A. Johns

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THE NOVEL AS A GUIDE TO INDONESIAN SOCIAL HISTORY

In the study of Indonesian history, it is possible to follow the trails of many kinds of evidence, each of which, if pursued consistently can illuminate wide areas of the life and circumstances of the Indonesian people. Old Javanese inscriptions and poems represent one trail; the study of Islamic documents provides another richly rewarding exploration into the social traditions of the people in whose life they played a significant role; dialect literature, based mainly on oral tradition is a guide to the traditional, and to a varying extent pre-Islamic pattern of social organisation and values in various areas. And in the modern era a great source of information may be found in a literary form which is an innovation for Indonesia, the novel.

It is not easy to define the novel in such a way that earlier fiction is excluded yet everything subsequent that falls into the category is included. Ian Watt suggests that the essential nature of the novel is that it is an art form which attempts to portray all varieties of human experience through the medium of narrative prose, expressing an attitude to life which may be defined as formal realism.¹ It operates through a concentration on the personal relations of individuals and the circumstances in which they live, and the resulting work as a whole reveals a moral or formal pattern.

If we take formal realism as a basis of our definition, we will find, *inter alia*, that the novel should present to us what a certain situation, or better a complex of situations was like, as effecting and effected by character under the consistent vision of the author. In this way, without making it its formal object, the novel can provide at once a criticism and picture of society.

Even in Europe the novel is a comparatively recent art form. Its development can be associated with several factors: an increasing importance attached to the individual as opposed to the group or the type which possibly rises out of the Puritan emphasis on self-reliance and individual responsibility; commercial individualism, a sense of

¹ Ian Watt: *The Rise of the Novel*. London 1957. pp. 31—32.

nationhood, the development of journalism implying a naturalistic prose style, and the growth of a reading public.

It is probably not a coincidence that there is no prose work approximating to this definition of the novel in Bahasa Indonesia, or any Indonesian language, before a general national consciousness of the Western type began to develop early in the twentieth century. The other conditions mentioned above also began to take shape during this period — the development of journalism requiring a naturalistic prose style, and the gradual formation of a reading public. The basic attitudes of Puritanism, in particular those of self-reliance and individual responsibility were provided not only by modernist Islamic movements, but also by European commercial individualism.

Thus the existence of the novel, in itself, may reasonably be interpreted as a symptom of quite extensive changes taking place in Indonesian society. By its very nature, it signals the beginning of the end of the retelling of stories based on Indian epics, or traditional narratives for purposes of moral instruction told to support the traditional way of life. As opposed to these older forms of literature, it is able to represent the individual standing against tradition on equal terms, and can even be used as a weapon for a radical attack on the older way of life. In it the elements of social tension in a society in process of change become articulate as the individual writer achieves sufficient self-realisation to see his own system as against other systems of social values in contrast or interaction, and express the predicament of individuals as the working out of the process effects them.

For the purposes of this paper, we are going to consider three Indonesian novels written at fairly widely separate periods: *Sitti Nurbaja*, the name of a girl (written in 1922); *Belenggu* (Bondage) (1938); and *Atheis* (An Atheist) (1949).²

Sitti Nurbaja is usually accepted as the first Indonesian novel. It was written by Marah Rusli, a Minangkabau from Central Sumatra, and this fact is highly significant, for a large proportion of Indonesian novelists have come from this area. The Minangkabaus have one of the more interesting systems of traditional (or *adat*) law in Indonesia. It is distinguished by the fact that its pattern of social organization is matrilineal, and marriage is matrilineal. This system of social life (law is too narrow a term) inspires great loyalty among the Minang-

² The editions referred to in each case are: *Sitti Nurbaja*, 8th reprint, Balai Pustaka 1957. *Belenggu*, 4th reprint, Balai Pustaka 1957. *Atheis*, 3rd reprint, Balai Pustaka 1957.

kabaus, and is felt as something distinguishing them in a special way from their neighbours. In general terms the position of the individual is subject to the efficient functioning of this system of social life, as the traditional saying indicates:

Ibu tagadai, anak tadjua
Asa adaik dipakai djuo.

Let mother be pawned and child sold
Provided the adat can function well.

