

## SAIR NONA FIENTJE DE FENIKS

### An Example of Popular Indonesian Fiction in the First Quarter of the Century

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If one reads any of the standard accounts of the development of modern Indonesian literature, whether those written by foreign scholars or by Indonesians themselves,<sup>1</sup> one is liable to get an exceptionally distorted picture of what reading material was available and what the readership of this material was, particularly for the period before the Second World War. The reason for this is that standard accounts have concentrated almost exclusively on works published by the official colonial publisher Balai Pustaka or produced by B. P. staff and, at least as far as prose is concerned, have ignored other publications. There are various reasons for this, but perhaps the most important is the influence exerted by Professor A. Teeuw, the pioneer<sup>2</sup> in the field of modern Indonesian literary studies. Since his early work *Vooltooid Voorspel* (1950) which was the outcome of a course of lectures on modern Indonesian literature during which, as he himself admits, he was reading the literature for the first time and simply keeping himself a little way in front of his students, Professor Teeuw has delimited the field of research and his example has been followed without much questioning by subsequent writers such as H. B. Jassin and Professor A. Johns. Professor Teeuw can hardly be blamed for what has occurred since he painstakingly dealt with all the material that was at hand to him. I don't think he himself realised when he came to write what is often taken to be the definitive account, *Modern Indonesian Literature* (1967), just how much material he

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Ajip Rosidi: *Ichttisar Sedjarah Sastra Indonesia* (1969). H. B. Jassin: *Kesusasteraan Indonesia dalam Kritik dan Esei*, 4 vols. (1967), A. H. Johns: 'Genesis of a Modern Literature', in R. McVey (ed): *Indonesia* (1963); A. Teeuw: *Modern Indonesian Literature* (1967).

<sup>2</sup> Armijn Pane had earlier written a brief synopsis of modern Indonesian literature, but the texts dealt with in this book (written in Dutch and never published in translation in book form) are the same as those dealt with by Teeuw. See Armijn Pane: *Kort Overzicht van de Moderne Indonesische Literatuur* (1949).

was ignoring and how important it was in the context of modern Indonesian social history. It has only been relatively recently, in part as a deliberate reaction against the Dutch colonial view of modern Indonesia, that the importance of what was unknown to Professor Teeuw has been brought to light by among others, P. A. Toer and his colleagues.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately for political reasons these recent researches have been curtailed because of the alleged involvement of this group of scholars in the coup of 1965. Although occasional mention is made of the necessity of continuing to investigate these matters<sup>4</sup> not much has been done within Indonesia, and outside Indonesia scholars are hampered by a lack of material, since libraries too seem to have taken their cues from Dutch scholarship. Consequently, the student of modern Indonesia unless he has a special knowledge of one or two books and articles<sup>5</sup> tends to think of modern literature developing along some such lines as follows.

Balai Pustaka established as a proper publishing house began to publish original novels with the appearance of *Azab dan Sengsara* by Merari Siregar in 1921. These early novels were written for the most part by Sumatrans, in particular Minangkabau, who had a greater facility in writing the kind of Malay which was being officially promoted by the colonial government than their Javanese counterparts whose knowledge of Malay was limited. These early novels of which the most outstanding examples were *Sitti Nurbaya* (1922) and *Salah Asuhan* (1928) were romantic in character and dealt with themes and problems peculiar to the Minangkabau community with its own very special adat and kinship systems. These novels were intended for the readership of secondary school children. Subsequently, in the 'thirties, more intellectually inclined writers tried to write a more serious type of novel which got away from the preoccupation with Minangkabau society and tried to focus on more universal problems arising from modernisation. The most successful of these attempts was *Belenggu* (1940). Modern poetry is thought

<sup>3</sup> The results of their researches were published in the weekly cultural column (Lentera) of *Bintang Timur* from 1963 to 1965.

<sup>4</sup> See for example the essay "Perlu Peningkatan Penelitian Sastra Indonesia" in Ajip Rosidi: *Masalah Angkatan dan Periodisasi Sedjarah Sastra Indonesia* (1973).

