular attributes) can easily change and become a concept of beauty that is embraced by many people if it can influence the perception of beauty of a whole group of people.

The same holds true for poetry. The concept of poetic beauty is first found within the language it employs because every poem relies on the medium of language. However, since language keeps evolving, the concept of esthetic beauty attached to language also changes. Language that is considered *deep* and *sublime* in a poem has been a standard for evaluating its beauty. The problem

is that the terms *deep* and *sublime* always mean *complex* and *ab-stract*. A poem that features complex and abstract is said to have achieved the highest levels of esthetics. The reader is forced to penetrate and construe this beauty within dark alleyways of difficult language which doesn't guarantee the ability to ascertain its meaning. Thus, reading a poem is similar to guessing the answer to a riddle.

Denny JA has adopted a different understanding of the role of language. He wants to return poetry to the days when poems could be easily understood by the public at large. He believes that esthetic achievement in

poetry does not necessarily derive from complicated and abstract language. If it is difficult to comprehend the language in a poem, this is not an esthetic accomplishment but instead it represents a failure of the poet to communicate effectively. If we view poetry from this perspective, he continues, this does not mean that essay poetry aims to reduce or negate the significance of the beauty of language. All of the linguistic devices that support the creation of esthetic language are still employed in composing essay poetry. The use of metaphor, symbolism, rhyme, meter, and various linguistic elements are actually recommended; however, the essay poem must always be communicative and easily understood. An essay poem is considered successful if it can be read and understood by the public at large<sup>18</sup>.

However, the esthetic commitment of essay poetry is not especially at face value as poetry; instead its esthetic beauty is mainly expressed by the humanistic values it espouses. In other words, beauty is not just something that is created in the poet's imagination; it can be something that derives from reality. Attached to reality one finds opposing values as

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<sup>18</sup> Denny JA, "Puisi Esai: Apa dan Mengapa", in *Jurnal Sajak*, No. 3, III/2012, pages 68-75.



well as values that have taken control of our consciousness without our awareness. These include our notions of good and bad, right and wrong, love and hatred, fairness and bias, as well as generosity and greed.

The literary author, Leon Agusta, has stated that the concept of beauty that Denny JA's books of essay poetry subscribe to advocates universal values and liberation of mankind from the shackles of discrimination. He calls this concept of beauty the esthetic of liberation<sup>19</sup>. Denny JA espouses a perspective that beauty arises from descriptions that are grounded in social reality and whose messages can be comprehended as a result of easily understood language. Due to his support for and attention to these humanistic issues, Denny JA's anthology of five essay poems, *Atas Nama Cinta* (In the Name of Love) constitutes a work of poetry whose values can be easily recognized and appreciated by the reader.

Is it inappropriate for works of literature, such as poetry, to advocate humanistic values? According to the poet Sapardi Djoko Damono, no!; he contends that it's appropriate to do so because the poet feels truly compelled to compose poetry because he wishes

to share an awareness and appreciation of life. In this process, he always finds himself in a tense position between being a child who plays with language and being a prophet who has been divinely appointed to guide and liberate mankind from adversity<sup>20</sup>.

### A New Movement

As a new literary development, it appears appropriate if essay poetry sparks controversy, whether this is voiced through articles or enunciated in discussion forums. However, beyond that, the publication of the first book of essay poetry, *Atas Nama Cinta* (In the Name of Love), was greeted by many figures from various groups. Two elder poets, Sapardi Djoko Damono and Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, as well as the well-known sociologist Ignas Kleden wrote epilogues for the book. Meanwhile, positive receptions and tributes for the book were conveyed by Siti Musdah Mulia (a female activist), Mahfud MD (the Chief Justice of the Indonesian Constitutional Court), Komaruddin Hidayat (Rector of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta), Jimly Asshiddiqie (a member of the Indonesian Presidential Advisory Council), Bondan Winarno (a senior

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<sup>19</sup> See Leon Agusta, "Tentang Puisi Esai Denny JA" in *Horison* magazine, November 2012, pages 31-36.

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<sup>20</sup> Sapardi Djoko Damono, *Bilang Begini, Maksudnya Begitu* (Jakarta: Editum, 2010), page 105.

journalist), and Mohamad Sobary (a cultural expert).

In addition to its availability in print, *Atas Nama Cinta* has also been published in a mobile web version so that it is easily accessible through the internet as well as cellular phones. And as previously mentioned above, within one month of its release, this book of essay poetry had garnered more than one million “hits” online<sup>21</sup>. These poems have not only been made available online; the poems in *Atas Nama Cinta* have also been transformed by film director Hanung Bramantyo in movie format in conjunction with Denny JA as co-producers. The following are the names of directors and actors associated with the film version of each of the five essay poems:

- *Fang Yin’s Handkerchief* was directed by Karin Bintaro. Actors/actresses: Leoni Vitria, Hartanti Reza Nangin, and Verdi Solaiman
- *Romi and Yuli from Cikeusik* was directed by Indra Kobutz. Actors/actresses: Zascia Adya Mecca, Ben Kasyafani, and Agus Kuncoro.
- *Minah was Still Beheaded* was directed by Indra Kobutz. Actors/actresses: Vitta Mariana, Saleh Ali, and Peggy Melati Sukma.

- *The Forbidden Love of Batman and Robin*, released in movie format with the title *Confidential Love*, was directed by Rahabi MA. Actors: Rizal Syahdan, Zack Nasution, and Tio Pakusadewo.

- *The Desiccated Flower of Parting* was directed by Emil Heradi. Actors/actresses: Rawa Nawangsih, Arthur Brotolaras, and Teuku Rifku Wikana.

The five poems in the book *Atas Nama Cinta* have also been rendered in a poetry reading version in the form of individual video clips which involved the authors and culture critics Putu Wijaya, Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, Niniek L. Karim, Sudjiwo Tedjo, and Fatin Hamama. The themes connected to the essay poems (which have already been filmed and made into film clips) have been used as a means of simulating relevant social issues for meetings and events that commemorate the violence of May 1998, the celebration of Pancasila Day in Taman Ismail Marzuki, and Labor Day, which is used to commemorate the death of Ruyati, an Indonesian migrant worker who was beheaded in Saudi Arabia<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Some readers have provided their impressions and comments at <http://puisi-esai.com>

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<sup>22</sup> For more complete information, peruse the website at <http://puisi-esia.com> or at <http://dennyjaworld.com/puisi-esai>

In their development, these five essay poems have been rendered in many forms. Besides their conversion to short films and video clips, they have also been expressed through theater, paintings, photographs, songs, and social movements<sup>23</sup>. In his preface to the book, Denny JA emphasizes that essay poetry is truly and deliberately written to be the throbbing pulse of the common people. Since its publication, the book *Atas Nama Cinta* has received attention both from the public and the media<sup>24</sup>. This book ex-

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<sup>23</sup> On 10 June 2012, more than 50 independent social agencies organized a committee (*Sepekan Tribute untuk Korban Kekerasan Agama di Indonesia*) and gathered at Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM) to commemorate the victims of religious/ethnic violence in Indonesia. These agencies, among many others, included YLBHI, ICRP, the Maarif Institute, the Wahid Institute, Kontras, PGI, and PP Ansor. Thousands of visitors participated by demonstrating their concern regarding the deteriorating state of religious tolerance in Indonesia. The main event, which was also attended by Haja Sinta Nuriyah, the widow of the late President, Abdurrahman Wahid, featured the presentation of a film which was adapted from Denny JA's essay poems in cooperation with the film director Hanung Bramantyo (*Indopos*, 11 June, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, "Puisi Esai Denny JA Ajak Berempati" (*Media Indonesia*, 12 June 2012); "Pemutaran Video Puisi Esai Denny JA Menjadi Puncak Acara Lomba Sastra SLTP dan SLTA se-Provinsi Banten" (*Media Indonesia*, 5 June 2012); "Puisi Esai Denny JA Menjelma Jadi Film Romantis Sarat Pesan" ([mediaindonesia.com](http://mediaindonesia.com), 11 June 2012); "Kisah Romi dan Yuli dari Cikeusik" ([kompas.com](http://kompas.com), Tuesday, 12 June, 2012).

presses two missions, namely to inform the public about discriminative practices that still affect common people and also introduce a new genre within the realm of Indonesian literature: essay poetry.