Despite this overall and self-sufficient system, it is a characteristic of Minangkabau men to leave home for some period of their life to attempt to make their fortune, usually by some kind of trading in some other part of the Indonesian archipelago. They work to send home money to their families, to take back presents to all their relatives, and to be of sufficient social standing through their success in business to be invited by the family of some eligible young lady to enter their family compound as a son-in-law (*sumando*).³

This self-contained, very conservative traditional society, which is at the same time open to outside influences, thus contains the germs of elements of social tension which can become articulate in the novel once the pressure of foreign influence becomes sufficiently strong and an author can remove himself far enough from the tutelage of his own social background to see it in contrast with other systems of social organization.

Marah Rusli was born in Central Sumatra in 1898. He was educated at a Teachers' Training College in Semarang, and then at the Medical School in Djakarta. He was, in short, a Dutch educated expatriate Minangkabau of the upper middle class, probably influenced to some extent by Dutch literature. Just the type of individual who, in the light of our earlier analysis, might be expected to write a novel.

The theme of the story is of a young couple, Sitti Nurbaja and Samsu'l-Bahri who are separated by the cunning of a money-lender, Datuk Maringgih. This money-lender, having ruined Nurbaja's father, Baginda Suleiman, threatens him with prison for debt unless Nurbaja is given to him in marriage. To save her father from prison, Nurbaja marries him, to the distress of Samsu who is in Djakarta studying

³ The term *sumando* includes the sense of son-in-law, but more properly signifies the relation of a husband to his wife's matrilineage.

medicine. After her father's death, she dismisses her husband from her house and goes to Djakarta to visit Samsu. But on arrival in Djakarta the police order her to return to Padang to answer a charge of theft by Datuk Maringgih. Once she is back in Padang, he has her murdered.

When Samsu hears the news of her death, he attempts suicide five times unsuccessfully (which must be taken as a departure from formal realism) and then joins the Dutch army. He fights recklessly, hoping to be killed, but only succeeds in winning a reputation for courage. Death evades him until he is sent to put down a revolt in Padang against the imposition of a tax. In the fighting he kills Datuk Maringgih, but is mortally wounded himself. He dies two days later, but not before he meets his father again, and has requested that he be buried between his mother and Nurbaja.

This is a brief outline of the plot, and several episodes are omitted. From the standpoint of literary criticism, despite certain flaws, the work is certainly a novel. The characters carry a certain conviction, many of the scenes are vividly presented and there is some delightful humour. The initiation at the Medical School where a student with weak nerves is made to sit through the night in the anatomy room, and his reactions when a skeleton raises its arm and with eyes glowing red moves towards him, are very well told. There is also a kind of moral pattern imposed on the work, which, if pretentiously put, might be called a dialogue between a man (Samsu) and his fate.

From the standpoint of social history, we can distinguish several themes. One is the tension between Sutan Mahmud Sjah (Samsu's father) and his sister Rubiah. Sutan Mahmud's family have been servants of the Dutch for generations, and as an individual he finds himself in revolt against the social norms of the Minangkabau *adat*. He chooses to give his son Samsu a Western type education as a doctor rather than to set aside money for the wedding of his sister's child as the *adat* demands. He pays little regard to hereditary social distinction, and although of royal blood, he has a 'commoner' wife; he keeps one wife, whereas, according to the *adat* values, unless a man is invited to marry many times he is despised. He is, within limits, prepared to take a stand on principle rather than custom. His sister Rubiah, on the other hand, is jealous because her brother has spent all his money on the education of his son, and not left enough to pay for sufficient marriage ceremonial to invite a son-in-law of high rank into the family. For her, rank is of more value than education, and

a large number of marriages (and divorces) is important for a man's social standing. She jeers at her brother's views, and accuses him of inclinations to turn Christian. In the end he gives way to her and borrows Rp. 3000 from the villain, Datuk Maringgih. Thus later, when he has to choose between his son and the Datuk, the Datuk has him in his power. He is forced into this step because the social tradition demands:

'ndak kaju, djandjang dikapieng,
'ndak wang, ameh dibungkue

which means that if you are without wood (for any purpose) you should cut some from the steps leading up to your house; if without gold, take some from your ornaments. The idea is that if custom demands a contribution to anything, one should go to all lengths to fulfil it, even at the cost of bankruptcy.