<sup>5</sup> Those interested might care to consult the following: Bakri Siregar: *Sedjarah Sastra Indonesia Modern* (1964); V. V. Sikorskii: *Indoneskiya Literatura* (1964); Nio Joe Lan: *Sastra Indonesia-Tionghoa* (1962).

to have begun with the publications of sonnets modelled from Dutch examples in cultural magazines sponsored by nationalistically inclined youth movements. The poems by M. Yamin published in *Jong Sumatra* in 1921 are usually considered to be the first modern poems. Although Balai Pustaka did publish one or two collections of verse, for the most part poetry was handled by private publishers. Medan was apparently an important centre for the publication of poetry. The themes of the poetry were lyrical and romantic and derived from imitation of Dutch romantic poets of the 'eighties and a contemporary fascination with esoteric Eastern culture as reflected in the works of Tagore and the publications of the Theosophical movement. The great cultural debate of the period, constantly discussed in the journals and newspapers of the time was whether Indonesia should go all out and adopt Western civilization as a model for development or whether there was a special Indonesia or Eastern pattern which should be the foundation of future progress. Contemporaneous with this cultural debate the nationalist movement was picking up momentum, and, although perhaps not yet a political force of any consequence, was nevertheless gaining a certain amount of notoriety from the activities of some of its leaders, most notably Sukarno.

The trouble with this account is that it's true as far as it goes but it doesn't go very far. As in most histories of twentieth century Indonesia which are political histories one finds here no appreciation of the social dimensions of the changes occurring during this period. What it was that the majority of people were thinking, feeling and living through during this time is simply ignored. If one wants to find out, one has got to peruse travel accounts, travelers' journals, eye-witness reports, souvenir books of societies and organizations, or one has to read the newspapers and journals with a discriminating eye, forgetting for a moment the headlines and concentrating on minor items, the advertisements, criminal reports and so on. In doing this, piece by piece a picture emerges of the society of the time which is quite unlike the standard accounts, although admittedly it too has its bias in that the picture is drawn largely in terms of what was going on in the urban centres, and doesn't provide all that much information of what was going on in the villages. There are of course a number of studies of rural sociology but on the whole one reads them without getting any sense of the "feel" of the period. Far better, if they are available, to read biographies and autobiographies

which although written with an upper class perspective, can provide interesting insights. Alternatively one can read the heavily tinted *Indisch* (Indies novels written by Dutchmen), and, peering between the lines, understand much.

As far as the standard account of the development of literature is concerned the distortions are particularly great when one realises that the majority of novels written by Minangkabau and dealing largely with Minangkabau problems were mostly incomprehensible to the book-buying public in Java, both from the point of view of language and in understanding the peculiarly Sumatran point of many of the stories. Their saving grace is that the stories are well-constructed and interesting and a number of them, although usually dealing with Minangkabau protagonists, are set in Java, which would lend them some familiarity for Javanese readers. Apart from the occasional glimpse one gets of an urban way of life in some of these novels (I am thinking now of novels like *Karam Dalam Gelombang Pertjintaan*. *Tak Membalas Budi, Nasib*) there is very little that can be gathered from them about what was going on in Javanese society (Javanese referring here to the island rather than the ethnic group). This needs stressing because too many scholars, it seems to me, have focused on the sociological implications of the literature without being aware of the methodological problems involved. I have tried to show in an earlier article how attempts to derive information of an anthropological nature about Minangkabau society from these novels is a dangerous business.<sup>6</sup> It should be clear, then, to try to reach conclusions of a general nature about what was happening in Indonesia as a whole, based on the evidence of these novels, is a procedure which should be regarded with great suspicion. It is fairly easy to extract a few relevant themes from well-known novels and then calibrate them with a few observations about Indonesian society, but the value of such work is non-existent. The only legitimate sociological observations one can make are limited to a study of the writers themselves in particular the changes of consciousness revealed in the shifts of emphasis within the corpus of one particular novelist or the different kinds of consciousness between one writer and another which a comparison between their works brings to light. To go, then, to Balai Pustaka novels for information about Indonesian society in general is to proceed in error,

<sup>6</sup> See "The Social Universe of the Minangkabau Novels" in *Sumatran Research Bulletin*. April, 1973.

indeed to sift any literature for information about attitudes and general perceptions of society is problematic.

