

OBITUARY

*In memoriam Professor Emeritus Andries Teeuw
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*It is the poem itself that matters,
not the method that I use to scrutinize it
(Teeuw, *Suspended by words*, 1980).*

The doctoral thesis written by Andries ‘Hans’ Teeuw at the University of Utrecht is *Het Bomakawya; Een oud Javaans gedicht (The Bomakawya; An old Javanese poem)*. It indicates that his first interest in literary studies is old Javanese literature. Later development of his career as a researcher, teacher and writer, however, gives us an image of him as a scholar who not only spent most of his time studying

old manuscripts untirelessly but also was interested in almost all subjects and topics about classical as well as modern Indonesian texts. For most of us, Teeuw will be memorized as one of a small number of foreign notables in that field; he had taught, given lectures, written books, and promoted a number of Indonesian scholars not only in the field of classical studies but also in diverse fields such as linguistics, history, oral tradition and modern literature.

His interest in Indonesian culture in general and literature in particular grew strongly when he came to Indonesia in the period of 1945-1947 to conduct a research on classical Javanese literary work. He had the chance to develop his interest further during his second stay, after gaining his doctoral degree, in Indonesia as a visiting professor at the University of Indonesia in the period of 1950-1951. On his return to Holland, he chaired the Indonesian Studies Program at Leiden University. Right from the very beginning, he realized that although the Indonesian language was not the only living language that had produced literary works, Indonesian language and literature were his main interest. His first collected writings, entitled *Voltooid Voorspel* and written in Dutch, was published in 1952. With some modifications, the book was then

translated into Indonesian and published in 1955. The book is a collection of essays on Indonesian literature, especially on the figures of the so-called "45 Generation". In the Introduction of the book he says that it's time for him to publish it although his document on Indonesian literature has been very limited. He wrote his essays when he was in Jakarta where his close friend, H.B. Jassin, lived and entitled them "The living record and compendium of modern Indonesian literature". We can imagine that they often exchanged information and outlooks on the problems surrounding modern Indonesian literature.

We can see that many of their writings reflect each other, at least the fact that both had been interested in the same literary figures and subjects. The difference between their writings is that, unlike those of Jassin's, Teeuw's essays are addressed to foreign readers. That is perhaps the main reason why the book has, to a certain degree, informative features. Teeuw has to some extent successfully distanced himself from his subjects, while Jassin in his writings cannot escape a certain kind of emotional involvement because he was inseparable from and an active part of what was happening around him. But, like Jassin, Teeuw was also of the opinion that popular fiction was not well worth considering. That was the reason why he had invited a Dutch scholar, Roolvink, to contribute an essay on what he called "dime novels", mostly published in Medan, in his first book. He kept asserting, in other articles, that Balai Pustaka – a Dutch government publishing house – had initiated modern Indonesian literature. In his opinion, other literary works published by private as well as commercial publishers were of lower quality, unworthy of being mentioned.

In his later books, *Modern Indonesian literature* volumes I and II, he made a brief assertion about popular literature, saying that the tendency to publish literary books, especially fiction, in cheap edition in 1960's was an effort to offer literary works to wider audience. Those books, originally written in English, were also addressed to foreign readers, hence the informative features. The books can also be considered as his effort to inform foreign readers that modern Indonesian literature has produced some works worthy of consideration. To some extent, those books are the rewriting and continuation of his first book; in the second volume of the book he presents a landscape of the development of Indonesian literature until the 1970s. It is in his *Tergantung pada kata* 'Suspended by words' that Teeuw read and discussed literary works, in this case poetry, quite closely. This book is a collection of essays on ten poems written by different poets in which he shows not only his attitude toward literary theories but also the depth of his command of the Indonesian language. In this case, he is well above other foreign critics and essayists.