The publication of the book *Atas Nama Cinta* will eventually be accompanied by the appearance of other works of essay poetry authored by other writers, as previously mentioned. This development will demonstrate that essay poetry has become a new viable genre that has social relevance and influence within society. Despite this, the forms of essay poetry that are being generated by other writers are not substantially similar or developed in the same manner as the poems in *Atas Nama Cinta*; thus, these new works have already contributed to and created a new tradition within Indonesian literature. As the person who conceived of and pioneered essay poetry, Denny JA has already proven that poetry can truly evolve, both in its form and content, following many decades of hibernation. It was once conceivable that miraculously only the works of Chairil Anwar, Sapardi Djoko Damono, and Goenawan Mohamad could stand as models of literature. Perhaps in the future, many more people will write valuable and meaningful poetry like they have.

# One Short Article Concerning Five Long Poems

SUTARDJI CALZOOM BACHRI

It is certainly true that poems do not only consist of poetic elements; they also contain stories, attitudes, opinions, arguments, and essays. The poetry of Rendra, T. S. Eliot, and Pablo Neruda are particularly impressive in these qualities. This is also true, for instance, in these lines from the poet Chairil Anwar: “*Whenever my time arrives / I would prefer that no person praises me...*” These opinions and poetic expressions unite each other. The seed for an essay can emerge in the head and heart of the reader, thus

making the reader contemplate: What is life, and what will the meaning of life be a thousand years from now?

Poetic imagination interacts with facts. The inspiration for a poem doesn't appear from an empty sky, and so it falls directly on the surface of a blank piece of paper sitting in front of the poet.

Composing a poem is a response to facts in real life, the verses of life and its events which have already been recorded. Thus, poetry is not written

on an empty piece of paper. The composition of poetry involves writing on top of what has already been written. It reinforces and underscores the writing of life's events and meaning which have already happened or are still in progress. Poetry that solidifies the writing of real life is poetry that resists the tendency to forget. Common examples of social poetry and poetry of resistance can frequently be classified within this genre. On the other hand, writing poetry can also represent an effort to dismiss and disregard verses of life that already exist. This is poetry whose specific purpose is to forget. Poetry of this nature, for example, would mention a horse for the purpose of expunging or dismissing the horse from memory in life as well as its existence as a word in the dictionary.

Poetry, like the imagination, can be arbitrary in its attention to facts in a manner that is similar to the arbitrary relationship between words and their meaning. A poem can abuse facts for the purpose of achieving poetic value. Facts, as far as the general public is concerned, can mean the total absence of something (like a new moon at the close of the fasting month), but some observers can still see a slight sliver of the moon in the sky if they are sufficiently motivated

to look carefully. However, Sitor Situmorang wrote a poem entitled "*Malam Lebaran / Bulan di atas kuburan*" ("On the evening of Eid al Fitr, the moon is (seen) over the cemetery.").

There are poets and poems that utilize the complete veracity of facts in order to augment the integrity of their poems. There are also, conversely, poets who dismiss or misappropriate facts for the purpose of reinforcing the poetic value of their verse. These are certainly two extremes; however, in practice, these two trends are intermingled.

The five literary works in Denny JA's book, *Atas Nama Cinta* (In the Name of Love), were inspired by factual events which had already been documented. Thus, these are not the kind of poems that I mentioned previously, i.e. when a poet writes the word "horse" specifically to dismiss or disregard a horse, which factually exists both in reality and in the dictionary.

The author calls these works "essay poems". I myself, as a reader, initially viewed them as poetry. If later I found within them various matters that made each poem feel like an essay, then that was actually a beneficial aspect of these verses. It can be claimed that all these verses contain a

common theme of various examples of opposition (e.g. related to social discrimination) that people engage in as individuals. These forms of opposition entail, among others, confronting poverty, discrimination, and “forbidden” love.

The verses that are expressed in a narrative form with central figures in the first person singular (“I”) and the second person singular (“he” or “she”) and numerous stanzas are dense in terms of “restraint” while exploiting various poetic devices that are created from a blend of poetic lines, rhythmic flow, and the sound of the words.

Fang Yin’s Handkerchief is the story of Fang Yin’s inner struggle and resistance directly within herself. Unlike other poems, which recount resistance toward other people based on external social constraints, Fang Yin is consumed with her own suffering as a victim of violence and rape (in the May 1998 riots); she feels hatred toward Indonesia but is finally able to adopt a positive perspective and even begins to love the country. Yes, this is the story of an extended journey to falling in love with Indonesia after first experiencing terrible pain, hatred, and an eventual yearning to return. In Jakarta, Fang Yin is raped, abandoned by her boyfriend, and evacuated to find refuge in the

United States, but thirteen years later she longs to return to Indonesia.

The story climax takes place when Fang Yin sets fire to her handkerchief, a symbol of love, which had been given to her many years before by her boyfriend. This keepsake, a remembrance from a faded antiquated love, is burned when feelings of love for Indonesia resurface, replacing the hatred she had harbored for many years.

The story is told in stanza after stanza whose total number is remarkable; the plot unwinds rather slowly. It is not hurried; thus, the poem turns out to be quite long. This is the general impression I received from reading these five essay poems. Almost every line in each poem apparently tends to be coordinated with a corresponding number of syllables and similar rhyme structure to the extent that a poetic sensation is achieved.

Stanzas that features rhythm substantially assist to achieve appeal in reading the poem, although it lacks outbursts of metaphor, simile, or other literary devices that are frequently found in Rendra’s poetry. And maybe this is not necessary since the *mood* in Denny’s verses is oriented toward calm contemplation and pondering of thoughts, which we tend to encounter when reading essays.

Occasionally, metaphor, which is normally full of meaning, is not expressed so that additional reservoirs of meaning and clarification are attained; this idea is exemplified in the description of the atmosphere surrounding Fang Yin's "burning handkerchief":

"And without any drawn out deliberation,  
she set fire to the handkerchief  
The flames became stronger  
until the handkerchief  
was consumed by fire

She stared at the handkerchief,  
which was now reduced to ashes  
Her past was now immolated  
Her long suffering  
had also been consumed by fire  
Her love for Kho had also been consumed  
in the flames  
Her jealousy toward Rina  
was also totally immolated  
And her anger at Indonesia?  
It too had been burnt  
through this rite of self-purification".

What I want to address here is that the writer counts on great clarity, such as article or essay writers tend to do and thus avoids conveying any dubious or unwarranted inferences.

After hating Indonesia and living in America for 13 years, now,

"Indonesia entered her heart again  
Like coconut palm leaves waving  
and beckoning to her  
...

She currently wants to go home, having already taken hold of a new comprehension of Indonesia: "

Now she desired to go home,  
her yearning was ablaze  
She wanted Indonesia to be like herself:  
victorious by defying her past  
Calamity and tragedy  
had undeniably appeared  
What was most important though  
was to always have a dream

*This is a new Indonesia,  
they claim, according to them..."*

This is a segment of the culminating lines of this essay poem. In this composition, poetry, a sense of an essay, and dreams are inter-mingled.

Similar to the love story of Romeo and Juliet, which features tragic conflict based on family background that obstructs their relationship, in Denny JA's essay poem, "*Romi dan Yuli dari Cikeusik*" (Romeo and Juliet from Cikeusik), there is a conflict between hard-line Muslims and followers of the Ahmadiyah sect. The story is told, as it is in other essay poems, with a proficiency for dense narrative, with rhythm and rhyme within well-structured lines, in an appealing manner that engrosses the reader in the story. Due to this skillful storytelling, the love story and the religious conflict may just serve as a backdrop;

thus, it appears that the reader needn't receive a sophisticated understanding of the exact points of argument between the two adversaries in the religious dispute. It is sufficient for the reader to be told in the following lines:

"Romi had explained,/ Ahmadiyah was blah, blah, blah.../ Ra, ra, ra.../ Ra, ri, ru.../ They were accused of heresy due to blah, blah, blah..."

In another stanza:

"Yuli's father screamed, saying,/ Ahmadiyah had already strayed from the true version of Islam. Its teachings had been declared heretical/ In religion, there are certain principles/ Blah, blah, blah.../ Ra, ra, ra..."

And in the next stanza:

Yuli tried to respond,/ Ahmadiyah was also Islam/ Because Ta, ta, ta.../ La, la, la..."

I recall that Rendra had also written something similar to this. This is truly a form of expression that is specifically characteristic of poetry. This style actually bolsters the potency of the poetic message; ironically, though, it would render the message obscure and confusing were this form

to appear within the context of an essay.

The poem concludes with the victory of love. Yuli's parents are defeated. However, Yuli dies prematurely just before her parents relent and permit her to marry her ideal partner. It appears that the author cannot bear or appreciate a more sensible outcome. It seems that with Yuli's death, the poem adopts a stance that favors a "win-win" solution.