Having said this I should perhaps explain what I am trying to do in what follows. In contrast to the novels in Malay published by Balai Pustaka between 1917 and 1942, which number about forty or fifty at an intelligent guess, it has recently become clear that there were hundreds, if not thousands, of novels published outside Balai Pustaka between 1900 and 1942. Although there is no direct evidence of this in terms of circulation figures, it seems reasonable to say that in Java, at least, the readership of these novels was several times greater than that of Balai Pustaka works. In just the same way it is reasonable to conclude today that the readers of "*silat*" (adventure stories involving heroes of superhuman powers, usually translated or adapted from Chinese originals) far outnumber the readers of the publications of the officially sponsored Pustaka Jaya which are of far superior literary quality. Any observer of the book stands round Banteng in Jakarta, or in the market area of Padang could confirm this. If, then, one wants to get some idea of what people were reading at this period, it is to these works one should turn. One shouldn't expect to find anything of outstanding literary merit in these works, although occasionally the writing is remarkably good, but there are features of interest which deserve to be investigated. One of these is the language of these works. Usually in this context one meets terms such as Bahasa Melayu-Tionghua (Chinese-Malay) or Bahasa Melayu Rendah (Low Malay, distinguished from High Malay, the language of Balai Pustaka publications) or Bahasa Melayu casar (Market Malay), but none of these terms has been defined sufficiently accurately, and no single one encompasses the range of the language with its borrowings both semantic and syntactic from Bahasa Betawi (the Jakartan dialect), Sundanese, Javanese, Chinese and Dutch. I shall give some examples of this later. As far as I know, although occasional reference is made to this linguistic hotch-potch in most accounts of the development of the Indonesian language, there has been no detailed research in this field. If it was to be undertaken, it is to these early literary works and to the journals of the period that the researcher would have to turn.

Another interesting feature of these works is the information they provide about a style of life seen in what I referred to earlier as the occasional glimpse. Here I should stress that I don't mean the kind of information about the sociology of change which I ques-

tioned earlier. What I have in mind is the occasional description of fact: dress, entertainment, habit, custom; exactly the kind of descriptions one meets in the travellogues, which taken together contribute to a general picture of a way of life. This incidental information abounds in these stories, and when the social history of Java in the twentieth century eventually comes to be written they will be an invaluable source material.

A third feature which interests me is the light which these works throw on the development of a modern literary consciousness. Modern literature or, to be more precise, a modern literary form such as the novel does not spring up overnight and the shape in which it does eventually emerge depends on particular historical and cultural antecedents. What we have in examples of modern literature of the early twentieth century in Indonesia is literary form in embryo. Although translations from foreign sources take a large share in determining this form, and therefore determining what readers are to expect from literature or fiction, there are, nevertheless, indigenous elements which also in part contribute to the making of a literature conscious public. Again this is perhaps something which emerges more clearly from the work published outside Balai Pustaka since the novels published by the latter were determined as far as their construction was concerned by imitating the form of European popular novels.

In what follows I want to show how one particular text can be read for information on these three features, thereby, I hope, suggesting the possibilities which a thorough examination of many such texts would reveal in these different fields of socio-linguistics, social and cultural history. I have mentioned elsewhere<sup>7</sup> that one of the most enduring of types of literary writing that are to be found in modern Indonesian literature is the crime story based on actual events. This is the same kind of interest that the English reading public has in murder cases which has led to the popularity of the *Chamber of Horrors* and the familiarity with the names of famous murderers: Jack the Ripper, Palmer, Crippen, Christie. And in just the same way as in England many of these characters have become the subject of books and plays, so in Indonesia too, famous crimes have become literary subjects, but whereas in England it is predominantly the theme of murder—how the murderer tries to escape detection and how he

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<sup>7</sup> See "Some Preliminary Remarks on the Antecedents of Modern Indonesian Literature," *Bijdragen T. L. V.*, vol. 127 no. 4, 1971.

is eventually detected and caught, thus bringing the reader the satisfaction of seeing justice done — which is of main interest, in Indonesia the popular stories are not concerned with murder *per se*, but with the combination of murder and passion, the figure of the *femme fatale* and the disreputable world of brothels, criminal gangs and devilish villains. And even more obviously then in the English examples great care is taken to point the moral that justice never prospers, although this is often appended in such a way that the reader is so conscious of its artificiality that he ignores it.

Just recently I have come across one of the classic examples of this type of fiction, an account of a series of events which took place in Batavia between 1912 and 1915 connected with the murder of one Fientje de Feniks. The subsequent arrest and trial of the murderer appear to have aroused great public interest, and as a result three books were published which gave a fairly extensive account of what happened.<sup>8</sup> In addition to these prose versions an adaptation was written in *syair* form by the same author (the *syair* is a type of Malay verse). The *syair* usually has the advantage of brevity over prose, and the language is uncomplicated and the rhyme and metrical schemes are simple. These factors combined to make the form particularly popular at this time, especially as a vehicle to carry fairly straightforward narratives without much poetic elaboration. A number of *syair* had been written dealing with contemporary crimes and usually these had been based on a prior prose account. The most famous of these *syair* were probably *Sair Njai Dasima* and *Sair Rossina* both very popular stories of Batavian life in the nineteenth century. *Sair Nona Fientje de Feniks* is in this tradition, but as we shall see with some interesting differences.

