

= Atheis =

Atheis (English : Atheist) is a 1949 Indonesian novel written by Achdiat Karta Mihardja and published by Balai Pustaka . The novel , using three narrative voices , details the rise and fall of Hasan , a young Muslim who is raised to be religious but winds up doubting his faith after dealings with his Marxist ? Leninist childhood friend and an anarcho @-@ nihilist writer .

Mihardja , a journalist @-@ cum @-@ literary editor who associated with the eccentric poet Chairil Anwar and the Socialist Party of Indonesia , wrote Atheis from May 1948 to February 1949 . The Indonesian used in the novel was influenced by Sundanese and harkens back to earlier works by Minang writers , as opposed to Mihardja 's contemporaries who attempted to distance themselves from the earlier style . Dealing mainly with faith , the novel also touches on the interactions between modernity and traditionalism . Although the writer insisted that the work was meant to be realistic , symbolic representations from subjective meanings to the novel being an allegory have been advanced .

After the novel was published , it caused considerable discussion . Religious thinkers , Marxist @-@ Leninists , and anarchists decried the novel for not explaining their ideologies in more detail , but literary figures and many in the general public praised it ; this positive reception may have been influenced by the nascent government 's need to promote literature for nation @-@ building . Atheis was translated into Malay before 1970 and into English in 1972 ; it was also adapted into a film with the same title in 1974 . The novel , which received an award from the Indonesian government in 1969 , is one of the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works .

= = Plot = =

The plot of Atheis is non @-@ linear . A. Teeuw , a Dutch scholar of Indonesian literature , models it as below , with A representing the time frame covered in Hasan 's manuscript (from the his youth until splitting with Kartini) , B representing the time frame in which the narrator meets with Hasan and receives his manuscript , and C representing the events around Hasan 's death .

[C { B (A) B } C]

The following plot summary is presented chronologically .

Hasan , born to a religious Naqshbandi family in Panyeredan , is a student who lives with his family and adopted sister , Fatimah . After finishing his schooling , Hasan attempts to propose marriage to his classmate , Rukmini . However , Rukmini , who is from a higher social class than him , is set to marry a rich man from Batavia (modern day Jakarta) . Instead , his parents ask him to marry Fatimah . Hasan refuses , then devotes himself to studying Islam with his father . In the early 1940s he moves to Bandung to work as a civil servant .

In Bandung , Hasan works for the Japanese occupation government and lives an ascetic lifestyle , often fasting for days on end and dunking himself into a river to refresh his body between evening and morning prayers . While there , he meets his childhood friend Rusli , who introduces Hasan to his friend Kartini . Seeing that Rusli and Kartini are atheistic Marxist @-@ Leninists , Hasan considers it his duty to return them to Islam . However , he finds himself unable to address Rusli 's arguments against religion and begins doubting his faith . Soon Hasan becomes increasingly divorced from his religious upbringing , at one time skipping the mandatory maghrib prayer to watch a movie with Kartini . Through Rusli , Hasan is introduced to people from different ideologies , including the anarcho @-@ nihilist playboy Anwar ; he also begins courting Kartini .

One day , he returns to Panyeredan to visit his family with Anwar . While there , Anwar sees some night watchmen quivering in fear near a cemetery . When told that they had seen a ghost , Anwar enters the cemetery with Hasan to disprove its existence . However , Hasan thinks he sees a ghost and runs away frightened . When ridiculed for this by Anwar , Hasan 's faith is broken . This leads him to have a large fight with his family about their Islamic faith , which results in Hasan 's family disowning him . Upon his return to Bandung , Hasan marries Kartini .

Three years later , Hasan 's relationship with Kartini is souring ; both are suspicious that the other is unfaithful . Eventually , Hasan sees Kartini and Anwar leaving a hotel near the train station and

incorrectly assumes that she had been cheating on him . He immediately divorces her and moves out , but soon contracts tuberculosis . After several weeks , Hasan returns to Panyeredan after hearing that his father is ill to work out their issues . However , his father rejects him as a temptation from the devil . Dejected , Hasan returns to Bandung .