However, what does it mean for a poem to win? A poem can win immediately, right now, when it is being read by someone. It does not require any future effort in order to win. Anytime someone is charmed by reading or listening to a poem, it wins. Proponents of social justice use poems because they do not need to wait long in order to win the contest. The captivating influence of a poem causes a certain belief that is still debated to be felt resolutely, although its eventual real (factual) victory may still lie decades in the future. Of course, a poem possesses its own struggle, i.e. a fight for aesthetic acceptance, which is often experienced by poets who write in an innovative style. However, this point is not relevant in the current context.

Factual victory and poetic victory are two distinct issues. When the



factual wants to enter the poetic domain, it must bow to the rules of poetry, which frequently cannot be arranged in a lucid manner. Thus, all the data pertaining to facts which are introduced into the jurisdiction of poetry may not necessarily be effective in creating a poetic machine that functions optimally. A common method for placing data and information is accomplished through the use of footnotes, such as those that often appear in Denny's poems; applying this strategy enables poetry to function freely and optimally (i.e. without being burdened by information in the body of the poem).

The essay poem, "*Minah Tetap Dipancung*" (Minah was Still Beheaded), recounts the story of Minah's struggle to change her fate, overcoming poverty and fighting for the sake of defending her integrity and self-respect. This is similar to other poems in that it is written in very clear verse within stanzas. Although Minah appears to be a naïve village woman, she has a talent for protesting: "You're a corruptor, aren't you?/ *You've filched from us, haven't you?*" she accuses an employee at a recruitment agency. When she is repeatedly raped by her Saudi employer, her struggle culminates in killing her boss (in self-defense).

Most figures who appear as victims in these poems are described as having a broad awareness and as being more tolerant and understanding of their opponents. For instance, Fang Yin is finally able to understand Indonesia, which she had previously loathed. Dewi demonstrates tolerance when she marries a man whom her parents have selected. Amir also marries a young woman whom his mother has chosen. An exception is Yuli, who stubbornly resists her parents' point of view. On the other hand, Minah, a village woman, lacks sufficient background knowledge to try to comprehend the cultural differences that confront her.

The opposing side in these confrontations is depicted as harsh, stiff, fanatic, and intolerant characters. Is this unfair? If so, where have you seen a neutral stance in a poem, especially when it involves human figures who serve an adversarial function in the poem?

Providing factual data as proof so that the poem is fair represents an effort to control the imagination and thus remain as fair and appropriately nuanced as an essay writer would strive to do. These five essay poems succeed because they were originally intended to be essays. In the hands of

a different writer with other intentions, the same basic facts could easily make a different impression on the reader. Imagination is the king: "It can do no wrong." Major facts that exist in the real world can be scaled down or even purged in applying one's imagination; conversely, trivial facts can become prominent in one's imagination. A broad beam of light from the sun of facts can be obstructed by a diminutive line of poetry.

This is true for other poems in this anthology, such as "*Cinta Terlarang Batman dan Robin*" (The Forbidden Love of Batman and Robin) and "*Bunga Kering Perpisahan*" (The Desiccated Flower of Parting); these essay poems are inscribed with clear, smooth language and moderate application of rhyme and rhythm. Among these essay poems, *The Forbidden Love of Batman and Robin* demonstrates the strongest resemblance to an essay format. In *The Desiccated Flower of Parting*, the author repeatedly uses death as a tool to terminate a dilemma or quell some troubled feelings. In my opinion, *Minah was Still Beheaded* stands out as being minimal in its essay aspects.

All of these poems can be described as "cross-border poetry". It can be read as prose in its positive connota-

tion. It is clear and certain that the stanzas, rhythm, rhyme, metaphor, and other expressive aspects serve to classify these five poems as true works of poetry. However, since these poetic devices are not employed excessively, carelessly, or in a non-speculative manner (as seen in some of Rendra's poems), we can conclude that these literary devices not only do not disturb (especially if they are read as prose) but actually enhance the reading of each poem by providing a special nuance that enriches the atmosphere of the underlying story.

In my opinion, essay poetry is intelligent poetry. The inclusion of data, facts, and arguments, instills insight that helps the reader understand and appreciate the personal dilemmas that are connected to social problems and conflicts.

If smart poetry exists, then, of course, so does dumb poetry. Unintelligent poetry elaborates primitive (or even animalistic) expressions in order to obtain human qualities that lack intensity. If intelligent poetry with its "one thousand pieces of data" illuminates our comprehension of specific instances of social conflict, then by comparison dumb poetry with its vulgar, animalistic phrases seeks only to invite the reader to regress one thousand years in human civilization.

In my estimation, smart poetry is a blessing that can stimulate intelligent and creative thinking through its dedication to enriching Indonesia's treasury of poetry.

# Essay Poems: What are They, and What is Their Value and Purpose?

DENNY JA

In 2006, *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, published an article by John Barr, the president of the Poetry Foundation. Barr's article was entitled, "American Poetry in the New Century". This article represented a sharp criticism of developments in poetry in the United States at that time. However, his criticism is also relevant for addressing the world of poetry in Indonesia in these times.

According to John Barr, poetry is becoming more difficult for the public to comprehend. The writing of poetry has also experienced stagnation; there

haven't been any meaningful changes in decades.

The general public feels even more distanced from the world of poetry. Poets are too self-indulgent with their own imagination, or they relate only to ideas and feedback from other poets. They have become more separated from and less responsive to the concerns that are felt by the wider audience. In his own words, Barr writes, "Poetry is nearly absent from public life, and poets too often write with only other poets in mind, failing to write for a greater public."

John Barr longs for the type of poetry and literature that was written during Shakespeare's time. In that era, poetry was an attractive form of literature that was widely discussed, appreciated by the public, and synergized with the development of a growing literate society. During the Shakespearean era, poetry also reflected the aura and salient issues of that time.

I myself conducted some research on poetry related to its development in Indonesia in 2011. I established the *Lingkaran Survei Indonesia (LSI)*, which has conducted hundreds of research projects. The research that I performed at LSI actually managed to predict events that had not yet taken place, such as the victories of candidates in the legislative and presidential campaigns of 2009 in short order. In the current context, I tried to conduct research with a sample and purpose that is more focused on the world of poetry.

As a sample, I randomly selected five poems that were printed in the most prominent Indonesian news paper during the year of January through December, 2011. I do not claim that these poems were representative of all of Indonesia. However, this sample represented poems which were chosen by the largest newspaper (specifically in terms of circulation). Next,

I presented these five poems from 2011 to three groups of readers: those with high educational attainment (BA, MA, PhD), intermediate educational background (junior and high school graduates), and low educational background (elementary school graduates). Each group consisted of five subjects. For the sake of comparison, they were also provided with two well-known poems: Chairil Anwar's "Aku" (1943) and WS Rendra's "Khotbah" (1971).

It was quite shocking that not even a single subject from the group that had completed college programs was able to comprehend the meaning of the sample of five poems from 2011. Subjects in the intermediate and lower education groups experienced even greater difficulty in trying to understand these five poems. They considered the language in these poems too difficult to comprehend. Thus, since the vocabulary in these poems was incomprehensible, it became even more challenging for the subjects in these two groups to ascertain the ideas that these poems were trying to convey.

On the other hand, the study subjects were generally able to understand and deduce the messages in Chairil Anwar and Rendra's poems. The outcomes from the respondents regarding these two poems were

varied. However, the subjects were confident in conveying what each assumed to be the message of each poem. On the other hand, the respondents felt quite distanced in trying to understand the five poems in the sample from 2011. Approximately 90% of the study respondents could not actually venture any comment about the purported messages of these poems.

When the respondents were asked to analyze why they experienced difficulty in understanding these five poems, they gave a variety of comments. The more tolerant ones commented that poetry is like a painting. There are realistic paintings whose subject is easy to understand; there are also abstract art paintings that make it necessary “to crane our necks” to understand its contents. This tolerant view implies that difficulty in understanding these poems results from the poet’s choice of a certain expressive medium. However, more cynical respondents stated (in edited language) that “modern poets are preoccupied with imagination and their own loneliness. These poets write in language that is difficult to comprehend, and later it is labeled “an aesthetic achievement of language”. It seems that the more difficult it is to understand, the higher the value and quality of the poem. Modern poets

share a community in which they compliment each other on the use of complicated phrases. “It appears that this whole group has become more alienated from the general public.”

However, whether these respondents are tolerant or cynical, both groups idealized poetry as a form of literature that can be enjoyed by the wider society and thus use language that is simple enough for the average person to understand.