Tan Boen Kim<sup>9</sup> was apparently an autodidact whose works were extremely popular. He began writing round about 1912, that is, just after the death of Lie Kim Hok the pioneer and the most well-known of all Chinese writers in Malay. Most of Tan Boen Kim's works to which I have had access or know about are concerned with the Chinese community in Indonesia although he did write or adapt (?) one or two novels set in China itself and he also wrote stories about Javanese society. All in all he seems to have been very prolific. One

<sup>8</sup> The titles of these books were: *Fientje de Feniks*, *Njai Aisa* and *G. Brinkman*.

<sup>9</sup> For some information about Tan Boen Kim see Nio Joe Lan, *op. cit.*

of his particular interests, of which the Fientje de Feniks stories are an example, was the re-telling of famous contemporary crimes. Besides the three short books and the syair on the Fientje de Feniks case he also wrote accounts of a famous murder of passion *Si Riboet* (1916), an account of the operations of a Chinese gang c. 1920 *Si Tjengkrong*, and an account of another gang involved in burglary cases, *Rampok di Grisee* (1918). This last book contains photos of criminals involved.

The story of Fientje de Feniks as related in the syair is as follows. Fientje de Feniks, a Eurasian, is a society prostitute. When the story begins she is waiting impatiently in her house for her current lover, Baba Sia Katja Mata, a rich Chinese of a respectable family. Before visiting Fientje Baba Sia has stopped off at the "raison" where he first met her and there he converses for a short while with the madame of the house, an old decaying Dutch beauty now given to smoking opium. Eventually he leaves and goes to see Fientje and together the pair of them go to the theatre. There Fientje attracts the excitement of an Indo-Dutchman, Willem Frederik Gramser Brinkman. After the performance Brinkman approaches her pretending to recognize in her someone he met in Semarang. From this conversation, conducted in Dutch so that Baba Sia can't understand, Brinkman obtains permission to call and see her. This he does a few days later and although nothing "happens" on this occasion — the writer says this is a deliberate piece of strategy on Brinkman's part — the relationship between them is established. About this time Fientje learns from second-hand that Baba Sia is intending to get married and, feeling hurt because he had concealed this from her, she decides to break off the relationship with him, and thus he quietly drops out of the story. Brinkman then becomes Fientje's "keeper" and at first everything works well, then suddenly without reason (and with very poor rhyme) the relationship sours and they grow cool towards each other. Fientje is rarely at home and this makes Brinkman jealous. On one occasion she is absent from home for a number of days and Brinkman goes wild with jealousy looking for her. Eventually he meets her by chance in the street and after a few minutes conversation persuades her to go with him. He takes her to a hotel in a lonely part of town and there murders her. He is arrested and stands trial and although at first convicted an appeal which he makes is successful and he is freed. During the time he was in prison he



made the acquaintance of a certain Johan Emil Soffing, a fellow prisoner, and on his release Brinkman goes to live with Soffing. The two of them embark on a dedicated life of crime, one of Brinkman's intentions being to steal enough morphine so that he can poison the witnesses who gave evidence against him at his trial. They get involved with a third partner a young soldier called Shafma who has a mistress called Aisah. Shafma deserts his barracks intending to set up house with Aisah and accepts Brinkman's invitation to join them. Eventually however Shafma is caught and imprisoned and Aisah having nowhere to turn to asks Brinkman and Soffing to help to spring Shafma which they promise to do. Some time goes by but Brinkman shows no sign of helping Shafma instead he begins to worry that Aisah might be a danger to their security and so with Soffing's reluctant approval he decides to murder her. Pretending that they are going to help Shafma they persuade Aisah to follow them and take her to a deserted spot. There they murder her and after stripping her of her clothes and taking away distinguishing items they return. The corpse is found and investigations are set under way. Suspicion falls on Brinkman and Soffing and the police are careful this time to collect a great deal of incriminating evidence. At the trial Brinkman tries to use the same evasive tactics which he used on the previous occasion, but this time to no avail. The trial arouses a great deal of public interest and, it appears, sympathy for Brinkman. Soffing, who throughout has been portrayed very much as the dupe of Brinkman is sentenced to twenty years imprisonment and Brinkman himself is sentenced to death. He plans all sorts of maneuvers to stay his execution, from trying to persuade Soffing to admit to sole responsibility, to planning to escape from prison, but all these plans fail. Finally the night before his execution he hangs himself in his cell. At the burial of the corpse there is a large number of mourners and a number of wreaths are sent and so ends the story. The writer of the syair himself seems to have taken an ambivalent attitude. On the one hand he describes Brinkman's deeds without any attempt to apologise for them or defend them, yet the full title of the syair *Nona Fientje de Feniks and all her victims* seems to indicate that Brinkman's crimes are all the result of his having fallen prey to the charms of a *femme fatale*.