As his health continues to degrade , Hasan approaches a local journalist with a manuscript that details his life ; the journalist agrees to publish it should something happen to Hasan . Not long afterwards , Hasan goes out into the night after curfew and is shot in the chest by Japanese patrols , dying after torture at the station with the Islamic creed " Allahu Akbar " on his lips . Later , Rusli and a tearful Kartini claim his body .

= = Characters = =

Hasan

Hasan is the protagonist of the novel . Raised a devout Muslim , he becomes confused over his beliefs due to influences from his childhood friend and other acquaintances in Bandung . He is further confused by his feelings towards Kartini , who physically resembles his first love Rukmini . Eventually , after being disowned by his family and seemingly abandoned by his friends , Hasan is shot and subsequently tortured to death by Japanese police .

According to the literary critics Maman S. Mahayana , Oyon Sofyan , and Achmad Dian , Hasan 's psychological struggles reflect Sigmund Freud 's theories on psychoanalysis . Teeuw notes that Hasan comes across as being disappointed that his traditional religious upbringing is not enough to overcome the temptations of the modern world . Poet and critic of Indonesian literature Muhammad Balfas writes that Hasan 's conflict arises from being torn intellectually between the teachings of his ultra @-@ religious father and the Marxist Rusli , while at the same time being emotionally victimised by the ever self @-@ confident Anwar . Balfas notes that three versions of Hasan are made apparent to the reader : Hasan 's view of himself , the narrator 's view of Hasan , and the narrator 's reconstruction of Hasan .

Rusli

Rusli is Hasan 's childhood friend who approaches him in Bandung . A Marxist @-@ Leninist , he is highly educated and eloquent , which he often uses to win debates on the benefits of different ideologies . Through Rusli , Hasan is introduced to several other characters with Western educations and ideologies , including Hasan 's future wife Kartini . During Hasan 's time in Bandung , Rusli provides emotional support to him and Kartini . Rusli accompanies Kartini to the police station to identify Hasan 's body .

According to literary scholar Boen S. Oemarjati , Rusli was inspired by one of Mihadja 's friends in Bandung . Hendrik Maier , professor of southeast Asian literature at the University of California , Riverside , characterizes Rusli as the most balanced of the main protagonists .

Kartini

Kartini is a young Marxist @-@ Leninist who Rusli introduces to Hasan . As Kartini resembles Hasan 's first love , Hasan falls deeply in love with her . However , after they marry Hasan becomes increasingly jealous and questions her relationship with Anwar , who often flirts with Kartini . When Anwar picks her up at the train station after she visits her aunt , he attempts to force himself on her . After fighting him off , Kartini leaves the hotel , followed by Anwar . After Hasan divorces her based on his perception of the events , Kartini lives alone . She cries over Hasan 's body when asked to identify him for the police .

Anwar

Anwar is a young anarcho @-@ nihilist who considers himself his own god . He is known for being a crude womanizer who has no qualms with using others to get what he wants . Through his actions , Anwar is responsible for both events which devastate Hasan 's life : Anwar 's ridicule leads Hasan to strife with his family , and Anwar 's womanizing and incessant flirting , including unwanted sexual advances against Kartini , lead to Hasan 's divorce . Maier describes him as a " destructive , egotistic and vain man who in daily life does not live up to the ideals with which he tries to impress [Hasan] " .

Anwar is thought to have been based on the poet Chairil Anwar , an individualistic anarchist known for being abrasive , having kleptomania , and womanizing . The poet 's friend Nasjah Djamin notes that the characterization captured the real @-@ life Anwar 's nonchalance , impoliteness , and arrogance .

Narrator

The narrator , who only appears in parts of the novel which he narrates , is referred to throughout the novel only as " saya " (a respectful term for " I " or " me ") . Little is known about his personal life other than that he is a journalist . According to Indonesian writer and literary critic Subagio Sastrowardoyo , the narrator appears to be representative of Mihardja and is used to teach moral lessons to the reader through his suggestions to Hasan .