The previous quotations come from two sources that deserve attention. The first source is an expert in literature; John Barr heads an institution that publishes a prestigious poetry magazine, which has been in existence for more than a century. The second source is the local public at large, whose opinions were obtained through a research sample. These two sources have reached the same conclusion, and they have similar expectations. They miss poetry that cared more for the general public, away from the world inhabited specifically by poets. They also long for poetic language that is more intelligible to the public at large.

This is truly an era of free expression. Religiosity is not deterred and is thus present in every region. Starting with religion, ideology, and ranging all the way to art, this is always a

multicolored spectrum. There are rights for every person, and thus for each poet, to choose his own form of expression independently. Every poet, regardless of the linguistic form or literary style he chooses, is entitled to be present in this postmodern era. However, the two quotations from the previously mentioned sources, which yearn for poetry that demonstrates a closer relationship with the concerns of the general public, also appeal for a proper response.

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In March, 2012, I published a book of poems, *Atas Nama Cinta* (In the Name of Love). In addition to the printed edition, the book also appeared in a mobile web version so that it was easily accessible on cellphones and Twitter. Some claimed that this book was considered as a turning point that introduced literature to the era of social media.

In a matter of only one month, access to the web version of *Atas Nama Cinta* exceeded one million “hits”. This had never occurred before in the history of poetry books, books of literature, or even with any other book for the general market. People did not just go online to read the book; they also gave comments, which can easily be seen at the website, <http://www.puisi-esai.com>.

I was also amazed. It turned out that the general public actually read and responded to poetry in a swift and massive manner. I assumed that they would give responses that would be similar to comments made for other poems. They responded by saying that it was important that they were treated to poetry that was written in simple language. It was important that they were presented with important themes that resonated with their own sense of agitation in social contexts. It was also significant that these readers were provided easy access to these poems through new “hot” network technology, i.e. via social media, such as Twitter, smartphones, and the internet.

As I wrote in the preface to my book, *Atas Nama Cinta*, I had never really pretended to be a poet. At that time, I was searching for a different medium so that my social anxiety and commitment for change could be conveyed to the public within a suitable forum. During that journey and quest, I, as a capable writer, reached “the peak of several mountains”. However, “the peak of several mountains” remained unsatisfactory in my bid to express my “inner child” on several important social issues.

I had previously expressed my views on various social issues within the form of research articles. My re-

search findings had already been publicized through the auspices of LSI; their value was already extraordinary. For example, in the two years of 2011-2012, ten of my research findings became front page headlines; in one national newspaper, research findings from LSI appeared as headline news in ten consecutive editions. These findings became “page one” headline news in the most prominent Indonesian newspapers, such as *Kompas*, *Media Indonesia*, *Republika*, *Koran Tempo*, *Seputar Indonesia*, *Jakarta Post*, and *Rakyat Merdeka*. Never before in Indonesian history since the republic’s establishment had research findings captured the attention of the national press in such a dramatic manner, placing these findings as front page headline news day after day.

I had already expressed my opinion on various issues in newspaper columns. This accomplishment was also exceedingly important. More than one-thousand of my articles were given space in newspaper columns in every national newspaper during the period of 1986-2004. I had also expressed my opinions on social issues on talk show programs. This accomplishment had also reached its maximal impact. For three years, I was the host of a talk show on Metro TV

and Delta Radio. All of the opinions I aired were collected and compiled. The contents of all these social opinions filled no fewer than twenty books. It had never happened before that anything close to twenty books, especially comprising opinions on social issues, had been published in the national media.

Despite these achievements, various forms of expressing my opinions on social issues no longer felt satisfying to accommodate my “inner child” this time. I often joked with my closest friends that I was experiencing a late middle-age pregnancy because I still hadn’t managed to find the right medium to “give birth to” my inner child. Since 2004, I have taken an extended break from the world of continuous writing for the media. During an eight-year span (through 2012), it is possible that I only wrote once or twice for the media. I was looking for a new medium. In fact, I was yearning for a new medium.

The writing medium that I revered was one that could touch the heart. Beyond this, however, this medium could also render the readers more knowledgeable and sympathetic regarding a social issue, even if only to a limited extent. The following are some criteria that I have arranged for essay poems:



1. It must touch the heart by exploring the inner, personal experience as well as express the inner psychological aspects of man in a concrete manner;
2. It must portray mankind concretely in a social context or in a concrete, authentic historical event. It should not evade the existence of relevant research that comprehends the social reality attached to an event. It should also not avoid using footnotes, since their use is a central aspect of this medium;
3. It must be written in language that is simple enough to be read by the general public, yet still be elegantly arranged; and
4. It must depict a certain social dynamic or describe a dynamic that involves the character of a perpetrator. The composition of an essay poem should not elude or preclude the possibility that it becomes lengthy and divided into many short chapters.

These four requirements cannot be fulfilled by any medium that currently exists. It is clear that a regular essay, research study, or newspaper column does not explore the inner side of man. On the other hand, a poem does not feature footnotes related to research findings, which are appro-

priate for research projects. I have independently developed a new medium, which was subsequently named an essay poem. It is a poem that possesses the characteristic feeling of an essay. Thus, my inner child was born in the format of an essay poem.

Is this a new genre in Indonesian poetry? This is no longer my concern. Beneath the skies in this current era, there is nothing that is totally new. However, the brew that is blended from the four criteria that I have “cooked” is something different and innovative. After all, footnotes placed within an essay poem are just as appropriate as using footnotes in a scientific research article.

What I did not anticipate was the public reception of the essay poems in *Atas Nama Cinta*. At the official website, <http://www.puisi-esai.com>, the number of “hits” exceeded one million in under one month’s time. In the world of social media, e.g. on Twitter, the book was debated. Some highly-rated artists were interested in cooperating to promote essay poetry. Sapardi Djoko Damono, Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, and Ignas Kleden were willing to provide the closing remarks. Putu Wijaya, Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, Niniek L. Karim, Sudjiwo Tedjo, and Fatin Hamama produced a video clip of readings from the essay poems. Hanung Brahmantyo, a

film director who received this prestigious honor, also made a film clip and plans to produce a film for the big screen. If everything goes according to plan, this would be the first poem to be made into a movie for the big screen.

I found a format for writing that was able to represent and express my distress at that time. Observing the ultra-high number of “hits” at the essay poem website, I feel that this composition format has also been received enthusiastically by the public. Many of my colleagues will also write their own opinions and poems in a similar writing format.

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In May, 2012, I met fellow poets and artists from same generation. For more than twenty years, they have been living in the world of poetry writers. They have established and built up the reputation of a poetry magazine, called *Jurnal Sajak*. The talent behind this poetry journal consists of four poets, Agus R. Sarjono, Acep Zamzam Noor, Ahmad Subhanuddin Alwy, Jamal D. Rahman, as well as Tugas Supriyanto, a graphic designer. Their dedication to poetry has been tested over many years.

I am expressing my appreciation to these poets for publishing *Jurnal Sajak*, which they established. I am

also making a close comparison between *Journal Sajak* and *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, which was founded by Harriet Monroe in 1912. The *Poetry Magazine*, which has maintained a long span of life beyond its first 100 years, is considered a significant literary publication for many reasons. One reason is that *Poetry* continues to absorb and energize various “movements” in the world of poetry which exist and have existed in various eras. Following developments in the dynamics of the evolution of poetry in the United States can be accomplished by reading *Poetry* magazine from time to time, because this magazine “bounces” and reflects real trends in the evolution of poetry.

I have argued that it is appropriate in Indonesia for *Jurnal Sajak* to choose a path similar to that of *Poetry Magazine* in the United States. One similar approach *Jurnal Sajak* could adopt would be to support and participate in making the local poetry “movement” more dynamic. It would be ideal if *Jurnal Sajak* in its Indonesian version would not only provide space for the best works of budding as well as veteran poets but also become more active in energizing the passion and rejuvenation of the poetry world in Indonesia.

I imagine that essay poetry could be a starting point to “be touched” by

the *Jurnal Sajak*. Essay poetry also has the potential to be packaged as a new poetic “movement.” In our previous experiences at the Ciputat School, my colleagues and I moved in similar directions. Zuhairi, Gaus, Novri, Anick, Jon, Elza, Ihsan, Neng Dara, Buddha, and other colleagues at the Ciputat School had earlier paved the way to making essay poetry a “movement” that offers a new strategy both for expressing social opinion and for adopting an innovative style of poetry.

What comes around goes around. A meeting with Agus R. Sarjono and his colleagues has made essay poetry wander to its next phase, which is to become a “movement”. An agreement was made; *Jurnal Sajak* will be active in energizing this movement by organizing a contest for essay poetry writers in which both established poets and the general public can participate.