So much for the story. Let us now look at the form of the syair a bit more closely. The book was published in Batavia by Kho Tjeng

Bie and Co. in 1923. The work is divided up into thirteen chapters each chapter comprising between seven to twenty nine verses (average about sixteen verses). Each verse contains six lines and within each verse the same rhyme is used for the ending of each line. There appears to be no regularity whatsoever. The number of words in a line vary between about nine and fourteen and the number of syllables too varies without any regularity. Strictly then, this is not a syair despite its claim to be. The syair form follows a very strict pattern consisting of a four-line, four word (pronouns, prepositions and conjunctions not counting as full words) rhyme scheme a, a, a, a. The lines are end stopped and there is usually a caesura after the second word. Here is an example from *Sair Tjerita Njaie Dasima* (first edition 1897).

Dikarang sair moela pertama  
Sair tjerita Njaie Dasima  
Belon ada sebrapa lama  
Di Kampoeng Koeripan dia beroema

(And now the syair is begun/ the syair which tells the tale  
of Njai Dasima/ who not so long ago/ lived in Kampung  
Kuripan)

This is quite different from:

Itoe nona ada doedoek di satoe roewangan deket djoeroesan  
pintoe,  
Fientje de Feniks, begitoelah ada namanya nona yang  
doedoek itoe  
Dalam golongan bidadari doenia, Fientje ada terkenal  
sebagai goela-goela jang nomor satoe,  
Pengawakannja kentjang, pinggangnja, langsing, parasnja  
eilok soeda boleh dibilang tentoe,  
Ramboetnja jang itam dan gomplok, alisnja kerang, matanja  
tjejli, ada membikin roepanja sabagi Ratoe  
Bibirnya jang mera delima, djikaloe ia bersenjoem ada  
kaliatan manis seperti goela batoe.

(The woman sat in a room near the door/ Fientje de Feniks, that  
was the name of the woman who sat there/ Among all the world's  
nymphs, Fientje was known as the best of mistresses./ Her figure  
was trim, her waist narrow and of course her face was beautiful./ Her  
hair was thick and black her eyebrows fine (?) her eyes bright,  
all making her look like a queen/ Her lips were as red as the delima  
and if she smiled it looked as sweet as sugar cubes)

Clearly something has happened to the concept of the syair here. Again I think this is a problem which has not yet been sufficiently

investigated. Although poems in traditional syair form continued to be written there had been a number of experiments at writing a new type of verse — still called syair <sup>7</sup> long before the publication of Yamin's sonnets. These experiments were not universally successful as the example above amply demonstrates, yet they nevertheless deserve to be studied. One possible starting point might be the poem *Siti Akbari* by Lie Kim Hok, a poem originally published in 1884 which did successfully experiment with new forms. Here for example is the first verse.

Pada waktœ boeroeng-boeroeng barœ tinggalkan sarang  
Ija itœ pada waktœ hari barœ djadi torang  
Dalam Barbari soedah ada banjak orang  
Jang terbangkit akan mendjoewal dan membli barang

(When birds were leaving their nests/ that is when it was just  
growing light/ there were already a lot of people in Barbary/ who  
had risen to go about their trading/)

This isn't the place to examine what was happening in detail, but I should perhaps state what I think happened in broad terms. The original syair form was popular as a vehicle for straightforward narrative perhaps even more popular than prose. (By 1922 *Sair Njaie Dasima* had gone through six editions, while the original prose version only went into a second edition in 1926). Writers therefore took to the syair as a means of reaching a large popular audience. The popularity of the form continued right through to the 'thirties when it was noticeable for example, that books of syair published by Balai Pustaka were among their most popular publications. Towards the end of the nineteenth century writers had however, attempted to experiment and break away from the original form being perhaps fed up with the monotony and requiring more flexibility. They did, however, retain the original rhyme scheme. To judge from the popularity of *Siti Akbari* which went into a third edition in 1922 these experiments were successful with the public, and writers were encouraged to experiment further. By 1923 when *Sair None Fientje de Feniks* was published experiment had reached such a stage where only the rhyme scheme was retained and it was only this plus the appearance of the lines on the page which made it resemble verse. To all intents and purposes it could have been written in prose.