In the Introduction of the book he asserts that reading poetry is a never-ending struggle to capture the meaning of the poem. He also discloses that a good poem is a language structure, a self-contained and complete entity that bears the poet's experience and life. The statement indicates that there has been an important shift in his approach to literature. He has moved from socio-

cultural approach to structural analysis. This new attitude is evidently reflected in his later books, *Membaca dan menilai sastra* (1983) 'Reading and judging literature' and *Indonesia: antara kelisanan dan keberaksaraan* (1994) 'Indonesia: between orality and literacy', which seems to have been written particularly for Indonesian literary students and scholars. These books examine trends in the development of literary approaches and theories since the advent of what is often described as "the age of theories". In the closing remark of his last book he writes that, something he himself has asserted a "purely personal and emotional sight", there are two different worlds in Indonesian literary scene. The first is orality, represented by seminars and discussions, and the second is literacy, a place that he describes as "where writers are nurtured and feeling happy". He discloses that during his stays in Indonesia, he has kept on visiting these worlds on and off.

Reading a literary work is, according to him, a dialogue between the reader and the text. It would be a fruitful dialogue only if the reader is well equipped with literary theories; otherwise, the reading would be likely to produce far-fetched, fanciful interpretations. It is this statement that, in my opinion, has been slightly misinterpreted by most Indonesian literary students and scholars. This may cause the removing of literary works aside and put the study of theories as the principal objective of literary studies. If there is no serious effort to correct this stance, Indonesian literary studies departments would very well be renamed the literary theory studies departments.

To conclude this brief tribute to Teeuw, let us not be mistaken in listening to his remark, "It is the poem I scrutinize that matters, not the theory that I use to scrutinize it". It is only in that sense that we can gain important message from his writings.

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Ever since he decided to take "the study of the living languages of Indonesia" as his field of interest in 1938, Hans Teeuw had never been absent as an observer and a student of this particular branch of knowledge. With the declaration of its independence, Indonesia found itself a nation with its own "new" literature. Hans Teeuw tuned in by studying its new forms. While many students of literature and language doubted the viability of Indonesian as a modern language, calling it an "experiment", he wrote a history of Indonesian literature, the first of its kind.

Beside his active interest in modern Indonesian literature and its creators, all the time he kept his great love for the classical literature, which he had shown from the start by his choice of his PhD thesis, the *Bomakawya*, an epic poem in Old Javanese. Many of his Indonesian students of my generation, and the generation after, remember Hans Teeuw as the guru who introduced them to the various literary theories which had developed shortly before and

after the Second World War, especially in Europe. With his training in the European classics, he invited them to explore the hidden meanings of their own classical literature and to understand them in their own terms. That was the way he tried to understand classical Javanese literature, which beside his interest in modern literature, had remained close to his heart. A few months before he passed away, he expressed his intention to translate the *Bhomāntaka* into Dutch, to enable a larger public to enjoy its beauty.

Hans Teeuw has left an empty place.

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An excellent mentor: Professor Teeuw, Pak Teeuw, Hans

I met Professor Teeuw for the first time on 13 February 1976 in his office at Stationsplein 10 in Leiden. I was eighteen years old and had just discovered that it was possible to study Indonesian language and literature at Leiden University in the department of Southeast Asian Languages and Cultures. I had phoned the department's secretary and she set up the appointment. I was much impressed – and felt intimidated – that a “real professor” would take the time to provide a recent high school graduate with information about the Indonesian Studies programme. Whatever Professor Teeuw told me on that grey, wet and windy day – I have forgotten the details – it made me decide to register in the programme. This decision has shaped my professional and personal interests and determined the direction of my career until today. It was a turning point in my life, one that I have never regretted.

In September 1976, my first-year cohort consisted of fifteen students, four to five times more than the previous two years when respectively four and three students entered the programme. In the first semester, Professor Teeuw taught us all of the Indonesian grammar from the so-called *Leerboek Teeuw* and in the second term, we read a wide variety of literary prose, journalistic, and essayistic texts that served to increase our vocabulary and make us familiar with *Bahasa Indonesia*. Professor Teeuw also introduced us to the basics of Malay and Indonesian literature and managed to pass his passion for literature and the aesthetics of language onto us, impressionable youngsters. He particularly highlighted his appreciation for Pramoedya Ananta Toer's writings and shared his high regard for this author and critical thinker. We were in awe of Professor Teeuw's profound knowledge and admired him for his genuine enthusiasm. He had high expectations of his students and was strict but fair in marking our work.