A new need has emerged. In my position as the writer who originally conceived of essay poetry, I need to consider in greater detail what constitutes and does not constitute an essay poem. A manifesto and a sturdier platform are required. The platform for essay poems will be applied as the criteria for the panel of judges to determine the value and validity of the essay poems that are submitted in the contest.

For me personally and for my colleagues, this contest is merely a simulation that will serve to return poetry to the public at large. The contest is only a simulation that invites the public to illustrate social reality in a new poetic format. This contest is only a simulation that invites the public to express opinions through poetry. It is very fortunate that *Jurnal Sajak* is willing to perform an important role by providing a permanent space and rubric for essay poems in its publications.

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So what constitutes an essay poem and what does not? This is the platform for essay poetry. First, an essay poem must explore the inner personal side of a person who is grappling with a social conflict. Thus, if Budi falls in love with Ani, this by itself is insufficient to become the basis for an essay poem. This topic could only become a true essay poem if the social context for this situation were to change; for instance, Budi falls in love with Ani, but their religions differ, or they come from different castes or social class to the extent that these differences instigate a dilemma or conflict within that community.

A father and child who argue back and forth is insufficient to be the ingredients of an essay poem. In order

for this situation to be deemed the basis for an essay poem, it must be contextualized within a social setting. For example, the father defends Soeharto's New Order (*Orde Baru*), while the son defends Reformation (*Reformasi*, i.e. the post-Soeharto reformation era, 1998-2002). Although they love each other, they confront each other angrily because they advocate diametrically opposed political positions.

Secondly, essay poetry must employ language and phrasing that is easy to understand. Literary devices, such as metaphor and analogy, are indeed valuable for inclusion in the poem; however, an effort should be made so that any high school student will be able to quickly grasp the message that the poem aims to convey. The poetry of Chairil Anwar or Rendra can be used as a reference for language usage. Poetry also serves as an effective medium of communication.

The main principle that governs essay poetry is that the more difficult and challenging a poem is to be understood by the general public, the less valuable the poem becomes as a means of communication between the poet and the external world of potential readers.

If a story is written in difficult language, although it may be written that

way in the name of aesthetic linguistic attainment, this subverts the purpose and spirit of the essay poem. From its inception, essay poetry has endeavored to revert poetry so that it is easily understood (again) by the public at large. Aesthetic achievement does not need to be accomplished specifically by using difficult phrasing. Indeed, if the language is too difficult to comprehend, it cannot represent the crowning achievement of aesthetic beauty; instead, it just demonstrates the incompetence of the poet to communicate effectively.

I myself am able to appreciate a painting that is rendered in a non-realistic, abstract style, which is characteristic of the surrealist art movement. For example, I truly enjoy Salvador Dali's surrealist painting, *The Persistence of Memory*. When I was attending college in the United States, I had the opportunity to buy a copy of it, and I often stared at it when I was tired of working on my research essays. However, when it relates to linguistic expression, I subscribe to the notion that "if it is easier to understand, it is better."

Thirdly, essay poetry is a form of fiction. It is permissible for an essay poem to portray a real historical figure who actually lived; however, that reality should be enhanced through

dramatization that involves various fictitious figures. The significance of an essay poem lies in its ability to convey moral content and contemplation based on drama that does not require an accurate portrayal of historical events. Essay poetry is neither meant to be a biography nor a slice of objective history.

It is true that during the riots of May, 1998 there were cases of rape against young women of Chinese descent. It is also true that in the aftermath of these riots, many ethnic Chinese families left Indonesia and sought refuge in various countries. However, the figure named Fang Yin who appears in my essay poem, *Sapu Tangan Fang Yin* (Fang Yin's Handkerchief), is fictitious. She is a made-up figure. It is precisely because she is fictitious that the author felt especially free to create a more touching dramatization, which also makes the reader more contemplative.

It is also true that there were incidents of violence in Cikeusik in 2011. It is true that there were confrontations between hard-line Muslim groups and followers of Ahmadiyah. However, the figures Romi and Yuli in my essay poem, entitled *Romi and Yuli of Cikeusik*, are both fictional. They are inserted into the story in order to dramatize issues of discrimination and thus enhance our edification.

Fourthly, essay poems are not just born from the imagination of the poet but are also the product of at least some minimal research concerning social reality. These poems respond to social issues that resonate within a certain community, whatever they may be. The social issues that are documented may relate to issues of social bias, religious resurgence, poverty, riots, and a thousand other issues. Although essay poems are fictional, they are contextualized within an authentic social setting.

When the gay community claimed that a person could be homosexual from early childhood (related to the essay poem *Cinta Terlarang Batman dan Robin /The Forbidden Love of Batman and Robin*), this argument was sustained and upheld by publications who cited authentic findings in the real world. In the same poem, when Bambang gets married to another gay in an American church, this is reinforced by a reference that documents that there is a particular church that arranges weddings for gay couples.

Footnotes represent a central feature of essay poems. The footnotes indicate that the fiction in the underlying story emerges from concrete social facts. If the reader wishes to seek more details concerning this social fact, he or she can investigate and

receive more detailed information through the footnote. The function of the footnote is not simply to be an accessory or stylistic feature but instead it serves a central purpose in an essay poem. From the outset, essay poems actually combine fact and fiction. Factual elements in an essay poem are mediated by these footnotes.

Fifth, essay poems are long and arranged in chapters. At a basic level, an essay poem is a drama or a short story that is converted to a poem. Within an essay poem, it is appropriate for the dynamics to be portrayed concerning the attributes of the main character or a change in a certain social reality. In the essay poem, *Fang Yin's Handkerchief*, a change is described in Fang Yin, who gradually becomes able to break free from her traumatic past. She approaches the idea of returning to Indonesia with great anger; however, as described in a natural style in the poem, she manages to stifle her hatred and begins to yearn for Indonesia.

In the essay poem, *The Forbidden Love of Batman and Robin*, a change is depicted in the character of Amir. In the early stages, he is afraid of openly admitting his homosexuality. However, in the final stage, he is brave enough to remove his mask.

A change in character in itself requires the story to be divided and ar-

ranged in chapters. When it is quantified, an essay poem is manifested in at least 10,000 characters. The five essay poems that constitute the anthology *Atas Nama Cinta* (In the Name of Love) each consist of approximately 20,000 characters.

It is clear, however, that these five criteria are not binding (like a religious reprimand for committing a sinful transgression). These five criteria represent the requirements that are easiest to discern if one wants to compose an essay poem. When a new "movement" and genre needs to be packaged, it is impossible to evade the issue of determining the line that separates "what it is" and "what it's not." These five criteria clearly describe what an essay poem is.

Essay poetry is only one variation among many forms of poetry that already exist and which will exist in the future. It does not pretend or claim to be superior or inferior to other forms of poetry. It also does not purport to either dominate or homogenize poetry. It is just one rose from the exuberant garden of Eden, which is filled with many other types of flowers. It is just one deer of a certain species that dwells among many other kinds of wildlife. It is only one color, orange, among a rainbow, which is enriched by a variety of other colors.

## Can We Write Poetry that Refreshes the Public Sphere?

Why does our public sphere need more poetry? Why is it essential that our social life not be dominated solely by political authority and figures in financial charts but also influenced by the passion, dreams, and beauty of poetry?

What is and what is not poetry? What should the criteria be for being or not being a poet? And who is entitled to bestow that label? If there are experts who purport to possess the authority to confer that label, who grants this authority to them?

Must poetry be subject to certain standards and conventions? In a world of unlimited imagination and beauty, aren't various tenets and conventions a prison for creative people? Isn't classification or taxonomy exclusively appealing to academic scholars and critics who specialize in a professional field? On the other hand, these precepts lack relevance for communicative artists who seek freedom of expression.

Such questions commonly appear for anyone who wishes to pursue and write poetry. This is especially true if one is an analyst. An analyst is already accustomed to trying to understand the "macro" context and "sunnatullah," the iron law that exists in nature even

before one enters that world. This is analogous to someone who wants to travel; one must first study a map of the overall terrain: the wilderness, mountain ranges, and coastline, as well as deep canyons, before setting out to that distant land.

The contents of poetry, its subgenre, and context, are undoubtedly personal aspects of a writer's private journey of life. However, specifically for my own journey in writing poetry, the context of the panorama can be best described through three quotations.

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The first quotation is a statement by John F. Kennedy. In October, 1963 Kennedy declared that,

"when power leads men towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses."

Kennedy reminds us of the important role poetry plays not only in our private lives but also within the public sphere. It would be terribly unfortunate if the public sphere of a country were only occupied by news related to power struggles and commercial charts.