The writer himself clearly felt uneasy about writing in what he thought was verse. For example, at the end of the *syair* he concludes by saying:

Writing a *syair* in verses of six lines is truly a very difficult business/ A *syair* can't speak as well as a story in prose, because the words are so sparing (*himat*)/ If you want to know more clearly we suggest with all respect that you read the prose version.

It seems an extraordinary but very honest admission by a writer who has just taken some trouble to write a *syair*. On another occasion too, when describing the proceedings at the first trial he writes:

Because the *Sair* can't find sufficient words the trial can't be described clearly.

Tan Boem Kim clearly felt ill at ease trying to write verse and expressed his uneasiness without a blush in these asides. Presumably he felt compelled to try his hand at it because stories in verse were so popular during this period.

The language used in the *syair* is a farrago of words picked out of different languages and dialects and is, one imagines, representative of the kind of colloquial, daily language spoken in Batavia. Some examples of these unusual words will perhaps give some idea of this. There are a lot of Dutch words not found commonly in Indonesian usage at present, for example, *bestel* (order), *lid* (member), *acteur* (actor), *tekenon* (signature) *chauffeur*. From the Sundanese there are *dahar* (eat), *neng* (miss); from the Javanese *manda* (put up with), *angot* (delirium) *kalap* (possessed); from the Chinese *soehian* (brothel) and *djitoe* (just right), from the Jakarta dialect *gompiok* (thick, luxuriant) *liplap* (half-caste, two-tone). There are even examples of Malay usage which are not now commonly used in Indonesian *suka-hati* (happy, glad) for which *bergembira* is now used and *kasoet* (shoes) for *sepatu*. This list is by no means exhaustive since it wasn't my intention to do a linguistic analysis of the text, but it does, I hope, give an indication of the variegated nature of the language of the period.

Another interesting aspect of the language is the peculiarity of some of the grammatical usages which are not found in the standard Malay of Balai Pustaka, but which are found today in spoken Indonesian and, increasingly, written Indonesian. I think the evidence of these examples goes a long way towards supporting the contention

of those who argue that the Indonesian language which emerged during the Japanese occupation and during the time of Revolution derived more from the colloquial Malay spoken in the major towns and sea-ports of the archipelago rather than from the officially sponsored Malay of Balai Pustaka. Here are some examples of constructions and usages:

1. *Koetika meliat tangan aloes memegang botol hatinja Brinkman seperti katarik dengan ilmoe*

(When he saw her soft hand holding the bottle, Brinkman's heart felt as though attracted by magic).

Here the construction *katarik dengan ilmoe* is taken from the Javanese where the *ka* prefix indicates the passive and where normal Indonesian would be *tertarik* (if the construction *keburu nafsu* which is commonly used today).

2. *Itoe waktoe* (that time) rather than the usual Malay *waktoe itoe*. This inversion which is now more or less accepted in colloquial language is said to be the result of Chinese influence as is the following:

3. a) *Fientje tida' poenja itoe pikiran* (that was not Fientje's intention) rather than *itoe boekan pikiran Fientje*;  
 b) *jang ada dalam ia poenja sakoe* (which was in her bag) rather than *dalam sakoenja*

This use of *punya* (to have) to express possession is fairly widespread now (if Sukarno's famous *Aku punya mau* — I have a wish, my wish is) although it is still associated with Indonesian spoken by Chinese-Indonesians. In this *syair* it is heavily used.

4. *Di atas itoe sado ada doedoek* ... (in that carriage sat ...) rather than *Diatas sado itoe doedoek*.

The use of *ada* is redundant here, and is still not acceptable in modern Indonesia. The superfluous use of *ada* (is) in this way is often said to be the common fault of Europeans learning Indonesian (of the English "was sitting"). It is also perhaps an example of Chinese usage transferred into Indonesian, which seems to be the case here. Quite by the way it is interesting to observe that the use of *ada* and *adalah* is far more frequent in Malaysian than it is in Indonesian, presumably because of the influence of English.

There are also examples of morphological changes not found in Balai Pustaka Indonesian.

5. *Jang doeloe pakardja'an ngeboedjang ia soeda perna lamar*  
(who had previously applied for a job as a servant).

The use of the prefix 'ng-' here is a typical Jakartan usage where Indonesian uses 'me-', 'ng-' is used fairly commonly now in Indonesia particularly among those (particularly students) who like to sprinkle their conversation with Jakartanisms to show their cosmopolitanism. Some Jakartan words such as *ngobrol* (chat) and *ngomong* (speak) are used universally.

