

youll learn, tough guy : on the relevance of american crime fiction and the femme fatale to indonesian literature

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Abstrak

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This essay constitutes the first step in solving an enigma of Indonesian letters, one that is little noticed but unfathomable: the absence of crime fiction from the canon of the national literature. This is surprising for two reasons, the widespread popularity of crime in popular culture, both literature and film, and the high esteem that the genre is held in other East Asian national traditions (Japan; Thailand; South Korea). This paper argues that contemporary Indonesian writers would be well advised to familiarize themselves with the various strands of crime fiction, in particular the American variant known as Noir, and adopt these traditions to local conditions. When Noir is examined closely, the attentive student will realize that the political and aesthetic concerns of American Noir writers are essentially those of Indonesian authors: the social depredations of neo-colonialism and the traumatic effects of international Cold War politics.