The public sphere should be an arena that benefits mankind. Fantasy, passion, dreams, anxiety, fear, and many other emotions contributed by the world of poetry should not be allowed to disappear from the public sphere. When human civilization first arose, poetry played an especially central role, which was embodied in epic tales and philosophies of life.

Unfortunately, however, during the past century, poetry has been cast aside from the public sphere. This is the perspective of Dana Gioia and John Barr, two intellectuals who have been highly involved in world-class poetry.

Gioia contends that poetry no longer functions as a key agent of cultural change. Poems are only disseminated at art events and specifically within the ranks of poets and their devotees, whose numbers are dwindling. Even the National Book Award (in the United States) ceased to recognize the contributions of any authors in the category for the Best Poetry Book from 1985 through 1990.

John Barr elaborates on the shortcomings of modern poetry. Poetry is disregarded by the public, but this development began with modern poets neglecting the interests and needs of the public. This situation is exacerbated by the recent development of poetry that is obsessed with

word play, which is only understood and appreciated by a small group of enthusiasts. The result is that the general public has been disillusioned and alienated by modern poetry. A further consequence is that the public has also estranged and distanced itself from poetry.

Of course, in a world that celebrates diversity, we appreciate and expect a variety of genres, choices, and forms of expression from poetry. This is not just a matter of civil rights; a pluralistic approach would also enhance and enrich the variegated “flower garden” of poetry.

However, I have chosen to undertake serious efforts to return poetry to the public sphere. My decision is to make poetry a medium that romances the public sphere so that the social world is not exclusively dominated by power brokers and economic charts and figures.

In other words, I choose to compose poetry that reflects and expresses the problems of our time. Dilemmas, strategic issues, dreams, anxiety, and fears of the public require the medium of 100 poetry to excite the thoughts and touch the hearts of the public at large.

A synergistic relationship can be facilitated between the issues that preoccupy the public and poetry that ad-



dresses these same concerns. The issues that dwell in the hearts and mind of the public can become poetry. Thus, poetry is embedded within the heart of the public arena, and its influence can even extend to and affect the community of decision makers who are entrusted to set public policy.

But is it possible that this social responsibility may place too great a burden on the shoulders of poets?

When an Indonesian Army general recited segments from one of my poems at a major political forum at the Golongan Karya Political Party's National Leadership Meeting in May, 2017 I was certainly gratified. Issues of injustice and marginalization affecting large segments of the population, as expressed within the poem, "Bukan Kami Punya" (*But It Does Not Belong to Us*), were considered an appropriate means by an army general to embellish his oratory presentation regarding current social disparities.

The news story of the reading of a poem by the most senior military general immediately went viral and was featured repeatedly as major news on television news and talk shows. Poetry had once again entered the public sphere, the midst of the public arena, and had glamorized the discussion for the public at large.

The more poetry is quoted in the main arenas of life, on the political stage, in business, scientific inquiry, mosques, and churches, the better. This is the first proposition.

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The second issue related to poetry which I often contemplate is embodied in a quotation from Robert Frost. He was a legendary poet, who was nominated 31 times for a Nobel Prize in Literature, and the recipient of four Pulitzer Prizes as well as the Congressional Gold Medal from the U. S. government for his literary contributions.

What is poetry according to Robert Frost? In his opinion,

"poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words."

That is poetry—nothing less, nothing more. In Frost's definition, the scope of poetry is especially vast. Poetry writers, or poets, can be anyone who expresses enthusiasm or passion in thoughts and then articulates these thoughts through words.

When Bob Dylan wrote a song, he didn't consider that he was a poet or a significant literary figure. He was just being productive as a writer in expressing his concerns and anxieties. Dylan

said that he was only imagining how neat it would be if his song could be sung in a café or even more so in Carnegie Hall.

It turned out that Bob Dylan's song lyrics were appreciated as poetry. Thus, he was honored with the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature.

“Not once have I ever had the time to ask myself, ‘Are my songs *literature*?’... or that I would ever receive the highest honor for writing literature,”

Dylan wrote in his acceptance letter. “If someone had ever told me that I had the slightest chance of winning the Nobel Prize, I would have to think that I'd have about the same odds as standing on the moon,” Dylan added.

Winston Churchill, the former Prime Minister of England, had a similar experience. He had only made speeches regarding human values, which he articulated as beautifully as possible. His collection of speeches were later compiled in book form.

He also authored biographies and wrote of his experiences as a witness to history during the two World Wars in a series of non-fiction books.

When Churchill gave speeches or wrote non-fiction books, he did not consider himself a literary author.

However, his collected works were appreciated for possessing literary value. Thus, he was even awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1953.

What represents and does not represent poetry? By what criteria can we judge if someone is or is not a poet? Considering Robert Frost's quotation and the stories of Winston Churchill and Bob Dylan, this classification appears rather loose.

I myself prefer this loose definition. By tradition, poets have always been defined as “career poets,” those who are professional writers and dedicate a prodigious part of their life's work focused on writing poetry. In my opinion, anyone who has stirring emotions, which can be conceived as thoughts, and then manifests these feelings in words is a poet. What distinguishes poets later is the depth of their ideas as well as their productivity.

This is the reason that within the essay poetry movement, I have deliberately invited as many people as possible to participate, specifically writers who had never been classified as poets or authors of poetry. They are: social activists, teachers, journalists, and others who have been summoned to write poetry and then publish their poems in books.

In the past, Chairil Anwar declared: "Those who are not poets should not take part." The philosophy that guides the essay poetry movement is the exact opposite: "Those who are not poets (i.e. career poets) are welcome to participate." In order to keep poetry alive and vibrant, we should not alienate talented writers who are not career poets.

From the efforts of the essay poetry movement, approximately 50 books have been published; this includes books that constitute anthologies of poems by several writers, as well as books written by one author. From the perspective of time and quantity, more than 50 poetry books were published in less than six years; this is quite an accomplishment for this young movement. Concerning the quality of the poems in these books, let the general public assess their value.

The more poetry is written by those who are not career poets but are instead citizens from different walks of life, the more that "those who are not career poets" take part, the better off we all are. This is the second proposition.

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The third notion that affects me is a quotation from Jalauddin Rumi:

"Sing just like birds that chirp. Do not worry about who hears or what they think."

In other words, express your ideas according to your own heart and awareness.

I have read about the emergence of many currents within the world of art, especially in painting. In its early stages, the art of painting merely attempted to transfer realistic images to the canvas. However, since the dawn of the modern era, more than one-hundred artistic styles or movements have emerged among painters.

For example, many artistic movements in painting have appeared, beginning with realism, surrealism, impressionism, and cubism. A parallel blossoming of art forms has occurred in the music world. When allowed to depart from classic music, pop, rock, blues, country, waltz, and other varieties of music emerged.

What can be learned from the emergence of this multiplicity of genres, styles, traditions, and "-isms" in the art world? The appreciation of artistic beauty is a permanent need that is embedded within the human brain. However, the expression of beauty is a dynamic process that changes according to the tastes and predilections of culture in each era.

Genres, movements, norms, and rules are certainly important. However, many of these diverse conventions are neither etched in stone nor ordained by God. It has been proven in the chronicles of art that many fashionable art forms lost their popularity and fell by the wayside. Conversely, new genres of art which were initially disparaged became even more popular than their antecedents.

The partition of the literary world into “poetry versus prose” is only valid as a point of departure. However, in the post-modern period, this conceptual division is dissolving with the development of hybrid forms, such as prosaic poetry and poetic prose.

Even the divisions between fact and fiction are becoming slack. There are, of course, articles that are replete with factual information, such as articles based on scientific research, as well as writing that is obviously fictional, like fairy tales. However, in the postmodern world, this previously firm division is becoming less rigid.

A new literary genre called *historical fiction* entails stories that are based on historical settings and events which truly happened. However, the drama that is expressed is at least partly fictional. Thus, the boundaries between fact and fiction are becoming less rigid.

In the incipient stages of my own literary efforts, these developments in literature formed the basis for creating the essay poetry movement. An *essay poem* can be viewed as an essay that has been poeticized or a poem that has the aroma of an essay. A clear plot is evident which is normally appropriate for short stories and prose but is presented in a poetic style and structure. An essay poem contains fictional elements, but there are also footnotes which cite actual historical facts.

The blueprint for this form of poetry is more in line with the sensitivity of my own consciousness in discerning and responding to reality. In the early stages, I conducted substantial research that often required the inclusion of footnotes. I myself was an opinion maker who often commented on social issues. However, in this new genre, everything was packaged as poetry.

In the course of developing essay poetry, it became evident that the public outside the serious literary community would be more receptive to this new genre. For the general public, essay poetry is easier to comprehend and is connected to their own social environment.