6. *Koetika sasoedanja dibilangin begitoe* (After this was said)

The suffix "-in" instead of "-kan" or instead of a zero morpheme in Indonesian is also common Jakarta usage and is used frequently in the syair. In one verse for example, the following rhymes occur "tjeritain", "tjari'in", "djandji'in", "loepain," "mati-in", "pasti-in". Again this Jakartan usage is fairly common even outside Jakarta.

7. *Fientje menanggoeken katjinta'an* (Fientje waited for her lover).

Here, and in fact throughout the syair, the suffix "-ken" is preferred to the Indonesian "-kan". Possibly this is simply a spelling irregularity but more likely, I think, we have a Sundanese usage which is occasionally used, particularly in West Java, as an alternative to "-kan".

All these are simply a few of the more obvious examples and the list is by no means exhaustive, and even though I might have wished it to be I'm not sufficiently qualified to be able to make a thorough linguistic analysis. Nevertheless I hope these few examples are of sufficient interest to persuade those expert in the field that this text and others like it provide much material for anyone interested in the history and development of Indonesian and perhaps more than any other source they give a good impression of the language used during this important period.

And in just the same way as the language hasn't been purified or touched up to conform to certain artificially set standards (as was the case with Balai Pustaka published works, for example), so too the content of these stories hasn't been subject to the censoring of the

Balai Pustaka editorial board. Balai Pustaka was particularly censorious over issues of sexual morality and those scenes which were thought to offend current standards of morality were carefully suppressed. This wasn't the case with other publishers who occasionally published books which were deliberately salacious. On the other hand writers themselves at times self-imposed their own censorship even when dealing, as is the case here, with subjects which are potentially pornographic. There is one rather amusing example of this is *Fientje de Fenijs*. The author at a critical scene writes as follows:

Sasoeda menoetoep pintoe kamar, Brinkman dan nona Fien  
berdoea lantas naek ditempat peradoean,

Apakah jang marika itoe bikin??? — Itoelah sama sekali ampir  
tida kataoean,

Maskipoen hal ini kita taoe adalah amat soeker boear boeat ditoe-  
toerken dengan perkata'an

.....

Berselang satoe djam, seleselah kadoeanja orang jang bertjinta  
itoe maenken ..... ?? lelakonnja komedi,

Sakaloearnja ia dari toneel(?) [sic] marika itoe doedoek  
kembali ditempat yang tadi.

(After they had shut the door of the room, Brinkman and nona Fientje climbed up on the trysting bed/ What did they do? This is something which is absolutely almost (sic) unknown to us/ Although we might know what it was it's exceptionally difficult to put into words ...../ An hour passed. The two lovers had finished playing .....? their scene of comedy./ After they came out of the performance (?) they sat down again in their previous places)

Is Tan Boen Kim being deliberately coy here, or is there a genuine feeling of embarrassment? Either way the passage is amusing.

Taken as a whole this story gives an interesting view on a class of society and a kind of life which we should have difficulty learning about from other sources, certainly one couldn't find out much about it from Balai Pustaka novels. What we have here is a description rather rough and raw, but providing an insight, nevertheless, into the demi-monde of Batavian society. Of course I'm not suggesting that the description of such a society is intrinsically more interesting than the subject of Balai Pustaka novels, but I am saying that if one were led by the latter to ignore what was going on in

this social group at that period one's picture of the social life would be incomplete, and therefore we should be grateful that the literature does exist which gives us an idea of the seamy side of life. But in addition to learning about the whoring habits of the Dutch and Chinese (a subject which soon becomes tedious) we can also through careful reading get to know much about the general social life of the period. For example there are long descriptions of dress in this *syair*. There is also a lengthy description of a theatrical entertainment which includes a lion-taming act. There are numerous mentions of cars and taxis and various types of carriage. An outing to Bogor by train is also recounted. All these details if cumulatively taken add up to an interesting picture of the society of the period. Clearly from one text one can't attempt to reconstruct a whole social history, but I would argue that a careful study of many such texts would enable the diligent scholar to produce a fascinating portrait of the period between 1880 and 1942. Something of this kind has been done for the Dutch Indo-European community by R. Nieuwenhuys and Tjalie Robinson, yet much more, I feel, is still to be done. Up till just recently the scholar might justifiably have complained of the lack of sufficient material to enable him to carry out such a study, but lately a very large number of texts have become available both in the metropolitan museum of the special district in Jakarta (D.K.I.) and also at the library of the Universiti Kebangsaan in Kuala Lumpur. My description of *Fientje de Feniks* isn't even the tip of an iceberg, it's the tip of a tip, which I hope may encourage social historians to look more intensively at the material.