During my second year (1977–1978), Professor Teeuw spent his sabbatical leave at Gadjah Mada University to complete the manuscript of his *Modern Indonesian literature*, Volume Two. Even though he was not one of my lecturers that year, I did meet him and his wife Joosje in Yogyakarta in the summer of 1978 while on vacation. I still felt somewhat timid vis à vis my professor who, I

had come to realize by then, was renowned for his erudition. In fact, there was no reason whatsoever to feel shy or apprehensive as “*Pak Teeuw*” (as I now called him) and *Ibu* Joosje were the most personable and welcoming couple one could encounter. The warm hospitality that I experienced during these first visits to their house in Bulak Sumur was to be continued for many more decades when I often called on their home in the Thorbeckestraat in Leiden, or during some other visits in Yogyakarta (1980) or in Berkeley, CA (1990).

Pak Teeuw supervised my MA thesis on Indonesian literature. While for me he signified mostly a scholar of modern literature, his academic endeavours and research topics were multifaceted and wide-ranging. This is reflected in his publications: Old Javanese poetry, philology, linguistics, dialect studies, dictionaries, classical Malay, modern Indonesian prose and poetry, literary criticism, Old Sundanese poems. For my MA I chose to study the novels and autobiographical narratives of the female author Nh. Dini. By this time, my own academic interests had expanded to literary criticism and theory, women’s studies, and feminist theory. As my PhD supervisor (1984–1990), Pak Teeuw wholeheartedly supported my explicitly feminist research on representations of women in modern Indonesian literature. He encouraged me to apply critical theories and approaches to the novels and stories that I had selected and, even though he was not too familiar yet with feminist scholarship, he guided me unreservedly to the completion of my dissertation. He was an excellent mentor who allowed me to explore the field of Indonesian literature on my own accord but assisted to point me in the right direction when he needed to. He was thoughtful and gentle, and to me he will always be an admirable role model who inspired not only me, but generations of students and scholars because of his own commitment to, and love for the literatures, cultures and peoples of Indonesia.

Hans Teeuw was the driving force behind the Dutch–Indonesian Cultural Agreement signed in 1975. As chairperson of the steering committee he was tremendously influential in setting up cultural and educational exchanges. He discussed policies and negotiated budgets at the highest ministerial echelons to better the chances of Dutch and Indonesian students to succeed in their fields. He did so with a keen sense of integrity and without any self-importance. He also played a significant role in improving the profile of the KITLV (Koninklijk Instituut voor de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde). With his colleague Professor E.M. Uhlenbeck he managed to enhance the international prestige of this highly specialized institution with its unique archives and special collections about Indonesia. In his typical unassuming way Hans Teeuw aimed at helping others to pursue their goals while he remained his own modest self. Anecdotally, one Indonesian perception of Hans Teeuw exemplifies him as a person without pretensions. When I first started to examine and question gender roles and expectations in Indonesia in 1980, I interviewed Dr. Boen Oemarjati, one of Hans Teeuw’s former PhD students. She reminisced how she always bristled when she saw Pak Teeuw helping *Ibu* Joosje in the kitchen drying the dishes. In her view this behaviour was not only unprofessorial,

it also did not match her Javanese-Indonesian expectation of a male bread winner. As became clear at Hans' memorial service, at home he was a caring husband and father who baked pancakes for his children and assisted his wife with household chores.

While my own interest in Indonesian literature has always focused exclusively on prose narratives, Hans' true zeal was poetry. For his dissertation (1946) he studied the Old Javanese *Bomakawya* and subsequently he published on Malay *syair* such as Ken Tambuhan and Sinyor Kosta, Old Sundanese poem, and Indonesian poetry. He greatly admired the Dutch poet Martinus Nijhoff. His children and grandchildren commemorated how he gave expression to his own poetic nature in sonnets for them on special occasions. In 1988 Hans composed a sonnet as well as a *syair* for me when I bade farewell to Leiden to start a new life and career in Vancouver, Canada. I will always cherish these personal gifts from the heart together with my recollections of Hans. At the end of his life, Hans returned to the *Bomakawya* and translated it into rhythmical Dutch to make it available for an audience in the Netherlands.

When Hans passed away on 18 May 2012, we lost not only a remarkable learned scholar of Indonesian studies but more so a magnanimous man who touched the lives and hearts of many individuals. He will continue to live on in our memory.