However, among the ranks of professional critics and the community of serious literary authors, the model

of the essay poem was deemed to have greatly sacrificed both literary esthetics and linguistic artistry. There were examples of essay poetry that succeeded from an esthetic angle, but there were more examples that failed to achieve this.

In my own further development, I began to write more poems that lacked footnotes. I began to write more social poems that featured drama; these were a kind of short story which were rendered in poetic style.

The greater the number of genres, movements, styles, and spectra of poetry that are created, the better it is for the flour-ishing garden of poetry. This is the third proposition.

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I initially emerged as a writer of poetry within the framework of the three principles expressed above. It hardly feels like I have written 27 poetry books during the past five years (2012-2017). Many of these poetry books (22 out of 27 books) became the chief topic for discussion at the Assembly of Southeast Asian Writers in Sabah, Malaysia in 2017.

Furthermore, I never expected that articles and thesis papers that delved into and examined my poems would appear. A wave of protests by literary activists decried the appearance of HB Jassin's Literary Documentation Cen-

ter's Book of the 33 Most Significant Indonesian Authors (since 1900), compiled by Team 8, in which I was selected as one of these esteemed literary figures.

The five essay poems in my book *Atas Nama Cinta* (In the Name of Love) were remade by the filmmaker Hanung Bramantyo as five short films, each of 40 minute duration. Putu Wijaya, Niniek L. Karim, and Sutardji Calzoum Bachri also converted these five poems to 30-minute poetry readings. The Jogja Theater under the tutelage of Isti Nugroho and Indra Tranggono adapted one of these essay poems to create a theatrical production.

The young literary critic, Narudin Pituin, conducted proficient research and wrote a comprehensive account in one book regarding my development and literary works in Indonesian literature. Ons Untoro and a team of authors wrote a book that focused on poetry and social issues. It discusses social issues within Indonesian literary history, specifically mentioning Lekra, Taufik Ismail, Rendra, Widji Tukul, and Denny JA.

The poems which I had originally written mostly in order to express my personal sentiments on the sidelines of my regular work as a political consultant, businessman, and activist unexpectedly evolved into something

more serious. I am just going with the flow in enjoying this process.

This book is being published on the basis of advice and encouragement from many parties. This comprehensive volume is comprised of selected poems that I have previously written. Contained within this edition are various essays that I have written as well as my thoughts concerning literature. Also included in this book are essays and literary compositions as well as literary criticism that other authors have written concerning the evolution, presentation, and value of my literary works.

This book represents the most comprehensive documentation of the stages of development as evinced in my composition of the selected po-

ems; it also includes my own thoughts as well as critical response by many literary commentators. It is sufficient to read this one book, which describes each and every relevant matter.

There are exactly 49 selected poems, 13 essays which I have written about poetry and literature (including this introduction), and 13 articles in which Indonesian and other Southeast Asian authors and critics have recorded their responses and observations.

I would like to express my gratitude to every person and also for each event and occasion, either planned or spontaneous, which have made the world of poetry an important chapter among the various chapters that inhabit the book of my life.



# Contributor

**Agus R. Sarjono** (born in Bandung, July 27, 1962) is a poet, essayist, and playwright. He's often invited as a key speaker in various national and international seminars and cultural events. For more than 10 years he improving reading habits and literary appreciation for students as well as for teachers in remotes areas of Indonesia. He also gives works shop on reading and writing for prisoners. He was editor of *Horison* Literary Magazine (1997-2013), Head of Jakarta Arts Council (2003-2006), and General Director of *Jurnal Sajak*. Several times he became writer in residence, i.e. in Interna-tional Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden (2001); Heinrich Böll Haus, Langenboich (2002-03), Bonn Universiteit (2010); Künstlerhaus Schloss Wiepersdorf, Bradenburg (2014). As a poet, he has been invited to various Literary Festival i.e. Winternachten Poetry Festival, Den Haag; International Poetry Festival, Berlin; Poetry on the Road, Bremen; Dubai International Poetry Festival; Kritiya International Poetry Festival, Kerala, India; Asia-Pacific Poetry Festival, Vietnam, etc. His new poetry collection is *Gestatten, mein Name ist Trübsinn* (Berlin, 2014). His new play is *Happy Household* (2020), and *National Monologue* (2021). He received Hadiah Sastra Mastera (Southeast Literary Prize) from Malaysia (2012) and Sunthorn Phu Award from Thailand (2013). His poems are translated to English, German, French, Arab, Japan, Vietnam, India, etc.

**Ahmad Gaus AF** is a freelance writer and lecturer in Language and Culture, Swiss-German University (SGU), Tangerang. Ahmad Gaus studied at the Daar el Qolam Islamic boarding school, Banten. Studying Bachelor at the Faculty of Communication Sciences, IISIP, Master degree at Faculty of Philosophy and Civilization, Paramadina University (S2), and currently pursuing a doctoral education, doctoral program in Political Science, National University (Unas), Jakarta. He has worked as the Editor-in-Chief of Publisher Paramadina, Publication Director of LibforAll Foundation, and the censorship team at the Indonesian Film Censorship Institute (LSF). His published books of essay: *Passing Over*, *Menjadi Indonesia* (Becoming Indonesia), *Api Islam* (The Spirit of Islam), and collected poems *Senja di Jakarta* (Twilight in Jakarta), *Kutunggu Kamu di Cisadane* (I Waiting for You in Cisadane River), etc. He is actively involved in various research programs with the Center for the Study of Religion and Culture (CSRC) Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta State Islamic University (UIN), on issues of communal conflict, tolerance, civil liberties, and human rights.



**Ashadi Siregar** is a popular novelist. He was born on July 3, 1945, in Pematang Siantar, North Sumatra. He studied in the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Gadjah Mada University. Ashadi Siregar was also the person in charge of the weekly magazine *Sendi* until 1973. He wrote several bestsellers and was made into successful films, i.e. *Cintaku di Kampus Biru* (My Romance in the Blue Campus), *Terminal Cinta Terakhir* (The Last Love Station), etc. He is the Director of Yogyakarta Research, Education, and Publishing Institute (LP3Y), since 1992.

**Berthold Damshäuser**, born in Wanne-Eickel, Germany, Februari, 8, 1957. Since 1986, he is teaching Indonesian language and literature at the University of Bonn and Editor in chief of *Orientierungen*, a journal about Asian cultures. He is a translator of German poetry into Indonesian and Indonesian poetry into German. He is editor of Indonesian and German poetry anthologies (with Ramadhan K.H.). Together with Agus R. Sarjono, he has been the editor of the German Poetry Series published since 2003. In 2010 he was elected by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia became the Presidential Friend of Indonesia. Since 2011 he has been the editor of *Jurnal Sajak*. He often writes columns on language themes for *Tempo* magazine. With Agus R. Sarjono, he edited *Sprachfeuer: Eine Anthologie moderner indonesischer Lyrik* (Berlin, 2014). His collected essay is *Ini Itu Indonesia* (This and That of Indonesia), published in Jakarta (2011).

**Datuk Jasni Matlani** was born in Beaufort, Sabah. He started writing poetry in 1981, then wrote short stories, novels, essays, and studies. He has produced 9 collections of short stories, 4 novels, 3 collections of poetry, and several books on literary criticism. He received the Sabah Literature Prize, the Malaysian Prime Literature Prize, and the Messenger Public Literature Prize. He received the SEA Write Award from Thailand (2015). In 2017, he also received the First Literature Prize through the Book of a Collection of short stories *Cerita Monyet, Anjing dan Pohon Ginkgo* (The stories about the Monkey, Dog, and the Ginkgo Tree). In the same year, he was awarded pingat kebesaran, Panglima Gemilang Darjah Kinabalu (PGDK) from Tuan Yang Terutama Yang Dipertua Negeri Sabah, according to the official anniversary of Tuan Yang Terutama Ke-64, who awarded him 'Datuk'.