In a later part of the book, the author speaks more clearly of what he disapproves of in his society — criticising under-age marriage, marriage based on considerations of property and rank, and the inferior position of women within marriage in general. But it is important to note that this direct criticism is made through a very religious figure, Ahmad Maulana, of whom the first thing we discover is that after performing the evening prayer (*maghrib*), he prays privately for the following hour and a half until the night prayer (*isja*). Presumably only on the basis of religion, in this case of modernist Islam, could any such criticism be tolerated, let alone accepted. These criticisms gain in point when later Ahmad Maulana's daughter, Aminah, tells Nurbaja of her divorce from her husband. Her husband's family incited her husband against her because he gave his wife a portion of his income and persuaded him to marry a second wife, a richly propertied woman. And here it is interesting to compare the treatment traditional literature gives to the question of how a wife should accept polygamy, and the presentation of the reality in the novel. Nothing could demonstrate more clearly the revolutionary potentialities of the novel as an art form. The passage from traditional Minangkabau literature is as follows (a mother is explaining to her daughter the duties and responsibilities of marriages):

"One thing more, O my child:
if you are not the only wife,
or he is invited for another,

— what is fine should be used together,
 what savours sweet be shared —
 that is the practice of the *adat*
 and is commanded by religion.
 Let him go ungrudgingly,
 let him go with a smile
 and have no ill-feelings.
 There is no need to be quarrelsome,
 no need for spite or sharp words:
 the Holy Book forbids this.
 Don't be like people of nowadays:
 once they meet a fellow-wife,
 all their better feelings disappear;
 they make waspish allusions and complain,
 looking proudly from the corner of the eye
 till it comes to quarrelling and fighting
 and clothes are torn
 — they are like dogs fighting for a bone.
 If you think carefully
 you'll see this something to be ashamed of,
 for if people see what is happening
 there will be much whispering and gossip".⁴

Alimah tells her story: "All that night I wept, unable to restrain myself. Whenever I met my husband it was as if I was looking on a wild beast, and I felt loathing and fury alternately. My delight in and love for him had gone. I would have slapped him, I was so furious, had my mother not restrained me. Time and again I asked for a divorce but he would not grant it. I was powerless, for the power of divorce was in his hands. Had I had the right of divorce, I would have divorced him absolutely on the spot, and not looked at him again. From that day on, I ignored him completely paying no attention to his food or clothing, for I could no longer look on him as before. If another man had enticed me I would have gone with him, I felt so bitter. I would have left him had I not feared that I would have been bound to him forever, neither divorced nor provided for.

Then, one evening, as I was out with an aunt, I saw my husband

⁴ See my: Rantjak di Labueh, Data paper 32, South East Asia Program, Cornell University, December 1958, p. 62.

out enjoying himself with my rival wife. At the sight of it I became blind with fury and completely lost control of myself. My mother told me that I rushed at the woman and began tearing at her hair and clothing, shrieking insults in full view of everyone. When we had been separated, I called my husband all the vile names I could think of and said he had no right to call himself a man if he did not dare divorce me — and he divorced me there and then”.⁵ Aminah had been married less than a year. In the novel the Minangkabau woman is able to demand passionately her rights as an individual.

Another important sidelight on Minangkabau social values is revealed in the scene where Sitti Nurbaja dismisses her husband, Datuk Maringgih, from her house. While her father is still alive and Datuk Maringgih has power over him, Sitti Nurbaja submits to all that fate imposes on her. Once her father is dead and cannot suffer shame through her repudiation of her husband, she orders him out as the filth he is. This illustrates rather poignantly the deep dilemma of many of the younger generation of Minangkabaus who find the older pattern of life intolerable, but through family — and not necessarily (and this should be emphasised) through an inherent lack of determination — and the closely knit social structure in which they have been brought up, have to live out their lives in anguished submission. Only the certainty that no one will suffer disgrace can give the power to decisive action. This scene also shows in practice the security the Minangkabau matrilineal system can give to the wife. According to Islamic law, the power of divorce is in the hands of the man, but since in the Minangkabau system property descends in the female line, the woman cannot be left homeless. It should be noted that, although these scenes are set in 1897 and the book was written in 1922, in 1959 the issues it raises are still living.