= = Writing and influences = =

Mihardja , who was born and raised in Garut , West Java , was trained as a journalist before moving to Batavia in 1941 to work for the state publisher of the Dutch East Indies , Balai Pustaka . While in Batavia , in 1945 he began associating with Chairil Anwar 's literary group Republika . After the Proclamation of Indonesian Independence and the start of the Indonesian National Revolution , he fled to West Java and participated in events led by the Socialist Party of Indonesia led by Sutan Sjahrir . He was not an atheist , although his association with the party led some to draw that conclusion . Mihardja drew upon this background while writing *Atheis* .

Atheis was Mihardja 's first novel ; what few literary works he had written beforehand were mostly short stories and dramas , both those intended for the radio and the stage . He never formally studied writing , instead learning how to write fiction from his experiences reading existing works , including those of André Gide , Leo Tolstoy , Vsevolod Ivanov , and Fyodor Dostoyevsky . His writing style was heavily influenced by that of Gide , particularly as found in *The Immoralist* (1902) . Malay , the language which forms the basis of modern Indonesian , was not Mihardja 's native language ; his earlier works had all been in Sundanese , and Mihardja had only begun regularly using Indonesian after the Japanese occupation (1942 ? 1945) , when he became a translator .

The inspiration for *Atheis* came , according to Oemarjati , sometime during the early 1940s . In Mihardja 's observations , Marxism ? Leninism and anarcho @-@ nihilism were among the most common ideologies in Indonesia ; this led him to depict Rusli and Anwar as holding those ideologies . Meanwhile , emerging writers such as Idrus , Asrul Sani , and Chairil Anwar were increasingly critical of the older generation of Indonesian authors , whom they decried as narrow @-@ minded and provincial . Mihardja , who was older than many contemporary writers and wrote in a similar style to the older authors , disliked this comparison ; according to Maier , this may have led him to represent Chairil Anwar as a much @-@ flawed character . Mihardja formalised his concept throughout the early 1940s and completed the writing during a period of unemployment from May 1948 until February 1949 .

= = Styles = =

Atheis uses three narrative voices , the first Indonesian novel to do so . The novel starts with a third @-@ person description of Rusli and Kartini 's visit to the Japanese police headquarters after hearing of Hasan 's death . Afterwards , the narrator , referred to only as " saya " , describes in the first person how he met Hasan and how the main character came to tell him his life 's story . This is followed by what is described by the original narrator as a manuscript by Hasan , which tells Hasan 's life story from his own point of view using the less respectful term " aku " . After a brief recollection of the narrator 's last meeting with Hasan in the first person , using " saya " , the last portion of the book describes Hasan 's death in the third person omniscient . According to Teeuw , this serves to avoid caricaturing the characters by giving an objective presentation of them before transitioning to their point of view . However , Mihardja wrote that it was simply to facilitate the completion of the plot .

Teeuw writes that the literary style is didactic , which he considers the novel 's main shortcoming .

However , he notes that Mihardja was part of a literary movement led by Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana that viewed literature as being instructive ; he also writes that such a style was common in Indonesian literature at the time .

The diction in the novel shows a heavy Sundanese influence , including many loan @-@ words . Teeuw describes the diction as forced in places , with sentence structure deviating from those used by the Minang writers who dominated that period 's Indonesian literature . According to Teeuw , this is because Mihardja had been raised speaking both Sundanese and Dutch ; as such , his Indonesian was not as well developed as Minang writers or those younger than him . Maier notes that the novel features " odd but appropriate metaphors and similes " and stylistically resembles earlier works such as Abdul Muis ' Salah Asuhan (Wrong Upbringing ; 1928) , Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana 's Layar Terkembang (With Sails Unfurled ; 1936) , and Armijn Pane 's Belenggu (Shackles ; 1940) . Balfas also notes stylistic similarities with older works , such as the death of the protagonist at the climax , and Sastrowardoyo opines that Belenggu had a more modern styling despite being published nine years earlier .

