

Modern Indonesian Poetry and Short Stories for Pre-College and Non-Indonesian Readers by Ied Veda Sitepu

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The author, Ied Veda Sitepu is a scholar of Southeast Asian Literatures in English, English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia, and gender competencies of higher education graduates in Indonesia. As a graduate student of Literature and English Language Teaching at the Ateneo de Manila University Philippines in early 1990s, she discovered that Indonesian literature's entry point into Philippine classrooms was limited to one or two major works. Ied Sitepu's work, "Modern Indonesian Poetry and Short Stories for Pre-College and Non-Indonesian Readers," initially conceived as a kind of textbook, was originally produced as her Master's thesis in mid 1990s, the lone copy of which was accessible for room-use only at the Ateneo Library. It was subsequently published in Volume 86 No.2 November 2013 issue of *Unitas Journal* as a monograph, finally making it accessible to all via online. This textbook addresses the problem of a lack of resources in teaching literatures from Asia other than those familiar works from India, China, and Japan, which are studied in the junior high school curriculum in the Philippines.

Ied Sitepu's textbook contains introductory reading materials and guide questions for teachers of non-Indonesian pre-college students who are keen to study modern Indonesian literature. It opens with a brief introduction to modern Indonesian literature, divided into several sections that

give readers a general picture of Indonesia and its literature. The sections include: Indonesia at a Glance (Geographical and Historical Perspective), History of Indonesian Literature, Bahasa Indonesia, the Language of Modern Indonesian Literature, and Periods of Modern Indonesian Literature.

It also provides a list of books on studies of Indonesian literature for those interested in further studying Indonesian literature and anthologies of Indonesian literature that are translated into English. These references are available for public domain use so that teachers can access them for free. The short stories and poems selected in this textbook are arranged according to the literary period where the author belongs. In each selection, there is an introduction to the work, which includes the author's background and the work and study questions. Sample lesson plans on how to conduct alternative classroom activities are also provided, integrative of the Dimensional Approach, Interactive Literature, and Language Teaching and Integrating Reading with Writing. Aside from sample lesson plans, thematic guidelines for the selections are listed. All that because, as the textbook's introduction reads, "It is hoped that these will help teachers select learning material based on the themes of the selections. Guidelines are also provided to help teachers and students alike for a clearer understanding of the works." By providing an opportunity to discuss literary works in the classroom, the textbook provides an welcome opportunity and excellent material with which to explore the richness of Indonesian cultural heritage.

Bloom's Cognitive Domain of the Taxonomy of Educational Objective, also called Bloom's Taxonomy, which the textbook follows, is used by teachers globally as a metric for constructing study questions. However, the textbook clarifies the following concerns that: 1) the six levels of Bloom's taxonomy are not presented in every selection; and 2) since Bahasa Indonesia has become the medium of the political unity of Indonesia as a nation and the language of Indonesian literature in modern times, thereby the textbook includes works that were originally published in Bahasa Indonesia. Nevertheless, non-Indonesian literature teachers may look for themes that resonate with a broader audience. Sample issues covered by the texts are

the struggle for independence, love, hope, and social life and culture to give readers an idea of the richness of Indonesian literary and cultural heritage.

Moreover, following the core principles of Bloom's Taxonomy, the textbook is commendable for it offers sufficient guidelines and questions to be able to analyze and interpret the Indonesian poetry and fiction in the book, following the core principles of Bloom's Taxonomy. As indicated in the introduction of the book, "Bloom's Cognitive Domain of the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives are used as guidelines for the construction of study questions that test the students' Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation of the ideas and concepts represented in each selection. While there are emerging pedagogies that are aimed at addressing the global concerns especially at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ied Sitepu's textbook can serve as an opportunity for teachers to update the questions to suit the demands of twenty-first-century learning dynamics by following Anderson and Krathwohl's Taxonomy (remembering - Learner's ability to recall information, understanding - Learner's ability to understand information, applying - Learner's ability to use information in a new way, analyzing - Learner's ability to break down information into its essential parts evaluating - Learner's ability to judge or criticize information, creating - Learner's ability to create something new from different elements of information.

The dearth of Indonesian texts in the materials provided for teaching literature courses in junior high school in the Philippines stems from the unavailability of books with enough representation of Indonesian works and their translations. Often, Pramoedya Ananta Toer's short story, "Inem," is usually treated as the sole representation of Indonesian literature. Thus, Ied Sitepu's textbook fills the lack of Indonesian texts in studying Asian literatures.