A most interesting part of the novel deals with the reaction of the Minangkabau community to the imposition of a levy by the Dutch. We hear in turn the justification of the tax by the Dutch Resident to his own nominees; then the reaction of the village leaders, and finally that of the people themselves. The Resident argues that all the parts of the archipelago under the authority of the Dutch, including West New Guinea, form a single entity, and that each has to contribute to the welfare of the other. He virtually admits that the forced plantation of coffee is unsuccessful as a source of revenue because

⁵ Sitti Nurbaja p. 235—6.

only the smaller peasants now planted it.⁶ It is only justice to impose the tax since the Dutch Government is doing so much for the country as a whole. The Dutch-appointed officials acquiesce meekly, and express the pious hope that the ordinance will be executed without any disturbances.

With the village officials, the reaction is different, and among their objections comes this rather curious commentary on the degree to which nationalist feeling had permeated Central Sumatra during this period: "The Resident himself has said that we should not ask others to supply our needs. Why then cannot each town and village fend for itself? Why should it be upon our shoulders to help the people of Celebes, the Timorese and the Papuans? Have we ever seen them? And who is to say that they would help us in return if any difficulty or need arose?"⁷

The people themselves assemble to make their protest in the mosque — and it should be remembered that the mosque is a centre for the organisation of public opinion. It is Datuk Maringgih who opens the meeting, urging resistance to the Dutch. He does this not out of patriotism, but because, were the tax imposed, he would have the most to pay, and in addition because the police suspect him of criminal activities. The next speaker is a *hadji* who has been to Mekka, Madina and Jeddah but never before seen any tax of this type. The *hadji* makes his appeal on grounds of religion, remarking acidly that the real aim of the Dutch is to make the Minangkabaus into Christian infidels like themselves so that they would not have the distress of sitting in hell and seeing the Minangkabaus in heaven.⁸ A demand for war against the Dutch develops rapidly, but on the basis of a narrow religious outlook and community self-interest. Datuk Maringgih adds: "I have never been to their schools, but I am rich enough. What need have we of their schools? And why do they build them? To make our children hate their own people. All we need is our mosque and place of prayer".⁹

As a further result of the meeting, emissaries are sent to Aceh and Turkey to ask for help. Probably before the first world war the

⁶ The compulsory cultivation of coffee in Central Sumatra was abolished in 1908. See Schrieke B. "Indonesian Sociological Studies", Part I. The Hague 1955, p. 98.

⁷ Sitti Nurbaja, p. 288.

⁸ Sitti Nurbaja, p. 290.

⁹ *ibid.* p. 291.

Ottoman Empire still held an important position in the Indonesian Muslim consciousness.

There is one scene which approaches pathos in the description of the fighting. At this time ($\pm$ 1912) the modernist Islamic movement was only beginning, and many of the people belonged to various mystical (*Sufi*) orders, such as the Nakshabandi, which possessed many non-Islamic accretions. Among these accretions was the belief that by practising ascetism and using powerful charms and spells given by their *guru* they could achieve invulnerability. At the beginning of the first clash, the Dutch soldiers fired into the air. Because none of the Minangkabau were wounded they imagined that they really were invulnerable, and advanced chanting rhythmically: *La ilāha illa'llāh*, only to be mown down by the next salvo directed at them.

The early part of the (twentieth) century was a period of modernisation in Islam under the inspiration of Muhammad Abduh. From 1911 onwards there was a movement against the *Sufi* orders in Sumatra as part of an attempt to purify Islam. There are several indications of this attempt at purification in the novel: Samsu was given a funeral procession according to the ancient practice of Minangkabau royalty, but the use of drum and flute were forbidden by the religious leaders. Similarly, the playing of a funeral march and the firing of a salvo were forbidden — small but sure indications of the way in which the modernists were attempting to restore the simplicity of the burial ceremony of orthodox Islam.