**Denny Januar Ali**, known as Denny JA (born 4 January 1963 in Palembang, South Sumatra) is an intellectual entrepreneur and best-selling author. He holds records in the academic, political, social media, literature, and cultural worlds in Indonesia. Denny JA was named by TIME magazine in 2015 as one of the 30 most influential people on the Internet. This recognition was regarding his role in utilizing social media in shaping public opinion and polls in Indonesia's 2014 presidential election. In late July 2015, Denny JA's book *Fang Yin's Handkerchief* (English and German

edition) become the no. 1 best-seller in Amazon.com kindle book poetry, enjoying the same position as the books written by legendary poets such as William Shakespeare, Rumi, Khalil Gibran, and Edgar Allan Poe. In 2014, he was awarded by Twitter inc as The World No 2 Golden Tweet 2014, and the No 1 in Indonesia. He was also awarded by MURI as the first and the only political consultant in the world helping and winning the presidential election three times in a row. In the academic world, Denny JA founded the Indonesian Survey Foundation (LSI, Lembaga Survei Indonesia 2003), the Indonesian Survey Circle (LSI, Lingkaran Survei Indonesia 2005), the Public Association of Opinion Research (AROPI, 2007), and the Indonesian Political Consultancy Association (AKPI, 2009). Through these four organizations, Denny JA has become known as the founding father of a new tradition in Indonesian public opinion surveying and political consultancy. As well as founding these four important institutions, he also served as their leader for the first period. Denny JA popularised the quantitative social science that has been able to predict the winners of local and general elections in Indonesia since 2004 and awarded the title of News Maker of the 2009 Election by the Indonesian Association of Journalists. In the political world (2004–2012), Denny JA has been dubbed a kingmaker. Denny JA also scored a hit when he overturned articles contained in both the 2009 Law on Legislative Elections and the 2009 Law on Presidential Elections. Twice the Constitutional Court ruled in favor of Denny JA in his position as chairman of the association of survey institutions (AROPI). Articles that restricted academic freedom, such as those banning the quick count on the day of the election was overturned by the Constitutional Court. Since 2012 Denny JA has been active in the anti-discrimination movement. He founded the Denny JA Foundation for an Indonesia Without Discrimination. In 2014 he was chosen as one of 33 the most influential literary figures in Indonesian history by a team of eight (a team of prominent poets, critics, and academicians). Denny JA is also known for his Essay Poetry and a social activist promoting and campaigning the non-discrimination movement with various cultural works including poetry, dramas, songs, photographs, paintings, and films, which spread modern concepts of equality and legal protection for citizens, whatever their social identity.

**Ignas Kleden** was born and raised in Waibalun, Larantuka, East Flores, May 19, 1948. He attends a school of prospective pastors who graduated with honors in elementary school. However, he left the school because he could not preach well. Then, he studied at the Ledalero School of Theological Philosophy/STFT, Maumere, Flores (1972), obtained a Master of Arts degree in philosophy from the Hochschule Fuer Philosophie, Munich, Germany (1982), and a Doctorate in Sociology from Bielefeld University, Germany. (1995). Ignas has also worked as a translator for

theological books at Nusa Indah Publisher, Ende, Flores. He also worked as an editor at the Jakarta Obor Foundation (1976-1977), the Social Sciences Foundation, Jakarta (1977-1978), and the Society for Political and Economic Studies, Jakarta. In 2000 he also provided Go East which is—now the Center Eastern Indonesia Assessment. He became a regular columnist for *Tempo* magazine. His literature essays were published in *Basis*, *Horison*, *Budaya Jaya* (Arts and cultural magazines), *Kompas Media Indonesia*, *The Jakarta Post* (Newspaper), and others. His essay collection books are *Scientific Attitudes and Cultural Criticism* (1988) and *Indonesian Literature in Six Questions* (2004). Together with Sapardi Djoko Damono, received the Achmad Bakrie Award (2003).

**Jamal D. Rahman** was born on December 14, 1967. He writes poetry, essays, and literary critics which were published in many important newspapers, journals, and literary magazines in Indonesia. His collections of poems that were already published are *Airmata Diam/Silent Tears* (1993), *Reruntuhan Cahaya/Ruins of Light* (2003), and *Garam-garam Hujan/The Salt of Rain* (2004). His poems and essays were also included in many anthologies and were translated into English, German, and Portuguese. He was the editor of more than 25 books. He was often involved in many important literary festivals in Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Germany, Iran, Vietnam, etc. He was chairman of the Literary Committee of The Jakarta Art Council (2003-2006). For several years now Jamal D. Rahman has been the chief editor of *Horison*, the leading literary magazine in Indonesia which has been published since 1966. He is also a lecture at UIN (State Islamic University) of Jakarta.

**Leon Agusta** (born in Sigiran, Nagari Tanjung Sani Maninjau, West Sumatra, is an Indonesian writer. He was a leader of the Padang Theater Workshop (1972), and a member of the Jakarta Arts Council. He attended the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa, United States (1976-1977) and then published a collection of poems entitled *In Those Corners of New York* (1977) and partly translated into English. After writing poetry for about fifteen years he said: “Writing poetry is not a job, being a poet is not a goal”. This he said with a wider awareness of life than the problem of mere poetry creation. He published several collections of poetry and a collection of short stories, *Hedona and Masochi* (1984).

**Phaosan Jehwae** (his Malay name Che Wan Fauzan Bin Che Wan Yusoff), born in Pattani, Southern Thai, is a scientist, artist, and literary activist in the archipelago. He is also a lecturer at the Malay Language Education Department, Universiti Fatoni, Thailand. Apart from being a penitentiary, he is well-known as a poetry designer and language fighter in Patani, South Thai. He writes in various fields and his works have been published in many countries in Southeast Asia. He has studied his first

diploma and Bachelor's diploma at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, Yogyakarta, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, and Jakarta State University. The Ph.D. diploma ranking was obtained from Universiti Brunei Darussalam. He is Assistant Professor of Malay Language Education, Universiti Fatoni (Fatoni University), Thailand.

**Sapardi Djoko Damono** (20 March 1940 – 19 July 2020) was an Indonesian poet known for lyrical poems, and who was widely regarded as the pioneer of lyrical poetry in Indonesia. Sapardi began writing poetry while still in high school in Surakarta. He is a permanent faculty member in the Literature Department at the University of Indonesia. In 1989 he received his doctorate from the same university, and in 1993 became a full professor. His first collection of poetry, *DukaMu Abadi* (Your Eternal Sorrow), was released in 1969. Now he published more than 12 books of poetry and several studies. He received SEA-Write Award (1986) from Thailand. Sapardi translated poems from T.S. Eliot, Khalil Gibran, Jalaluddin Rumi, and Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. He was a professor at the University of Indonesia. Sapardi Djoko Damono has received several awards, i.e. The Putera Poetry Award (1983), The Jakarta Arts Council Literary Award (1984), The SEA Write Award (1986), The Achmad Bakrie Award for Literature (2003), and The Akademi Jakarta Award (2012). He died in South Tangerang, Banten on 19 July 2020 after a long illness.

**Sutardji Calzoum Bachri** was born in Rengat, Riau, Indonesia on June 24, 1941. He studied at Padjadjaran University, Bandung. His poems appeared in literary magazines such as *Horison* and *Budaya Jaya*, as well as in the literary pages of national daily newspapers. He is on the editorial board of *Horison*, and was appointed senior editor in 1996. Between 2000-2002 he was the poetry editor of "Bentara", a monthly cultural supplement of the newspaper *Kompas*. In 1973 Sutardji stunned the Indonesian literary public with his Poetic Credo in which he sets out to 'free words from the burden of meaning' through his mantra poems, in which each word takes on particular weight as an aural and visual phenomenon. He uses 'autonomous words as material for fresh mantras and new meanings. Poetry unleashes the force of language, to present the experience of life as dynamic as possible. He attended the Poetry International Festival in Rotterdam summer of 1974. In the same year, he spent 6 months as a participant in the International Writing Program in Iowa City, USA. Sutardji took part in the International Poets Meeting in Baghdad, Iraq. In 1997, he was invited to read his poetry at the International Poetry Festival in Medellin, Colombia, and participation in the Winternachten International Literature Festival (The Hague). He SEA Writer

Award from Thailand (1979) and an Arts Award from the Indonesian government (1993). He is also the recipient of the 1998 Chairil Anwar Literary Prize, Jakarta Arts Council (2001). He was also awarded the title Sastrawan Perdana (Prime Man of Letters) by the regional government of Riau.

**Tatang Abdulah** has been actively involved in the world of theatre since 1986 until now. He directs and performs in more than 30 theatre plays in Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Japan. Some of his works as director i.e. *Swan Song*, Anton Chekov (1990); *New Year's Eve Song*, Rolf Laukner (1991); *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Bertolt Brecht (1991); *Marriage*, Nicolai Gogol; *Barabah*, Motinggo Busye; *Heartbreak House*, George Bernard Shaw (1991); *Interogasi I* (Interrogation I), Arifin C. Noer (2002); *Wangsit Membawa Petaka* (Revelation brings Disaster), Heri Herdini (2017), and *The Theatre*, Agus R. Sarjono (2018). He has a doctoral degree in History from Padjadjaran University (UNPAD) Bandung. He was a lecturer and chairman of the Theater Department, ISBI Bandung.

