



## Review

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**Launch *Lolong Anjing di Bulan* by Arafat Nur**

**Hosted by University of Sanata Dharma Dies Natalis Program.**

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**Review *Lolong Anjing di Bulan* – English Language Translation**

As *Lolong Anjing di Bulan* is my introduction to Arafat Nur's writing, I can't compare it to any of his other work, some of which have won literary awards. From this one novel, I draw the conclusion that Nur writes with one thing, and one thing only, in mind: love. He loves his world — the world of words. He loves life and, above all, he loves mankind.

In *Lolong Anjing di Bulan*, the Aceh landscape appears vividly on the page. Readers who are used to the scenery of paddy fields, fodder crops, and trenches — typical of Java countryside — will be taken by the difference in the Acehnese landscape depicted in this novel. The everyday life of a population of farmers, placed amid turmeric fields, coconut groves, and plots of mountain rice, immediately engages the reader. Nazir, the narrator, as well as his parents and sisters are vividly present. The reader can also easily envision the story of Nazir's grandfather and grandmother, whose lives end tragically.

Because Nur's writing finds its essence in love, I did not find the passages that described violence — such as reducing a body to bloody, broken bones — excessive. While Nur addresses neither the government's nor the rebels' brutality harshly, his powerful writing still stirs the reader's conscience.

Every human being is called upon to protect and love the life God has endowed us with. God, alone, is the owner of life. War denies all of this. From the very beginning, this novel attests to the vanity of war. We are supposed to highly regard the culture of life, and war is a celebration of death.

From the many eloquent passages in which Nur describes Aceh's dark history, my favorite is the description of a harvest in his grandfather's banana orchard. While the writing here turns anthropocentric, it still describes life. In the interest of time, I will simply quote a paragraph.

*Once every three months, a banana wholesaler would come in a Chevrolet pickup with two workers dressed in dark uniforms. The two workers would walk through the orchard, looking for banana clusters that were ready to be harvested. With their sharp machetes, they expertly cut through the soft trunks of banana plants. The first slash was applied with measured strength, in the middle of the trunk, and*

*left the plant still erect. The slanted, second slash caused the plant to bend slowly, as if offering its fruit respectfully.* (Nur p.124 *Blood Moon over Aceh*)

I'm still trying to figure out why this passage affects me so much. While I haven't pondered intensively over the author's metaphor, I feel it is safe to assume that here, Nur tells his reader that if nature is treated kindly, it will treat us well in return. The bountiful harvest which provides the family with a livelihood is the result of the grandfather's painstaking care of the banana grove. Ironically, it is in that exact banana grove that little Nazir is introduced to the meaning of the word *resistance*.

The passage describes frightened young Nazir witnessing soldiers pillaging his grandfather's banana grove while unsuccessfully looking for rebels. When the soldiers take off with a bunch of ripe bananas, Nazir understands why the Acehnese rebels are not afraid of the soldiers. They do not believe that the military presence was meant to protect the people. With his young mind, Nazir concludes that war derives from a passion to resist. A notion much stronger than fear.

This novel is a statement of reconciliation evidenced by Nur representing both sides equally on the page: the villagers' hatred and fear, and the angry frustration of determined, uniformed individuals persecuting rebels who seem to be present everywhere.

Nur points out the succession of calamities that would befall a family if one of the family members joined the resistance movement. As a result of Nazir's uncle Arkam being a commander in the rebellion, Nazir loses all of his loved ones. The army, without mercy, eliminated everyone suspected of being a rebel.

Nazir is not motivated by revenge when he decides to take up weapons. Yearning for life, he wants to end the perpetuation of killing and acts on *si vis pacem, para bellum* – if you want peace, prepare for war.

I conclude that through *Lolong Anjing di Bulan*, Nur encourages everyone to read as much as possible. Literature indeed enriches the imagination while discouraging intolerance. Nur provides us with examples of this in his writing, which is a testament of his own deep love for literature, life, and humanity.

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