Finally a word or two about the literary assumptions underlying the structure of the story. The most obvious point is that the writer hasn't really appreciated the difference between a factual report and a story. The clearest point of difference is in the operation of a principle of selection. The writer of a story selectively describes events and characters so that there is an interdependence and an interrelation between them, thus a narrative pattern is built up which lends to some sort of climax. In a straightforward account of what happens, on the other hand, the writer simply tries to piece together chronologically everything which is known to have happened. There is no search for relevant interconnections; the factual report is simply the raw material out of which the imaginative writer later constructs his fiction. Tan Boen Kim seems unaware of the



need to shape his material. The writer of *Sair Njaie Dasima* is, far superior to him in this respect, since there the story is carefully constructed with a beginning, a middle, and end which sustains the readers' interest throughout. In *Fientje de Feniks* numerous threads are taken up which lead nowhere. After going to some trouble to describe the character of Baba Sia Katja-mata, for example, this character is suddenly dropped and disappears completely from the reader's sight. Other characters, too, appear only never to reappear again, such as Brinkman's friend at the theatre, Piet, or Jeannie Oort, the brothel keeper. Fientje shows a pistol to a friend leading the reader to expect that this preludes some scene where the pistol will be used, but this is not the case. The very title of the book and the opening passage gives the reader a false idea of what most of the *syair* is about. Fientje is murdered half way through and the rest of the story about Fientje are thereby frustrated. In terms of organising a pattern the structure is weak, critical points in the narrative are glossed over or simply ignored. The most glaring of these is in the passage describing the disintegration of the relationship between Brinkman and Fientje. After describing in some detail an outing to Bogor when the relationship was still very fresh the writing proceeds as follows:

Kaloe dilihat begitoe, njatalah perhoeboenganja itoe doea orang  
ada rapat sekali,

Karapetan mana soeker ditjari, maski dengan seorang sekal,  
(sc. sekali) poen soesa boeat dibeli,

Begitoelah katjinta'annja Fientje da (sic) Feniks dan Gramser  
Brinkman sabelonnja sampe di boelan Juli,

Satoe apa sebabnja, keonjoeng koenjoeng perhoeboengan itoe  
kaliatan genting ia poenja tali,

Hingga dari wates itoe, pengidoepannja nona Fien tida lagi seperti  
jang bermoela kali,

Kerna itoe waktoe orang dapatken perhoeboengan jang tadinja  
begitoe rapet djadi renggang kembali

(It would appear, then, that the relationship between these two was very close/. Indeed a closer relationship would be hard to find; even with money it would be difficult to purchase/. This was the love of Fientje de Feniks and Gramser Brinkman up till the month of July/. Then for some reason, suddenly the tie between them grew tense/. So from that time on nona Fien's life was not as it was when the relationship which had once been so close had become slack again)

For the previous few pages the writing has been building up to this point where the relationship between Fientje and Brinkman reaches its climax, and the reader is expecting to find a correspondingly long description of the period of happiness, yet suddenly just as he is prepared to savour this, he is told in two brief lines, quite out of proportion with the importance of the event that the relationship breaks up for no specified reason. His expectations are again thwarted and the whole story appears unsatisfactory. These examples show just how primitive narrative technique could be at the time, yet this was, it would appear, a stage through which the sensibility of reader and writer had to pass before a higher level of literary awareness could be reached. Other works of the same period dealing with crimes and actual events had achieved greater sophistication, but as a whole this was still an experimental period when writers were trying both to gauge what the public wanted and at the same time write something they thought was reasonably good.

This kind of literature could I think be profitably compared with the ballads and broadsheets of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England where the reporting of crimes and murder cases is still rough and unshaped. It was of course from these sources that such plays as *Arden of Feversham*, *The Miseries of an Enforced Marriage*, and at a later date *The London Merchant* came to be written. What is an interesting point of comparison in the development of both modern English Literature and modern Indonesian Literature is that in both cases the transition from an essentially aristocratic, classical, written literature, to a popular literature for the populace at large was initiated by the spread of journalistic accounts of crimes and unusual events which later became the source material out of which imaginative writers worked colourful stories which excited the interest of a large public. I hope to elaborate on this comparison at a later date.

*Sair Nona Fientje de Feniks* is far from being a good or even mediocre piece of literature and for anyone whose interests are purely literary (if it is possible to use literary in this way) I would hesitate to recommend it. Nevertheless I hope that I have done sufficiently to indicate that to anyone interested in the development of Indonesian urban culture and society in the first quarter of this century, the book has its own fascinations, and this gives some indication of the copious material about this period still to be studied.