The personal attitude of Marah Rusli to his characters is somewhat puzzling, and his own standpoint appears confused. If we have read the book correctly, he appears as a moderate representative of Modernist Islam: ready to accept what appears of value from the West, tolerant towards Christians and interested in the reform of marriage. Yet the moral basis of the book is irrational and self-contradictory. We mentioned earlier that the theme of the book could be summed up as a dialogue between a man and his fate. But fate here seems to have no relationship to God. It is fate that warns Samsu in a dream that Datuk Maringgih will destroy him and Nurbaja, fate that tells him in a dream that Nurbaja is dead, and fate that tells him (also in a dream) when he sets out to fight his own people and co-religionists on behalf of the Dutch, that the path traced out for him is nearly complete, and that he will soon rejoin his mother and Nurbaja. The upper levels of Samsu's personality pay lip service to Islam. But he attempts suicide no less than five times and fights for infidels against Islam

in the hope of finding death and consequent reunion with his mother and Nurbaja. With his last breath he exclaims *Allāhu Akbar* — God is Lord of All — as a good Muslim, but there is no mention in the book of his praying or fasting. The God that exists for him is not the burning passionate concept of Islam, but a benign piece of pious self-deception.

The problem of course is in the mind of the author, and illustrates the basic predicament of the reformer whose reforming ideals come to some extent at second-hand from a foreign source. He has to control the sub-conscious tendencies of his own mind and reduce what he has been brought up to believe as vital in his own way of life to a rational basis. He also has to eradicate from it all that appears irrational or bad in terms of his new ideals and foreign rationalism.

Belenggu (Bondage) is a very different type of novel. The author, Armijn Pane (born 1908), was likewise Dutch educated — for some time at the medical faculty in Djakarta. But later he turned to journalism (in Solo) and became a teacher (at one of the Taman Siswa Schools). In 1936 he began work at Balai Pustaka — the government publishing house — and has since been concerned with literature. He too is an expatriate. Although born in North Sumatra, he received a Dutch education in Java and has since worked there.

Technically *Belenggu* marks a great advance on any previous work, and with it the Indonesian novel comes to maturity. The theme is simple. It can be reduced to the eternal triangle: a husband, Sukartono, and wife, Tini, who get on each other's nerves, and the other woman who can give Sukartono all the tenderness, love and feminine attention that he is lacking.

When completed it was refused by the government publishing house, and on its appearance in the literary periodical *Pudjangga Baru* soon received the necessary qualification for a work of literary innovation: severe criticism from several quarters on the grounds that it was immoral and an imitation of decadent Western literature.

This novel, like *Sitti Nurbaja*, is a tragedy; but the tragic predicament arises not from the pressure of exterior circumstances, but through defects in the characters of the protagonists. The action of the former novel took place against a rural background, presenting the predicaments of essentially village people in a traditional setting. *Belenggu* is set in Djakarta, the metropolis. The characters are representatives of a new type of Indonesian, the successful professional

urban couple who possess a car, use a telephone, and both have professional interests. They are free of the traditional restraints of village life; they chose each other, and they have no fear of poverty. Yet something has gone wrong. Perhaps they are both fettered by emotional ties to the past before they met; Sukartono to a school-girl sweetheart, Tini to a certain indiscretion with one she now thinks dead. Their basic problem is that, although they have each achieved their aims — emancipation in the Western sense, and professional success, they are unable to understand each other, and little by little fall apart. It is the telephone (symbol of modernity, perhaps) which plays an important part in the break-down of the marriage. Sukartono's wife is dissatisfied because it is the telephone which keeps Sukartono busy as a doctor, and to show her spite she removes the notebook where telephone messages received for the doctor are written. And ironically, the telephone too provides the entrance for the other woman into Sukartono's life. Tini's own activity in the social life — where her husband's standing as a doctor gives her authority — is, in part, an expression of her unhappiness and disillusion at home.

The problems that occupied the centre of the stage in *Sitti Nurbaja* are still present in the background. The "other woman" had been forced to marry a man she disliked twenty years older than herself and been taken to Palembang. She left him, and drifted into prostitution in various of the large cities in Java. This, without doubt, is a contributory element in the problem of prostitution. In the third novel we are going to discuss, the central figure, while at a hotel, is offered a massage (this is an euphemism) by a girl recently divorced from her husband. The old world of *adat* is passing on its problems to the new world of the city; and emancipation from the *adat* presents the new problem of attempting to find an identity and basis of relationship to replace the comprehensive system of relationship which has been lost.

