

Pram on the Net

Pramoedya Ananta Toer barely lived on the net. Using Google Trends (<http://www.google.com/trends>), the volume of searches for 'Pramoedya' did not reach measurable levels except on one occasion -- the day he died. Most of those searches came from servers in Bandung and Jakarta. Shortly after, Pram again disappeared from the collective virtual mind. Amazing, eh?

Offline man

Pram seldom authorized his works to be placed online. Instead, he lived off royalties from print versions of them. Pram's generation was mostly not net-literate, nor was he. Limited by mostly slow dialup connections in the Jakarta area during Indonesia's net takeoff era in the mid-1990s, Pram would have cursed online work even if he had done it more.

Throughout Indonesia, fast connections still exist mainly in big offices and some internet kiosks (warnet), not places he frequented. Connections from home, where Pram spent so much of his later years, comprise a small fraction of these two main access points.

The few sites dedicated to documenting Pram's life unfortunately didn't generate the traffic to make it into Google's graphs. For example, see the usage measures for the most visited site on Pram (http://www.alex.com/data/details/traffic_details?&compare_sites=&y=r&q=&size=medium&range=&url=radix.net/~bardsley/prampage.html).

Some might argue there are so few sites focused on Pram due to fear. I'm inclined to doubt this. In the so-called 'apakabar database' (<http://www.library.ohiou.edu/indopubs/search/search.html>) which covers the period 1990-2002, over 500 postings deal with Pram. Creating specialized sites anonymously on foreign servers was then, and remains now, no big deal. Speculating, I'd guess Pram's literary antagonists, some heavily involved in net ventures, decided not to make this a priority task.

Half-full glass

The vast majority of scholarly papers written on Pram's work are available only in licensed proprietary databases. Nice for anyone working at or attending a university with a budget to support access.

This is not to say nothing's out there. Go to Google Advanced Search

(http://www.google.com/advanced_search), type "pramoedya ananta toer" in the "exact phrase" box and then choose to see results only in pdf file format, and just over 500 hits appear. All right, still not that much using this easy technique for finding free papers and e-books, but enough to warrant attention now -- and later (more will be written). Further restricting the pdf search to only Indonesian-language pages produces, incredibly, just 75 results. Dismay!

Contrary to a common view, many pdf files are exceedingly short, even those most sought, and some just point to fee databases. So a scan of the pdf search results is mandatory. Early on, you will be rewarded by Alex Bardsley's simple but eloquent appreciation of Pram's life (<http://www.opendemocracy.net/content/articles/PDF/3530.pdf>).

Oh, ya, if you do a comparable plain-and-simple Google web search, you'll get about 24,000 hits. Still unremarkable for so remarkable a figure. 'Searching for 'soeharto' yields 124,000 results. History is cruel.

Prampages

Alex, who completed a master's thesis on Pram, (<http://www.radix.net/~bardsley/abstract.html>), has maintained, since 1996, the most comprehensive research website on Pram (<http://www.radix.net/~bardsley/prampage.html>). Go there. Bookmark the page. It's far more worthwhile than this brief column.

Google presents search results roughly in order of number of times requested for specific searchword/s. Google ranks Alex's site first in a simple search for Pram's full name. What better recommendation could there be.

Yet, in absolute terms, the page is poorly trafficked (http://www.alexa.com/data/details/traffic_details?&compare_sites=&y=r&q=&size=medium&range=&url=radix.net/~bardsley/prampage.html).

One rare alternative is the only remaining version of Alfred Ticoalu's dedicated site (<http://www.geocities.com/ticoalu2/index4.html>). For a collection of Pram obituaries, see a new special section of Waruno Mahdi's site (<http://w3.rz-berlin.mpg.de/~wm/wm6.html#pram>).

Buy the books

Both Alex Bardsley's and Alfred Ticoalu's pages provide many links to publishers and booksellers carrying Pram's titles. For a list of Pram's major works, try Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pramoedya_Ananta_Toer).

Then go shopping. Don't forget to try some of the discounted booksellers (<http://www.addall.com>). Incredible bargains.

Need previews? On Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com>), some of Pram's titles can be browsed if you see 'search inside the book' after you click on their titles. At Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>), by typing Pram's full name in the search box, you can see some citations by others for specific titles by Pram, do a web search yielding a very complete list of booksellers for each title, and check out libraries which hold copies. Lots of great stuff for bibliophiles. Pram still lives -- offline.

John A MacDougall (johnmacedougall@comcast.net) edits Indonesia Publications (<http://www.indopubs.com>) and moderates the indonesian-studies list (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/indonesian-studies>).