In addition, this textbook is deemed helpful for junior high school students, especially for Grade 8 who are taking up Asian literature as part of their curricula. Using this textbook will allow Filipino students to be immersed in works that show the milieu, themes, and techniques represented in Asian texts beyond those of India, China, and Japan.

In particular, reading Indonesian literary history, as may be gleaned from the textbook, also enables the literature teachers to approach Indonesian literature in a comparative way by showing the similarity between Indonesia and the Philippines in the development of the genres and the assertion of the particular language used in the text. For example, during the Japanese occupation when the Japanese eradicated the use of English in the Philippine educational system and Tagalog was used to produce literary works, while in Indonesia, the Japanese occupation signaled the eradication of the Dutch rule in the archipelago, including the use of the Dutch language in institutions.

An alternative way of reading and teaching these texts is through providing activities that will help deepen the analysis of the characters and examining the thematic contents. For this end, the textbook allows for flexibility by including the works of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Ali Akbar Navis, Sitor Situmorang, Mochtar Lubis, and Umar Kayam, among others, that cover various issues relevant to deepening the understanding of our students on Indonesian's socio-cultural, political, and economic issues. These issues are as follows: the critique of patriarchy, abuse of power both in society and among individuals, injustice to women who are considered second-class citizens during the Dutch colonial era, and the value of teaching Islam. This alternative way of reading and teaching Indonesian texts is by challenging the interpretation of the literary texts or making connections between the texts' contexts and current national situation.

As indicated in the literature curriculum for high school English in the Philippines, the essential skills and learning competencies needed to evaluate the literary texts are developed alongside the understanding of various issues that highlight the role of literature in nation-building. Filipino teachers are expected to analyze these Indonesian texts as expressions of truths, philosophies, and individual or communal values within first, structural context (patterns and motifs, figure of speech and sound devices, diction, tone and mood, style, sign and referent, binary opposition, point of view and narrative techniques, rhyme and meter, organic unity, plot, character and characterization, conflict and resolution), and second, sociocultural context, third, historical context, fourth, biographical context, and fifth, linguistic context.

Overall, Ied Sitepu's textbook, *Modern Poetry and Short Story for Pre-College and Non-Indonesian Readers*, can be a helpful reference in introducing our students to other literatures that are not well-explored in the teaching of Asian literature in the Philippine English curriculum for Junior High School. This way, following the thought process of Anderson and Krathwohl (Wilson) teaching modern Indonesian poetry and fiction would also lead to a more relevant and fruitful discussion of the contexts shared by the two Southeast Asian nations. In particular, integrating Indonesian literature in the teaching of junior high school literature classes can also serve to strengthen the 7C's of 21st-century skills of the students from the P21's Framework by the World Economic Forum's 'New Vision for Education: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, computer literacy, civic literacy, and cross-cultural literacy. Doing so can also help students to improve their higher-order thinking skills in evaluating Indonesian texts. Most importantly, the activities and assessment tasks in teaching Indonesian literature can also accommodate the Philippines' Department of Education's mandate of integrating interdisciplinary or real-life issues into the content knowledge that modern Indonesian poetry and fiction carry.

The book could also prove valuable and a relevant read among the international audience, Filipino high school literature teachers and students in the Philippines. Currently, the state of teaching of world literature is plagued with the following issues: 1) the visibility and recognition of Asian literatures in the global arena; 2) the aestheticization and stereotyping of Asian and Southeast Asian literatures in the global literary landscape; 3) the universalizing evaluation of the literary merit and evaluation of Asian literatures on the basis of presumed international standards; and 4) the methodological potential and challenges of intra-Asian literary studies. While these issues in the teaching and studying of Asian literatures are more pronounced in the university context, it is nonetheless essential for the Filipino high school literature classrooms to have a wider selection of readings from Indonesia and be taught with an eye for parity vis-à-vis the works from Philippine Literature in English or in English translation.

Given the present socio-political and economic climate in our country, literature can be read both as social documents and be used as a tool to enrich the way of looking at, speaking about, and being in the world. In this way, the students would veer away from the tendency of treating literature a mere “reading” class, and their critical thinking skills can also be improved by connecting the text to real world scenarios. Hence, Ied Sitepu’s *Modern Indonesian Poetry and Short Stories for Pre-College and Non-Indonesian Readers* is a valuable contribution to Filipino teachers and students as it offers a new way of looking at, speaking about, and studying literatures of Southeast Asia in the Philippine high school classrooms.

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