Sukartono thinks that he has found someone who understands him, and whose identity he can grasp when he meets the other woman who shows him the love which Tini does not. But her personality keeps dissolving. First he knows her as Nonja Eni; then she becomes Rohajah, a school sweetheart, and then Sitti Hajati, a popular singer. And he bursts out in desperation: "You are not Hajati, you are not Njonjo Eni — who are you? You are making a fool of me".¹⁰

It is this problem of identity, and a longing for security in an

¹⁰ Belenggu, p. 107.

I-thou relationship which leaves Sukartono bewildered and frightened. This is particularly clear in the following extract where the author presents the thoughts running through Sukartono's mind as he drives from the house of his mistress down to the beach close to Djakarta harbour (Tandjung Periok): "In his heart of hearts, Sukartono felt, still believed, that, although Tini seemed not to care, put on a frigid exterior, he felt that she still loved him. But what was the proof? Was it conjecture or just feeling. At one time hadn't he felt he had known Njonja Eni. But would he have known Njonja Eni was Rohajah if she hadn't told him. Did he know — a momentary wave of sadness engulfed him — the disease that had killed Mar? [a child patient who had died]. The child herself could not tell him, she could only say Ma and Pa, and these words changed their meaning according to the child's whim. But if Tini said hadn't she said that she had a right to happiness? Wasn't she happy — he smiled — as a doctor's wife? Hadn't that been her ambition? And like the dawn lighting up his mind he remembered the beginning; that night Tini had still been able to communicate with him, to tell him she was angry because he hadn't fetched her. What had she said? "If you are busy, do I have to wait until you are free?" He didn't have time, but Tini still had to live. But didn't he have to go out? Go to Jah? Yes. But because he had to. Had to? Because, because he wanted to remember, to return to the past because his mind groped around in nothingness, his train of thought kept losing itself as if his mind were a radio with uncertain reception.

Somehow or other he reached the beach at Tandjung Priok safely. He was brought back to himself by the ripple of the waves. There was no moonlight to glisten on the waves. A kind of visible darkness rested over the sea. There was no one else, he was alone. The darkness over it was like a reflection of his own soul. As he sat behind the wheel he gazed towards the water. It was like gazing into his inner self".¹¹

This is Sukartono's problem: he cannot understand his wife, his mistress or himself; he cannot understand the germs of disease that, as a doctor, he has to fight. He is oppressed by the sense of inevitable parting and death. As a background to this goes on the busy round of his wife's committees — of jealousy, gossip and vanity like the vanity of Mrs. Sumardjo who was always chosen as chairman of committees, not because of her ability, but because of her husband's position.

¹¹ Belenggu, p. 69—70.

Some critics have considered this a European novel transplanted into Bahasa Indonesia. We find it impossible to agree with this judgment. The singularly delicate treatment of the theme and its environment are purely Indonesian, although it concerns Indonesians of the city, not of the country. It is the approach of formal realism applied to a tiny scene of city life (through the key hole, as is said of Richardson's approach). Tini and Sukartono part forever, although in their hearts they still love each other. Tini's uncle, Mangunsutjipto, an old Javanese who is a symbol of the traditional wisdom of Java, gives them advice which, if acted upon, would save their marriage. He explains to them the wisdom of gradualness and patience, for patience is not a sign of defeat but equality. He tells them that they think in terms of dynamism, but forget patience; that they make a God out of intellect but forget the value of intuition which can penetrate places inaccessible to reason. But they reject his advice. They each go their own way with none of their basic problems solved.¹²

It would be possible to speak at great length of the literary merits of the novel, on the extraordinarily vivid presentation of two streams of consciousness, each misunderstanding and at odds with the other, of its symmetrical structure and the skilful use of language. But what is important for the purpose of our paper is to see the predicament of an emancipated couple who, to the world at large, are sure of themselves, but whose inner life is still hollow and confused.

Achdiat Karta Mihardja, the author of *Atheis* (An Atheist), first published in 1949, was born in 1911. Chronologically he belongs to the older generation of writers, but his novel *Atheis* encompasses all the revolutionary developments in Indonesian literary history of subject and treatment since the Japanese war. Thus, he is regarded as belonging at one and the same time to both the older and modern generation of writers, the revolutionary group of the generation of '45, as they call themselves. He too was Dutch educated, but while at High School he took Oriental literature. Later he studied and attempted to practice Nakshabandi mysticism. In addition, he has studied Thomism and contemporary Western philosophy. Thus, he has unique qualifications for the novel he set out to write, a novel in which one system of thought and way of life, that of Hasan and his family, is set against the revolutionary socialism and anarchism of his friends Kartini, Rusli and Anwar.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 111.