= = Themes and symbolism = =

Mihardja later wrote that he intended the novel to deal with the question of the existence of God . Mahayana et al. agree , noting that the theme of faith ? a theme unknown in modern Indonesian literature at the time ? is found throughout the novel . Maier notes that the psychological concepts of guilt , fear , and remorse drive the novel . Teeuw describes the work as taking up the classic theme of modernity versus tradition in a new , more worldly manner . Balfas writes that this approach to the theme was soon followed by other writers .

Despite Mihardja 's insistence that Atheis is meant to be realistic , several symbolic interpretations have been put forward . According to Mihardja , one of the most common interpretations readers conveyed to him was that Hasan 's death symbolised atheism defeating religion , with Hasan 's death as the death of theism . According to Maier , Atheis serves as an allegory for the development of the Indonesian nation . Hasan , representing traditionalism , is killed by the Japanese , who changed the status quo when they invaded in 1942 . Meanwhile , the anarchistic Anwar finds himself without a place in the modern world . Only the responsible modern character , Rusli , is able to bring the Indonesian nation , as represented by Kartini , to terms with the new world .

= = Print history = =

Atheis was published in 1949 by Balai Pustaka , which had become the state publisher of independent Indonesia . A second printing followed three years later , with a cover by Basuki Resobowo . A third printing , which had several revisions to improve the flow of the story , was published in 1958 . As of 2009 , Atheis has been reprinted thirty @-@ three times . By 1970 , Atheis had been printed in Malaysian three times . In 1972 , the novel was translated by R. J. Macguire into English as part of the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works project .

= = Reception = =

According to Teeuw , after the publication of Atheis Mihardja immediately became famous . Maier notes that the fame and warm reception to which Atheis was released was influenced not only by the novel 's strengths , but also by Mihardja 's personality and stature . These qualities were in @-@ line with the nascent government 's need to use literature , as the most developed of the new national culture , for nation @-@ building ; in 1969 , Atheis received a literary award from the government of Indonesia .

According to Mihardja , religious thinkers blasted the novel for depicting Hasan , whom they interpreted as representative of religion and religious people , as unable to overcome temptation ; they also disliked the novel 's lack of in @-@ depth discussion of religion , necessary for a better understanding of theism . Marxists and anarchists also felt that their ideologies were not well

explained . They considered Rusli and Anwar not truly representative of the thoughts of Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche . In response , Mihardja wrote that the characters were meant to be realistic , and that few people have as much knowledge about an ideology as demanded by the critics .

However , other readers ? many from the literary community ? praised the novel , including writers Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah . Sastrowardoyo described it as a " well made novel " , arguing that Hasan 's death brought complete closure to the story . Teeuw describes *Atheis* as the first truly interesting novel to arise after the war for independence .

Author Ahmad Tohari describes *Atheis* as a " timeless monument of Indonesian literature " , emphasising its ability to represent the social factors dominant in Indonesian society at the time of writing . Mahayana credits the book 's success to " almost every element which remains salient " owing to its setting and story @-@ telling techniques .

= = Legacy = =

By the 1970s *Atheis* had become part of the Indonesian junior and senior high school curriculum . In 1974 Sjumandjaja adapted the novel into a film with the same title . The film , shot on a Rp . 80 million (US \$ 193 @,@ 771) budget , mimicked the novel 's non @-@ linear plot . Intended as a challenge to Indonesia 's religious communities , upon its release faced with controversy . Ultimately , the Indonesian censorship bureau passed the film after several cuts . Though it was a commercial failure , Sjumandjaja 's *Atheis* was well received by critics .

Mihardja went on to write two more novels : *Debu Cinta Bertebaran* (*The Dust of Love Spreads* ; 1973) , published in Singapore , and *Manifesto Khalifatullah* (*Manifest of Khalifatullah* ; 2005) , published in Jakarta . At the launch of *Manifesto Khalifatullah* , a religious @-@ themed novel , Mihardja stated that it was " the answer to *Atheis* " , after he came to believe that " God made man to be His representative on earth , not that of Satan " .

= = Explanatory notes = =