Hasan comes from a village in West Java where the traditional pattern of life is still intact. His parents are deeply religious, following the religious practices of the Nakshabandi Order. This means that Hasan was brought up according to the traditional pattern of Indonesian Islam, untouched by the current of modernism, and without the rational sophistication of the modernist. Before leaving home to work in Bandung, he joined his father's Order.

When he first arrived in Bandung he lived isolated from the community where he worked, keeping up all the ascetical practices of his Order: fasting seven days and seven nights; diving into the canal and sitting on the edge until he was dry forty times during one night between the night prayer, *isja*, and the dawn prayer, *subh*. Once he sat locked in his room three days and three nights without eating, drinking or sleeping.

One day he meets an old friend from his village, Rusli, and a girl, Kartini. He fears they are irreligious and decides it is his duty to attempt to convert them. But it is he whose faith is undermined by the Marxist interpretations of religion. Kartini's beauty attracts him and her face haunts his imagination while at prayer. He cannot but continue meeting them, and with them he meets Anwar, an anarchist — selfish, demanding, and with a reckless vehemence in all he does. Rusli's suave argumentation, using the technique "of course you are quite entitled to your own opinions, but" is too much for the poor simple Hasan, whose faith gradually seeps away.

One can imagine his feelings, envying the freedom and experience of Rusli, instinctively forced to respect him as someone who knows. For when Rusli expounds any theory which amounts to blasphemy, he can only think in terms of Infidel, Retrograde, Traitor. These are his feelings when Rusli remarks that one day it may be possible for man to create life. He objects that this is the equivalent of man making himself equal to God, only to receive the bland, sophisticated reply: "But why be obscurantist? There is no God".¹³ And when Rusli explains to him that God and religion are a creation of man himself arising from an imperfect social structure and economic system, he finds himself unable to agree, but unable to prove Rusli wrong. In any case, these are problems that he has never before thought about. His only defence is to finger his rosary reciting as hard as he can: *La ilāha illa'llāh*. But Rusli's social analyses are beginning to influence his thinking. As he walks along the street one night and hears

¹³ Atheis, p. 68.

the soliciting of the prostitutes he analyses their predicament instinctively in Rusli terms: the victims of Capitalism.

Later he meets Anwar, the anarchist. Anwar is a coarse egalitarian who slaps his servant for kneeling to him in the traditional Javanese manner. To Anwar the servant is perpetuating the feudalistic degradation of humanity. Hasan experiences the following situation while with Rusli, Kartini and Anwar at a restaurant: Anwar accepts a cigarette from Rusli, then adds something to it from a small tube.

"What's that?" asked Rusli finishing a last spoonful of his meal.

"Opium," replied Anwar, gently smearing some black substance onto the end of the cigarette he was about to smoke.

The three of us watched him. He really is someone extraordinary, I thought — he even smokes opium.

"Why are you all gaping at me? Isn't this God I'm putting onto my cigarette?"

"You're talking like a man out of his mind, Anwar," said Rusli, glancing in my direction for a moment.

"Why out of my mind? Didn't Marx say that? Didn't Marx say that God was the opium of the people?"

"What do you mean?"

"It's very simple — God is opium."

"God opium?" I repeated.

"Yes, opium — at least according to Marx." (nudging Rusli's arm).
 "Isn't that so?"

Rusli smiled, and sipped his coffee.

"But for me, God is myself." (pointing to himself with his forefinger). "And with Kloos I say: 'I am a God within my innermost thoughts'.¹⁴

Though all this blasphemy Hasan can only remain silent, wondering at the opinions of people who know better than he does.

Later among Rusli's circle he meets Bung Parta whose life is a record of the restlessness and ferment among the younger generation of Indonesians from the end of the first world war on.

The earliest politically based Indonesian mass organisation was the Sarékat Islam, or the Islamic Federation, founded in 1912. By 1917 radical Marxist infiltration into the organisation had become heavy. It was this Islamic organisation that Bung Parta joined when he was seventeen. However, a riot broke out while he was addressing a public meeting during the fasting month because he drank a glass of water.

¹⁴ Atheis, p. 106.

The crowd roared with anger, and he jeered back. The police intervened and dissolved the meeting, but not before Bung Parta was so badly beaten up that had to spend a week in hospital. As a revolutionary socialist, he became an enemy of the Sarékat. This may have some historical reference to the situation in 1920 when the Communist Party attempted unsuccessfully to gain control of the twenty-two trade unions totalling 77,000 members, which had been united by the Sarékat Islam, and in the following year set up a rival association of trade unions with the name: The Revolutionary Trade Union Central.¹⁵

After taking part in an unsuccessful strike, he became a sailor for Rotterdam Lloyd, visiting Australia, China, Japan, Europe and America. In America he saw the plight of the negroes, and during the depression the misery of millions of unemployed in contrast to the glittering wealth of the big stores. During his travels, he took an active part in international trade unionism strike organisation.

Hasan is overwhelmed: in contrast to this, his little world seems meaningless. And later in the evening he leaves, not to pray as he might have done three months earlier, but to take Kartini to the cinema.

A little later, by some mischance, he takes Anwar with him to visit his family. One evening they go for a walk, and talk with a couple of watchmen. The watchmen are terrified of a ghost who killed the wife of one of them, the spirit Embah Djambrong. This spirit lives near a certain grave not far off. Anwar tells them that this is nonsense and that the man's wife died of typhus. He gets a torch and insists that he be led to the habitation of the spirit. Unwillingly the two men lead him a part of the way and then refuse to go further. Hasan continues with him until little by little the suspicion creeps into his mind that the man beside him is not Anwar, but an impersonation by the spirit, leading him to destruction. All at once he turns and runs for his life. A few minutes later Anwar returns and says to him: "What were you afraid of? There is no Si Djambrong, there is no ghost".

This incident destroys Hasan's faith. He quarrels with his father and leaves home an atheist, although a tormented one. The chapter describing his return home begins: "The train crawled along, as though unwilling to carry two atheists such as we".¹⁶ During the journey the scene of the quarrel with his parents is presented in Hasan's memory. He finds consolation with Kartini. They marry, but after three years of

¹⁵ See Kahin: "Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia", p. 75.

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 158.

rapidly decreasing harmony, have a bitter quarrel and separate. Hasan develops tuberculosis which aggravates his mental misery. He hears that his father is dying and goes to visit him. But his father orders him out of the room, treating him as a temptation from the devil to torment his death bed.

In desperation, Hasan opens his heart to faith again, convinced by his mental suffering of the existence of hell.

This account of the novel is brief, but the problems it poses are clear. Hasan is crushed between the old world and the new. He joins his father's mystical Order because he is not allowed to marry the girl he would have chosen because of social status; his spiritual exercises wreck his health and sow the seeds of the tuberculosis that is to kill him; his attitude to the ultimate things of life has been one of acceptance; his quarrel with his father is caused directly by his father's attempt to make him marry a girl who had no appeal to him. The world of the village has treated him badly and left him defenceless against the intellectual ferment in the city. The world he comes from is static, the world he is drawn into is full of a furious dynamism, compelling him to ideas he cannot reject: social justice, equality, freedom, but which in the form they are presented demand a complete rejection of the values of the world he has grown up in. The novel has presented to us very effectively two strands in Indonesian life: the static docility of Hasan and the extraordinary dynamism of Anwar and Bung Parta. It is impossible not to admire the vitality of these two characters, and they provide one answer to the questions: what kind of people was it who brought Marxist and Anarchist ideas into Indonesian life? And how did they effect people? In the novel there is no bridge between the two worlds, there is only the vivid communication of faith and doubt in a tortured conscience. But the problem remains an important one in Indonesian life.

It is impossible to do justice to this theme within the limits of a short essay, which in any case cannot be much more than an introduction. None of the novels we have discussed can be called happy, none offers any real solution to the predicaments in which the characters find themselves. But each of them has given some picture of the important currents moving at different levels through Indonesian society, and which are creating problems of value and social organisation which are not less important than the apparatus of government and financial stability.

A. JOHNS